

CREATING A SPACE FOR THE UNKNOWN: THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT
PROCESS OF BLACK WOMEN ATTENDING A SOUTHERN PREDOMINANTLY
WHITE WOMEN'S COLLEGE

by

MARIAN HIGGINS

(Under the Direction of Richard Mullendore)

ABSTRACT

This phenomenological qualitative study explored the career development process of black women attending a predominantly white women's college in the south. Social Cognitive Career theory, Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity theory and the Social Class Worldview Model served as the theoretical frameworks to understand the influence of the college environment, racial identity and social class status on the women's career development. Interviews were conducted with 11 black women who recently graduated from the same women's college. Four themes were identified including 1) the process of choosing a career; 2) the influence of the college environment; 3) the challenges of being different; and 4) the impact of social class. Within the college environment, the faculty, staff, and experiential learning opportunities contributed to the women's confidence in pursuing their career goals. For the majority of the participants, their black identity also played a role in defining their career goals and motivating them to consider certain fields. Social class did not have a tremendous impact on the women's career development.

INDEX WORDS: Women's colleges, phenomenology, black college women, social cognitive career theory, racial identity, social class

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DEDICATION

To my grandmother, Jimmie L. Pendleton, who always reminded me to “get your lesson.” Grandmama, I have completed my lesson.

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Throughout this journey, I have been asked numerous times how was I able to manage the many responsibilities in my life while completing a doctoral program. My response simply is God. I am thankful to serve such an awesome God whose spirit guided me throughout this process. It is only by His grace and mercy that I completed this program.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION	1
Women's Colleges	2
Women's Career Development.....	5
Statement of Purpose	6
Definitions.....	7
Significance of the Study	8
2 LITERATURE REVIEW	10
History of Women's Education	11
Women's Colleges	13
Women's Colleges versus Co-educational Institutions	17
Women's Colleges Today.....	20
Historical Overview of Women in the Workforce.....	23
Today's Working Woman.....	26
Career Development Theory.....	29
Early Career Development Models and Women	31
Racial Identity and Career Development.....	42
Social Class and Career Development.....	44

3	METHODOLOGY	47
	Phenomenology.....	48
	Epistemology and Theoretical Paradigm.....	50
	Study Context.....	50
	Sample Selection.....	50
	Data Collection Methods	52
	Data Analysis	53
	Trustworthiness and Authenticity	54
	Ethical Considerations	56
	Epoche.....	56
4	FINDINGS	58
	Participants.....	59
	Themes	70
	Composite Descriptions	109
	Conclusion	111
5	DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	113
	Discussion.....	114
	Limitations	123
	Implications.....	124
	Recommendations for Practice	127
	Recommendations for Future Research	129
	My Reflection	130
	Conclusion	133

REFERENCES	135
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APPENDICES

A Recruitment Letter	144
B Recruitment Flyer	146
C Screening Questionnaire	147
D Interview Protocol.....	149
E Consent Form.....	152

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Today, college continues to be an attractive choice for women. Women are consistently choosing to enroll in college. They make up approximately 60% of the college student population which represents an increase in women's college enrollment (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). This increase is due to the emergence of three distinct groups of women on campus – women of color, older women, and women from a lower economic status (Sax, 2008). The presence of these three groups of women on campuses reflects the overall increase of students of color, non-traditional students and students from a lower economic status who are attending colleges today. Not only are more women attending college, but they are also more likely to complete a college degree and to maintain a good grade point average when compared to men enrolled in college (Sax & Arms, 2008). These changes in women's college attendance represent women's evolving impact on higher education and the need to pay further attention to their needs, challenges, and outcomes.

While women have made positive strides in higher education, a gender gap still exists. In comparison to men, women are less likely to feel confident in their academic ability, especially as it relates to math and science subject areas (Sax & Arms, 2008). Therefore, they choose not to pursue academic majors and careers in these areas in nearly the same numbers as men. Instead, they often select fields of study and careers that lead to lower paying jobs and underemployment (Kinzie, Thomas, Palmer, Umbach & Kuh,

2007). Women are also less likely to pursue graduate degrees, especially doctoral degrees in research areas (Sax & Arms).

The social class backgrounds of women college students fare quite differently from men as well. On average, men come from families whose average family income is at least \$12,000 more annually than those of women (Sax, 2008). Women, generally, come from families with low socioeconomic status and tend to choose their college based on the financial assistance they receive (Sax, 2008; Sax & Arms, 2008). Additionally, more women of color now attend college and many of these women are among those who agonize over their financial commitments while enrolled in college.

The majority of women in college attend co-educational institutions, which is where women experience the most challenges. Co-educational institutions are known for providing a “chilly climate” for women, a climate that fails to acknowledge the presence of women and their educational and developmental needs (Hall & Sandler, 1982). Historically, these institutions have offered a less supportive and engaging environment for women, which has affected their intellectual and social development (Kinzie et al., 2007). Additionally, these institutions may not value the leadership styles and experiences of women, which further hinders women from serving in prominent leadership roles on these campuses (Kinzie, et al.).

Women’s Colleges

Women’s colleges have a long history of meeting the educational needs of women. Originally created during a time when women were not allowed to attend college, these institutions emerged as the need for women to advance their academic credentials became apparent. Societal changes such as a shortage of teachers and limited

work for women led to the development of women's colleges. These colleges not only prepared women to respond to societal needs, but they also provided women with a liberal arts education that was intended to be equal to the education of men (Harwarth, Maline, & DaBra, 1997).

Women's colleges offer a different experience for women by creating an environment that is conducive to their learning and developmental needs. Women attending women's colleges often report more positive outcomes than do women attending co-educational institutions. In fact, women's colleges address the inequities that women experience while attending co-educational colleges. Women at women's colleges are more confident about their intellectual abilities and are more likely to pursue science and math majors, which were once perceived as only appropriate majors for men (Sebrechts, 1999). These women also demonstrate strong leadership skills and a commitment to political and social activism (Kim, 2001). In essence, the women at these colleges feel as if they are taken seriously and that their educational experiences are important.

Mainly located in the northeast region of the United States, these independent women's colleges reflect a diversity of institutional types. With nearly 50 institutions still in existence, the majority of these colleges are private four-year institutions. The most notable of these are the Seven Sisters, which include Barnard College, Bryn Mawr College, Mount Holyoke College, Radcliffe College, Smith College, Vassar College, and Wellesley College. Vassar and Radcliffe are no longer women's colleges. Two historically black women's colleges, Bennett and Spelman, continue to offer educational

opportunities to black women. Some women's colleges also have a Protestant or Catholic affiliation.

Although over half of the college population consists of women, fewer than two percent of women attend women's colleges. These women come from diverse backgrounds with regards to race, ethnicity, age, socioeconomic status, and religious affiliation. Increasingly, women of color, part-time students, and older students have become attracted to these institutions (Harwarth et al., 1997). Women of color specifically are drawn to women's college because of these institutions' efforts and commitment to recruit and retain a diverse student population (Guy-Sheftall, 2000). Therefore, all types of women find the women's college environment welcoming.

Women from all economic levels attend women's colleges; however, it is assumed that women from affluent backgrounds are more likely to attend these institutions than women who come from lower economic backgrounds (Kim, 2001). Women's colleges are typically private colleges, which means that the costs to attend these institutions on average are higher than the costs of attendance at public institutions. Women from affluent backgrounds can better afford to attend private women's colleges. Additionally, these colleges are often selective in their admissions practices and the women who meet the selection criteria tend to be from more affluent backgrounds (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

The impact of the women's college experience reaches beyond the college days of many of its students. These graduates are commonly recognized for their career accomplishments (Kim, 2001; Tidball, Smith, Tidball, & Wolf-Wendel, 1999). They pursue high-profile careers such as congresswomen, college presidents, medical doctors,

and research scientists --careers that once were not options for women. Such career achievers include Hillary Clinton, Dr. Johnetta B. Cole, Marian Wright Edelman, Madeline Albright, and Nancy Pelosi. The women's college environment is often perceived as a contributing factor to the successes of these women. Graduates of these institutions witness strong role modeling by the women faculty and administrators who lead their institutions (Tidball et al., 1999). Furthermore, it inspires and compels women at these institutions to excel in their career endeavors. While role modeling is one aspect of the women's college environment that affects the career development of its graduates, it is necessary to further explore additional environmental factors and social constructs that contribute to the career development of women attending women's colleges.

Women's Career Development

Women's career development is best understood by using a conceptual framework based on the work of Albert Bandura's (1997) work on self-efficacy. Recognizing self-efficacy as an important aspect of career development, social cognitive career theory is a framework that recognizes the interlinking process of three specific career development areas – the development of academic and career interests, career-related choices, and performance outcomes (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994). It accounts for the cognitive-person variables (i.e., self-efficacy, outcomes expectations, and goals) that are considered important aspects of not only social cognitive development but career development as well. This theory further addresses how these variables interact with the social and environmental influences that may contribute positively or negatively to the career development process.

Unlike older career development models, social cognitive career theory recognizes that the social constructs of gender, race, and class have a pivotal effect on career self-efficacy and career outcomes. The theory acknowledges that due to these social constructs, differences in educational environments and learning experiences may exist. In turn, these differences affect an individual's ability to access information and may limit their exposure to career fields, which will also affect their career self-efficacy (Lent et al., 1994). Acknowledgement of such conditions is important when addressing the women's career development process.

Statement of Purpose

Using the social cognitive career theory as a context for understanding women's career development and the influence of race, class, and gender, the purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the career development process of Black women who attend a southern predominantly white women's college. This study addressed the following questions:

1. How does a same-gender college environment facilitate the career development of black women who attend a women's college?
2. How does racial identity contribute to the career development of black women who attend a women's college?
3. How does social class contribute to the career development of black women who attend a women's college?

Definitions

In order to understand the key aspects of this study, it is necessary to define several terms to provide a common understanding throughout the study.

Women's Colleges

For the purpose of this study, women's colleges are defined as institutions whose mission reflects a strong commitment to promoting and expanding educational opportunities for women (Harwarth et al., 1997). These colleges primarily enroll women into their institutions.

Women's Career Development

When considering women's career development, it is important to recognize that all women are at different life stages and life contexts. A woman in college trying to identify an academic major is at a different point in her career development than a woman who is a wife, a mother, a professional worker and a graduate student. Therefore, to define women's career development is to understand the various dimensions of a woman and how these dimensions influence her life at different stages and in different contexts. It is to consider the individual and the psychological, sociological, educational, physical, and economic factors that inform a woman's career decision (Sears, 1982). It further highlights that the career development process for women is not a linear process but rather multi-directional and multi-leveled (Patton & McMahon, 2006).

Racial Identity

Several racial identity theories explain the identity development of black people. Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, and Chavous (1998) offer the most comprehensive definition of black identity development through their Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI). According to MMRI, racial identity for blacks is the "significance and qualitative meaning that individuals attribute to their membership within the black racial group within their self-concepts" (Sellers et al., 1998, p.23). This definition allows for an

examination of the importance of race to the individual's self-concept, and it gives the individual an opportunity to determine what it means to be affiliated with the black racial group. This definition was used to further understand the role of racial identity in the career development of the participants in this study.

Social Class

College student's parents' income levels and educational backgrounds are variables that often determine their social class and social status. While the income level and educational background contribute to the social class of students, they are not the sole factors that should be considered. A more broad, yet inclusive, definition of social class acknowledges that an individual's economic and social status are defined by their "income, wealth, property ownership, job status, education, skills, or power in the economic and political sphere in relation to those who have more and those who have less" (Yeskel, 2008, p. 3). This broad understanding of social class was used throughout the study.

Significance of the Study

Women's colleges have a history of providing a positive educational environment for women. This environment has been the focus of research related to successful women's college graduates especially as it relates to women's career accomplishments in fields once dominated by men. This study further developed the research on women's colleges by including the perspective of women representing different racial and social class backgrounds and their interpretations of how the environment influenced their career development.

From a theoretical perspective, this study expanded the research on social cognitive career theory and women's career development. This model brings further understanding to college women's career development issues while considering the influence of gender, race, and class. Often perceived as a model for practitioners to consider when working with women, women's college administrators will be able to understand how this theory applies to the students at their institutions.

This study recognizes that race and social class are social constructs that affect the career development process of college women. Therefore, the study unfolds how these constructs contribute to the process and how to better serve women who are from different racial and social class backgrounds.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historically women's colleges have served as positive and nurturing educational environments for women. Such environments have been associated with the positive career outcomes of their alumnae. These outcomes have led to speculation about the socialization that takes place at women's colleges and how they facilitate the career development process for women. While positive effects have been highlighted, it is unclear if all women at these colleges have similar experiences. With the increase of women representing a diversity of backgrounds on women's college campuses, it is necessary to capture their individual experiences.

This chapter seeks to provide an overview of the role of women's colleges in the history of women's education and career development. This overview will serve as a foundation for understanding the current state of women's colleges and their effects on women's career progression. Since career development is the focal point of this study, the next section of the chapter will feature an overview of women's entrance into the workforce and women's career development. This overview will outline the progression and challenges women have encountered in pursuit of establishing careers for themselves. Black women's workforce experiences will specifically be highlighted. Career development theories that are comprehensive in nature and that acknowledge the intersection of gender, race, and social class status will also be discussed. Furthermore,

this chapter will conclude with a review of racial identity and social class status models that relate to the career development process.

History of Women's Education

Beginning with the colonial period, a clear distinction was made regarding education for women and men. Limitations were placed on women pursuing a formal education. In comparison to men, these women were not considered to have the same intellectual capabilities needed to attend school. Therefore, their educations were defined according to their roles in their households. Women were responsible for the domestic tasks such as cooking, cleaning and sewing and received training to perform these tasks. Although some women were content with domestic chores, other women challenged the idea that they were only capable of learning how to manage the home. They became self-taught learners and recognized the value in women receiving a liberal arts education (Solomon, 1985). These women's actions led to society reconsidering whether women should receive an education outside of domestic training.

After the American Revolution, a new perspective on education emerged. Having an educated citizenry was important in moving the nation forward. Since women were primarily responsible for teaching their children, it seemed necessary that women obtain an education that would equip them for their teaching responsibilities (Solomon, 1985). Additional societal issues and changes prompted communities to reconsider the benefits of educating women. Girls demonstrated an increasing interest in learning and attending public school (Antler, 1982). In order for girls to attend school, they had to be taught by women. This growing interest led to teaching being recognized as a profession that women could pursue. Of course, women had to receive training in order to teach. In

addition to women's growing interests in education, women also pursued employment opportunities outside of the home because new household devices were created (Antler, 1982). These devices performed the tasks that women once performed. Since women sought work outside of the home, they needed additional education in order to pursue these new opportunities.

Women's seminaries and academies were established to address this increased need to educate women. During the early 1800's, these institutions grew in popularity and appealed to women from all social statuses. These institutions continued to offer guidance on social etiquette while also providing a liberal arts education to women.

Although the seminaries and academies provided a foundation for women's education, they were not comparable to the education that men received. Two prominent women proposed plans to transform these institutions. Emma Willard, a proponent of women's education, argued that changing the curriculum and offering instruction on the core academic areas would strengthen the teaching at the seminaries and academies (Harwarth et al., 1997). Catherine Beecher presented a different perspective for women's education. She agreed that the academies and seminaries were substandard and argued that a more sustainable education should be provided for women (Solomon, 1985). She argued for the establishment of women's colleges – institutions that would possess the financial and physical resources in order to be comparable to the men's colleges.

Mary Lyon was another contributor to women's education. She recognized that seminaries were not enough to educate women. She gathered the financial and physical resources to establish Mount Holyoke Seminary which later became Mount Holyoke

College. Mount Holyoke Seminary served as a model for the development of women's colleges (Harwarth et al., 1997).

Women's Colleges

Women's colleges were established beginning in 1825. Georgia Female College which is now Wesleyan College in Macon, Georgia was the first women's college created. However, Mary Sharp College in Tennessee was the first four year women's college (Solomon, 1985). These institutions continued to focus primarily on offering a liberal arts education. The goal was to provide women with a high quality education similar to the education that men were receiving at men's colleges. It was challenging to reach this goal because women's colleges did not possess the financial and physical resources needed to remain open. Such challenges led to the closing of many of these colleges.

Four women's colleges – Vassar, Wellesley, Smith and Bryn Mawr – offered a rigorous academic curriculum and had the resources to function as model institutions for women's education (Solomon, 1985). Their curricula were comparable to that of men's colleges. Vassar College was the first women's college to have an endowment. These institutions represented a new era of education for women (Antler, 1982).

Although women's colleges presented an opportunity for women to receive an education, opposition still existed towards women attending college. Women's colleges were perceived as neither capable of offering a quality education, nor of offering the preparation needed for women to pursue professional opportunities. Additionally, women were considered to be unfit for higher education. Opponents believed that attending college would impact a woman's mental, physical, spiritual and emotional

development. Edward Clarke, professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School, supported this notion and wrote about his observations of women at women's colleges in *Sex in Education*. From his observations, Clarke (1873) gathered that intellectual activity interfered with women's development. Furthermore, he indicated that it affected women's ability to marry and to have children (Antler, 1982; Miller-Bernal, 2006). Dr. Clarke's perspective was influential in maintaining opposition against women's colleges. Society feared that if educating women led to a reduction in the number of marriages and families, this would have an adverse effect on society (Antler, 1982). Opponents also believed that providing women with an education would also make them less desirable for men, which would lead to a decrease in marriages as well (Harwarth et al., 1997).

Despite the opposition, women's colleges began to thrive during the 20th century, which led to the expansion of the curricula taught at these institutions. Other women's colleges were established that challenged the curricula that were offered at women's institutions. Bennington College, Sarah Lawrence College, and Scripps College focused on student-centered learning and introduced art and music to the curriculum. They believed these subjects were just as important as humanities, social sciences and physical and biological sciences (Harwarth et al., 1997). Additionally, reformers of women's education felt the need for women's colleges to move away from a curriculum similar to that of men's colleges and to develop a curriculum that was more conducive to women's learning (Brubacher & Rudy, 1968).

Women's colleges also flourished with diversity. These new women's colleges represented four--year colleges, two--year colleges, religiously- affiliated, specialized, and private and public institutions. Most women's colleges were located in the northeast

near the colleges that were traditionally established for men (Miller-Bernal, 2006). The Northeast was home to some of the most notable private women's colleges, the "Seven Sisters": Barnard, Smith, Mount Holyoke, Vassar, Bryn Mawr, Wellesley and Radcliffe. These institutions were among the first women's colleges founded and were considered comparable to the Ivy League institutions, which were originally only open to men. They are known for their selective admissions processes and their academic rigor.

Traditionally, these institutions have also recruited and maintained a high percentage of women faculty members (Harwarth et al., 1997). They served as model institutions for women's colleges.

Southern Women's Colleges

Private women's colleges were also prevalent in the south but their missions for women's education was quite different from the missions of women's colleges in the north. The south embraced the idea of women's colleges for several reasons. First, these institutions allowed the South to uphold their belief in maintaining traditional gender roles while offering separate education for women and men (Miller-Bernal, 2006). Second, the religious evangelism movement attracted women to the Protestant faith. This particular faith further perpetuated the notion that women should represent piety and femininity. These beliefs were upheld by southern women's colleges (Harwarth et al., 1997). Lastly, in the South, having a college degree could lead to marriage for women and also indicated that the woman was from an upper-class social status (Harwarth et al.). Although women could attend college in the South, these women were not allowed to pursue employment after graduating.

Black Women's Colleges

Women's colleges also provided access to higher education for Black women. After the Civil War, education was perceived as essential for the progression of Black men and women. Their education focused on changing their attitudes about their intellectual abilities and morality. Blacks established their own co-educational institutions, which are commonly referred to as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Women were permitted to enroll in these institutions because the Black community at that time did not have the financial resources to create separate institutions for women (Poulson & Miller-Bernal, 2004). Additionally, Black women were expected to share in the responsibility of advancing the race by becoming educated to serve in public roles such as teaching. At HBCUs, Black women were taught to practice high moral standards and they received instruction that led to the development of domestic skills (Poulson & Miller-Bernal, 2004). These women were expected to work hard while maintaining a positive image because they were a reflection of the Black community.

Eventually, Black women's colleges were established to begin a legacy of educating black females (Perkins, 1988). Barber-Scotia College in Concord, North Carolina, and Huston-Tillotson in Austin, Texas, were two HBCUs that catered to women (Miller-Bernal, 2006). These institutions later became co-educational. Two additional black women's colleges were established – Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia, and Bennett College in Greensboro, North Carolina. Spelman College was founded in 1881 by two white women from New England. Bennett was initially a co-educational institution, but it transitioned to a women's college in 1926.

While Spelman and Bennett were liberal arts colleges, a great debate existed about the type of education that would lead to progression of the race. Booker T. Washington supported a vocational curriculum that would prepare black people for industrial jobs. W.E.B. DuBois believed that Blacks would move forward with the leadership of the talented tenth, who would receive a liberal arts education. A study conducted by the Phelps-Stokes fund revealed the difficulties that plagued the Black community's higher education system (Poulson & Miller-Bernal, 2004). Given these challenges, the industrial education curriculum appeared to be the most beneficial for Black people. Therefore, Blacks received the financial resources to implement such curriculum in their institutions. Bennett and Spelman incorporated the vocational programs (i.e., home economics) into their curricula as well (Chamberlain, 1988). These colleges still exist today and continue to be recognized for their roles in educating Black women.

Women's Colleges Versus Co-educational Institutions

In the 1960's and 1970's, a shift in women's education took place. Many single-sex institutions became co-educational and that included women's colleges. With more co-educational institutions, women had more options for higher education. They were no longer simply limited to women's colleges. This shift in women's education was heavily influenced by the Civil Rights Movement and the Women's Rights Movement. At the center of these movements were the principles of equality and justice for all humans. This message resonated with higher education and led to higher education becoming more inclusive of men and women from all backgrounds (Miller-Bernal, 2006). Co-educational institutions were considered more equitable than single-sex institutions, and

they offered a lower tuition rate than single-sex colleges (Tidball et al., 1999). These aspects of co-educational institutions made them attractive to women. In addition, the establishment of Title IX stated that it was illegal for publicly funded institutions to discriminate on the basis of sex and led to the development of more co-educational institutions (Miller-Bernal, 2006).

Although there was an increase in co-educational institutions during the 1960's and 1970's, these institutions were prevalent much earlier. Prior to the Civil War, Antioch, Oberlin and Hillsdale were private co-educational colleges (Miller-Bernal, 2006). Oberlin College was the first institution to admit women and to grant them degrees. These women were not limited in their areas of study at Oberlin. They were able to explore all subjects. Oberlin became a model co-educational institution for other colleges to follow. Women also attended men's colleges during the Civil War due to a decline in men's enrollment during that time (Harwarth et al., 1997). By 1870, more co-educational institutions were open than women's colleges.

While co-educational institutions provided more access to higher education for women, these institutions did not necessarily present a welcoming and inclusive environment for women. Compared to single-sex institutions, co-educational institutions were selective about the subject matter that women and men could pursue. They were only allowed to enroll in sex-traditional programs (i.e., men learned about science and math). At single-sex institutions, women and men were exposed to all subjects (Tidball et al., 1999). The distinct differences that co-educational institutions made between the education of women and men led to the questioning of their true intentions for admitting women into their institutions. Tidball et al. (1999) argued that women were permitted to

attend the once all-male institutions because enrollment was low during a time of war, and there was a need to increase the enrollment levels and financial support. The increase in enrollment and financial resources would only come by admitting women. Therefore, these institutions allowed women to enroll, but they were not truly committed to women's education. Their lack of commitment was evident through their curricula and the campus environments. These institutions created gendered experiences for women.

Hall and Sandler (1982) captured the essence of this gendered experience while compiling documentation on the "chilly climate" at co-educational institutions. They highlighted specific behaviors that occur within the classroom that left women feeling less supported academically and socially. They found that women were less likely to be called upon in the classroom. Women were often interrupted while they were speaking. Additionally, these young women did not see other women serving in faculty and administrative roles on campus, thereby, further distorting their perceptions of women, their abilities, and their potential careers (Miller-Bernal, 2006). This lack of support created barriers for women that affected their self-concept, identity, academic performance, social relationships and their perceptions of their career potential. The research on the "chilly climate" at co-educational institutions sparked much debate about the type of institution that is best for women.

In comparison to co-educational colleges, women's colleges offer an environment that is more conducive to the learning and development of women. At these institutions, women are valued and recognized for their unique contributions to the institutions (Sebrechts, 1999). They have been known to positively influence the development of women, especially academic and intellectual development, self-efficacy, self-esteem and

leadership skills (Astin, 1993; Riordan, 1994; Smith, Wolf, & Morrison, 1995). The career achievement of women attending women's colleges is another outcome that has received a lot of attention. Elizabeth Tidball's groundbreaking research on the career achievement of women's college graduates is highly recognized. Tidball analyzed the *Who's Who* registries and noted the colleges that influential women had attended. She found that graduates of women's colleges were more likely to be cited for their career achievements. Her work further demonstrated that the presence of women faculty and administrators at women's colleges contributed significantly to the career achievement of women's college graduates. Tidball's additional work also revealed that women's college graduates were more likely to obtain research and medical doctoral degrees.

Women's Colleges Today

Since co-educational institutions continue to be the institutions of choice for women planning to attend college, women's colleges experience challenges as they strive to remain single-sex institutions. Since 1972, the Women's College Coalition has tried to increase enrollments at women's colleges by highlighting the benefits of a women's college education (Women's College Coalition, 2011). Yet, women's colleges continue to experience low enrollment and financial problems. Less than four percent of high school girls have expressed interest in attending a women's college (Miller-Bernal, 2006). This low interest has led to financial difficulties for these institutions. Women's colleges that have a strong endowment have prestige, have been able to distinguish themselves from only being a single-sex institution and have been able to survive as women's colleges (Kratzok, 2010).

To address the enrollment and financial issues, women's colleges have implemented several strategies. Miller-Bernal (2006) categorized the alternatives of these institutions. Some institutions have decided to admit men, and those decisions have resulted in increases in enrollments and the development of strong interests in their institutions. Other women's colleges have developed relationships with coeducational institutions and men's colleges that allow for the sharing of resources, facilities, courses, and student social activities. Women's colleges are also creating new curricula in order to attract groups of people that have not traditionally attended women's colleges. They are offering more undergraduate and graduate degrees while also scheduling classes at times that are more conducive to working students. Often the final option, women's colleges are also closing their doors or merging with another women's college. These alternatives are not easy for women's colleges to consider especially when they are met with disapproval from current students and alumnae (Kratzok, 2010).

Another alternative that is gaining attention is the recruitment and enrollment of women of color, women from low-income backgrounds, women who are attending school part-time and women who are returning to school later in life (Langdon & Giovengo, 2003). Women's colleges have often been recognized for their commitment to diversity and their willingness to embrace multiculturalism. Women attending women's colleges are more likely to encounter women from diverse racial, social and economic backgrounds (Kinzie et al., 2007). This commitment to diversity has been demonstrated by the increased efforts to attract more women of color to these institutions. Pine Manor, a small liberal arts women's college located in the Boston, MA area, has been recognized as one of the top schools reflecting student diversity (Calefati, 2009). Over 55% of the

women who attend this college are women of color. Not only are they seeking women of color, but the president has also lowered tuition in order to make college more affordable for low-income students (Calefati, 2009). Pine Manor College is just one example of how women's colleges are adjusting their recruitment strategies to diversify their student population.

While there has been an increase in the number of women of color and women from low-income backgrounds who are attending women's colleges, it is important to further investigate the experiences of these women. As previously noted, women's colleges have been known to have a positive impact on its students. However, the research has not always been thoroughly inclusive of the experiences of women of color or women from low-income backgrounds. Most recently, Kinzie et al. (2007) found that African-American women and Asian-Pacific American women at women's colleges were "less engaged and satisfied with their college experiences" (p. 162). They indicated that this finding suggested that women's colleges needed to further examine the campus climate and determine the most ideal learning conditions for women of color, especially since these institutions are enrolling more women of color.

Not only are the experiences of women of color at women's colleges important, but the career development of these women is important as well. Women's colleges have a long history of producing graduates who have successful careers. The research on the career achievements of women's college graduates focuses on specific variables that contributed to their successes like the presence of mentor relationships. It is unclear if women of color are influenced by these same environmental factors.

Since the women's career development is the focal point of this study, it is necessary to review the working history of women. The next section of this chapter will include a brief overview of the history of women working in the United States. Special attention will be given to the work of black women. Additionally, the career development of women and career development theories for women will be discussed.

Historical Overview of Women in the Workforce

The history of women working mirrors the history of women entering higher education as was previously discussed in this chapter. Historical events and societal changes dictated the point in which women could receive an education and enroll in school. The same practices held true for women as they sought to enter the workforce. History reveals that women worked primarily inside the home unless it was advantageous to society for her to work outside of the home.

Beginning with the colonial period, women were essentially responsible for managing their homes and rearing their children. Women worked outside of the home if they were assisting with their husband's business or if they were widowed with children and needed to work in order to earn an income for the family (Hesse-Biber & Carter, 2000). If women worked, they were limited to positions such as those of nurse, midwife, teacher and innkeeper. The women who worked during this time period were an exception to the societal expectation that women remain in the home. Women's work identity was focused on the home.

The Industrial Revolution began to change the work that women performed in their homes. In fact, it led to women seeking work outside of their homes as well. With the development of machines that could perform household tasks, women had less

household work to complete (Hesse-Biber & Carter, 2000). Therefore, they pursued work that was considered “feminine” jobs that included office and sales positions. Although women worked in these positions, it was still expected and preferred for women to work in their homes. Their work outside of the home was viewed as temporary.

Following the Industrial Revolution, World War I presented another opportunity for women to enter the workforce. As servicemen went off to fight in the war, women were allowed to take the place of these men by working in factories. Women were needed to work in these positions in order to maintain the functionality of society at that time (Hesse-Biber & Carter, 2000). When men returned from the war, women returned to work in their homes. They were reminded that a women’s primary responsibility was her home, and that if she chose to work she needed to pursue more “feminine” jobs (Hesse-Biber & Carter, 2000). Again, work outside the home was considered temporary, and in this case it was only out of necessity that women were permitted to work in jobs previously held by men.

The onset of World War II shifted the concept of work for women. Women returned to work in factories and production companies just like they did during World War I. This time they received higher paying industrial jobs. When the men returned home from the war, it was difficult to get the women to return to their homes. Working during the war gave women a new perspective on their ability to work outside of the home while still managing the home (Hesse-Biber & Carter, 2000). This perspective led to an increase in women permanently entering the workforce. Since then, women have flooded the workforce while balancing their marital and maternal responsibilities.

Entering the workforce has presented its share of challenges for women, yet women continue to work outside of the home.

Black Women in the Workforce

Black women have a unique history of working. Unlike White women, Black women have always worked outside the home while also managing their homes. This expectation of work began with slavery when Black women performed agricultural and domestic tasks (Hesse-Biber & Carter, 2000). Black women worked in order to contribute financial resources to the household. This expectation of working has been passed along to generations of Black women. This expectation also positioned Black women to be the largest group of women to enter the workforce (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987). Their participation in the workforce has been challenging as they have grappled with the effects of not only sexism, but racism as well.

Beginning with the emancipation of slaves and the Reconstruction period, it was difficult for black women to find work. Their skills sets were limited, and they were not considered a reflection of true womanhood (Hesse-Biber & Carter, 2000). Therefore, they were only able to secure jobs that were low paying with low status, and sometimes the most dangerous. Oftentimes, these jobs involved domestic services. During the period after World War II, Black women were able to obtain jobs outside of domestic service which helped to improve their economic status (Hesse-Biber & Carter, 2000). Gradually, Black women transitioned to more professional/white collar positions which helped to weaken the gap that existed between the work of White women and Black women. By the 1990's, this gap began to close as more than two-thirds of Black women began working in white-collar jobs (Hesse-Biber & Carter, 2000).

Although Black women have made strides in the workforce, they are still plagued by the effects of racism and sexism. These forms of discrimination continue to affect Black women's ability to obtain management positions and to receive equitable earnings (Hesse-Biber & Carter, 2000). Compared to White women, Black women are less likely to have managerial or professional roles and are more likely to have low-level service and factory jobs (Hesse-Biber & Carter, 2000). They also earn less money than White women. In 2009, Black women earned on average \$31, 824, while women in general earned \$36, 278 (National Committee on Pay Equity, 2010). Black women are twice as likely to be unemployed and they also lack having college degrees and completing high school (Hesse-Biber & Carter, 2000). Such disparities continue to stifle the progress of Black women in the workforce.

Today's Working Woman

Today, women continue to work in greater numbers. In fact, 59% of women are currently working (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). In 2009, 24% of women worked full-time while 26% worked part-time (U.S. Department of Labor, 2009). Women continue to pursue careers in traditional "female" fields. The majority of working women pursue work in education, health care and social assistance (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Women's educational interests support the data on women's career interests. Most women who attend college choose majors (i.e., education, human sciences, health services, and social services) associated with traditional "female" fields. From 2007-2008, women received the majority of bachelor's' degrees conferred and these degrees were concentrated in the areas previously listed (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). Fewer women earned degrees in engineering, computer science and information systems,

physical sciences and science technologies (U.S. Department of Education, 2008).

Hence, a limited number of women are represented in these career fields.

Women's pursuit of degrees and careers in these traditional industries has limited their earning power and social status. Jobs in these areas are often lower paying and lower in status (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987). Women earn approximately 77 cents for every dollar earned by men (National Committee on Pay Equity, 2010). From 2008-2009, the average salary for women was \$36,278, while men averaged \$47,127 (National Committee on Pay Equity, 2010). However, research also indicates that regardless of whether women enter traditional or non-traditional roles, they still earn less than men (Williams, 2008). This discrepancy in wages has been attributed to the many barriers that plague women's career decisions. These barriers limit women's career choices, therefore, impede their economic growth potential.

Barriers to Women's Career Development

Osipow and Fitzgerald (1996) categorized barriers to women's career development into two groups – psychological/internal and external/environmental. The psychological/internal barriers relate to the beliefs that women internalize about their career interests and their abilities to enter the workforce (i.e., fear of success, traditional sex-role orientation, home-career conflict, low academic self-esteem, or self-efficacy) (Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996). The external/environmental barriers have less to do with the individual and more to do with the external influences that affect women's career choices and progression (i.e., discrimination, sexual harassment, and lack of resources for child care). Additional factors that might impact women's career development include

education level, socioeconomic status, and the lack of role models in non-traditional career fields (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987).

Occupational sex-segregation is one of the most prominent barriers to women's career development. Occupational sex-segregation groups men and women into specific career fields according to gender. Women are primarily viewed as suitable for careers in administrative support (i.e., administrative assistant), education, social services, and health services while men are considered suitable for careers in technology, engineering, science, manufacturing, etc. This categorization of careers stems from sex role socialization, assigning specific roles to men and women. Women were often perceived as more nurturing and supportive, and therefore, they were given tasks that would reflect these qualities. Hence, women's work began in the home and expanded to jobs that allowed them to remain nurturing and supportive. Men were perceived as intellectual and task-oriented. The jobs that they pursued reflect these qualities. Messages about sex-role and occupational sex-roles have been communicated in homes and in the schools. At home, traditionally, women have been responsible for cooking, cleaning, making clothes and caring for children. Men have performed the more physical tasks in the home like making repairs and maintaining the grounds.

School systems have also contributed to the sex-role socialization and occupational sex-roles by using textbooks that project women and men in specific roles, implementing sex-based curricula, limiting women's athletic involvement and by having a strong presence of women as teachers and guidance counselors (Hesse-Biber & Carter, 2000). Over the years, changes have occurred in the education system to address sex role socialization, however, women still aspire to and obtain careers in traditional "female"

careers. This becomes even more apparent while reviewing the major and career choices of women who attend college.

Sex-role socialization may be partially to blame for women pursuing careers in traditional fields for women. Women are also attracted to careers in these fields because of the flexibility that they provide for them to balance work, manage the home and care for children. Women can sometimes work part-time schedules in these “traditional” female fields (Hesse-Biber & Carter, 2000).

Black women encounter these barriers that were mentioned previously in addition to obstacles that are associated with their race. Ward and Bingham (2001) mentioned several messages that are communicated to Black people that influence their career development. They assert that Black people may believe that they are only suitable for certain career fields. Black women may aspire to pursue certain careers that family and friends perceive as unattainable for Black women or Black people in general. Additionally, these women may decide not to enter a specific career due to a lack of representation of Black women or Black men in that area.

The barriers that women in general have to confront contribute to the distinctiveness of women’s career development. To better understand how these barriers and other factors play a role in women’s career development, career development theories should be examined.

Career Development Theory

Career development was initially perceived as the process in which individuals identify career interests and make career choices by the time they reach late adolescence or young adulthood. As more research was conducted on career development, career

theorists realized that this process extends beyond young adulthood and is a lifetime process. They also recognized that the career development process involves all aspects of the individual. Wolfe and Kolb (1980) acknowledged that not only personal characteristics contribute to an individual's career development but also environmental factors, relationships, and personal responsibilities. Sears (1982) further asserted the holistic nature of career development by highlighting that psychological, sociological, educational, physical, economic and chance factors play a role in career development. This holistic view recognizes the complexity of career development while also acknowledging the individualistic nature of the career development process.

Career development theories were designed to conceptualize the career development of individuals. These theories were initially developed to assist counseling professionals in their practices, however, they have been studied and applied to research studies as well. These theories have been categorized in different ways, yet, there is not a definitive labeling structure for them. Patton and McMahon (2006) categorized career development theories into two areas – content and process. Content theories focus on the individual's characteristics that influence her career development. Such theories include the trait and factor theory or person-environment (i.e., Holland's personality theory of careers). Process theories emphasize the developmental stages of career decision-making. Developmental theories created by Super (1957), Ginzberg, Ginsburg, Axelrad, and Herma (1951), Gottfredson (1981), and Miller-Tiedeman and Tiedeman (1990) are examples of process theories. The theories in the content and process categories represent the theories that have traditionally been used by practitioners and researchers. Patton and McMahon (2006) acknowledged that theorists are working towards creating

theories that combine the content and process components. The career development theories based on social learning theories, specifically the social cognitive career development theory highlight these components. The social cognitive career development theory will be discussed later in this chapter.

Early Career Development Models and Women

Although the traditional career development theories created a foundation for understanding the career development process, the components of these theories failed to reflect the diversity within society. Since men were only perceived as fit for working outside of the home, these models reflected the career development of men, specifically white men. During the 1950's and 60's, career development theorists attempted to be inclusive by indicating how their theories were applicable to women (Farmer, 2006; Patton & McMahon, 2006). These models and their relevance to women's career development are discussed in this section.

Super's Life Stages and Career Patterns

Super (1957) was the first theorist to highlight women's issues and the career development process. His work acknowledged that women's roles in the home were central to their career decision-making. He outlined seven patterns for women that included stable homemaking, conventional, stable working, double track, interrupted, unstable, and multiple trials. Stable homemaking referred to women who married after they attended school and never entered the workforce. The conventional pattern described women who worked until they were married and then transitioned to taking care of their home and family. The stable working woman was able to balance work and family. Women in the interrupted pattern returned to work after caring for their children.

The women in the unstable and multiple trial patterns had irregular and unstable work histories. Super's career patterns of women served as the foundation for other theorists to create models that honored the career development of women (Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996).

Psathas's Theory

Following Super's lead, other career theorists perceived that managing the home and childrearing were core issues for women's career decision-making. Psathas (1968) recognized that women's career development was different from that of men and involved more internal and environmental factors. He identified factors such as marriage, intention and fulfillment, family finances, social class, education, and occupations of parents, values, social mobility, and mate selection as having heavy influences on women. Psathas, a sociologist, believed that women desired to be married because marriage was symbolic of social class. He stated that many women were secretaries, nurses and flight attendants because they wanted to make themselves attractive for marriage. Although, Psathas's beliefs about women's reasons for entering these careers were unpopular, his recognition that women's career development was unique given the factors that influence their decisions became popular.

Zytowski's Theory

Zytowski (1969) also acknowledged the differences in women's career development. Using nine postulates, Zytowski developed a model that focused on women's career developmental stages, their patterns of vocational participation and the determinants of these patterns. This model upheld the socially accepted belief that the ideal role for women was a homemaker and further stated that this role was neither static

nor different from the work of men. While describing the patterns of women's work, Zytowski recognized that more women were entering the workforce, however, he believed that women did not have the ability to fully balance pursuing a career and working in the home. If women decided to work outside of the home, then they could not fully engage in the responsibilities of managing a home. Zytowski highlighted three variables that contribute to the career patterns of women including their age of entry into the workforce, the span or length of years, and their degree of participation in the workforce. Given these variables, Zytowski created three career patterns for women. The mild career pattern represented women who had an early or late entry and a brief and low-degree participation in a traditional career. The moderate career pattern was described as early entry with a long period in a traditional career. The unusual career pattern was early entry, lengthy or uninterrupted length of time in a nontraditional career.

Although Zytowski's work contributed to the research on women's career development, his work has been criticized for continuing to place limitations on the type of work that women can perform. Patton and McMahon (2006) argue that Zytowski's work does not recognize the power of gender-based socialization and how it confines women's career choices to specific careers. Furthermore, Zytowski's work also fails to accurately address women who enter non-traditional careers (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987).

Socio-psychological Model of Career Choice and Work Behavior

Astin (1984) was one of the leading theorists who attempted to address women's career development. Astin created a socio-psychological model of career choice and work behavior that was applicable to women and men. Her model featured four constructs including motivation, work expectations, sex-role socialization, and the

structure of opportunity. She believed that people were motivated to work due to their need for survival, pleasure, and the ability to contribute to society. She further stated that work expectations were dependent upon the availability of work opportunities and the ability of the occupations to fulfill the individual's three needs. These work expectations were generated according to sex-role socialization and the structure of opportunity.

While Astin's work appeared to be more comprehensive, theorists and researchers have criticized her work for not recognizing that the women and men's career development processes are different and that women encounter barriers that contribute to the difficulty of their career decision-making (Patton & McMahon, 2006). One of the more promising aspects of Astin's work, however, is the structure of opportunity component.

Theory of Circumscription and Compromise

Gottfredson's theory of circumscription and compromise also contributed to the growing number of models that addressed women's career development. This theory captures the developmental process that individuals experience as they circumscribe and compromise their career choices in order to meet job prestige and sex-type expectations (Gottfredson, 2002). Circumscription, which is the process of eliminating unacceptable career options, begins in childhood and continues through late adolescence (Gottfredson, 2002). Compromise refers to the process of examining preferred career options and determining which options are actually more a reality. Self-concept is the fundamental factor that facilitates an individual's process through this model. It helps to inform the individual's career aspirations. Individuals choose careers that are most congruent with their self-concept.

Although this theory is applicable to women and men, Gottfredson (1981) recognized the impact of gender and social class on career development and perceived sex-role socialization to have a strong influence on women and men's career choices. She indicated that individuals consider occupations based upon the sex-type of occupations, the perceptions of opportunities and the barriers.

Model of Career Achievement and Motivation

Continuing along the same path as Gottfredson and Astin, Farmer (1985) developed a model of career achievement and motivation for women and men. This multidimensional model examined the influence of background factors (i.e., sex, social status, school location, race, age, and ability), personal factors (i.e., academic self-esteem, independent, cooperative and competitive achievement), and environmental factors (i.e., parental support, teacher support, support for working women) on dimensions of motivation (i.e., level of aspiration, mastery strivings and career commitment). From this model, it was determined that background factors have a significant influence on level of aspiration while personal factors have an impact on mastery strivings. Furthermore, Farmer's research on this model highlighted gender differences and the impact of role priorities on career commitment (Farmer, 1985). While Farmer's model demonstrates gender differences and the influence of significant variables, additional research on the model indicates that it is not suitable for fully understanding women's career development (Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996; Patton & McMahon, 1999).

Career Self-efficacy

Hackett and Betz (1981) were the first researchers to apply Bandura's self-efficacy theory to career development. Bandura (1997) defined self-efficacy as an

individual's belief in his or her ability to complete the tasks needed to accomplish a specific outcome. Hackett and Betz (1981) believed that self-efficacy theory could be used to understand women's career development. Initially, they studied the effects of self-efficacy on the differences between women and men in their approaches to pursue various careers such as mathematics, science and engineering. They concluded that socialization limited women's self-efficacy towards careers traditionally associated with men, and that women did not recognize that they had the skills and abilities to pursue such careers. These conclusions were further supported by additional research that they conducted highlighting the notion that women possessed low self-efficacy when compared to men with regards to pursuing mathematics and science careers (Betz & Hackett, 1981; Betz & Hackett, 1983). In addition to Hackett and Betz's findings, other researchers have continued to study the career self-efficacy of men and women and expand the research in this area (Clement, 1987; Post-Kammer & Smith, 1985; Post-Kammer & Smith, 1986; Rotberg, Brown, & Ware, 1987; Wheeler, 1983). The findings from these studies support the work of Hackett and Betz.

Social Cognitive Career Theory

Lent, Brown, and Hackett's Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) was created to provide a more comprehensive framework that integrates previous theories while bridging the common concepts featured in these theories (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2002). Primarily grounded in Bandura's social cognitive theory, SCCT also includes concepts from Krumboltz's social learning theory of career decision-making and Hackett and Betz's (1981) use of self-efficacy theory in career development. However, it mostly aligns with Hackett and Betz's work. Using a constructivist paradigm, SCCT aims to

capture the process by which individuals develop their career and academic interests, select their career choices and become successful in their educational and occupational pursuits. Therefore, this theory purports the importance of learning experiences and the influence of genetic factors and environmental factors on the career decision-making process. More specifically, SCCT focuses on social cognitive variables such as self-efficacy, outcome expectations, goals and their interaction with personal attributes, and contextual and environmental factors. Lent, Brown, and Hackett (2002) describe these social cognitive variables as the fundamental aspects of career development that also enable an individual to leverage their personal agency in the career development process.

According to the SCCT model, self-efficacy is “a dynamic set of self-beliefs that are specific to particular performance domains and that interact in a complex way with other person, behavior, and environmental factors” (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2002, p.262). Self-efficacy beliefs are fueled by four sources, namely, performance accomplishments, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion and emotional arousal. Outcome expectations relate to a person’s beliefs about the outcomes of their performance behavior (Lent, Hackett, & Betz, 1994). These expectations are formulated through learning experiences and can be influenced by the same sources that drive an individual’s self-efficacy. Goals outline the efforts that an individual is willing to take towards engagement in a specific activity to obtain the desired outcome. By establishing these goals, the individual is able to take responsibility for their behavior, and that enables her to exercise personal agency in the process. The SCCT model postulates that a reciprocal interaction takes place among self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations and goals. This interaction leads to self-regulation and maintenance of behavior.

At the core of the SCCT framework are three interlocking models: interest development, choice model and performance model. The three cognitive social variables are interactive components of these models. Within the interest development model, career interests derive from self-efficacy and outcome expectations. Individuals develop an interest in an activity when they believe that they are good at the activity and that pursuing this activity will lead to the desired outcome (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2002). A positive feedback loop develops and continues as the individual experiences their valued outcome. This loop further strengthens the individual's self-efficacy and outcome expectations thereby solidifying their interests. The SCCT model also acknowledges that abilities and values are significant to interest formation and help to influence self-efficacy and outcome expectations. Abilities have a direct effect on self-efficacy and values influence outcome expectations.

In the choice model, the individual is moving from confirming her interest to identifying relevant career choices. During this process, the individual expresses her career goal, outlines and implements the actions required to pursue it, and experiences the subsequent performance attainments. This process creates a feedback loop that shapes future career behavior. Self-efficacy and outcome expectations interact to serve as co-determinants in this model as well (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2002). Under optimal conditions, the individual's interest will align with her expectations; however, the SCCT model recognizes that unfavorable conditions can prohibit an individual from pursuing her ideal interests and career choices. These conditions equate to contextual influences that are noted to have a significant impact according to the SCCT model. Contextual influences as they relate to the SCCT will be discussed at length later in this chapter.

The performance model draws attention to an individual's level of work performance and her perseverance towards career-related endeavors (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2002). Abilities, self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals are at the center of this model and continue to interact to develop a feedback loop between performance outcomes and future behaviors. These variables are also affected by the contextual influences that contribute to the individual's learning experiences and performance conditions.

Contextual influences. Unlike many of the existing career development theories, SCCT acknowledges the role that the contextual factors play in the career development process. Contextual factors are conceptualized according to Vondracek, Lerner, and Schulenberg's (1986) contextual affordance and Astin's (1984) structure of opportunity. Contextual affordance refers to the individual's perception of the resources that her environment provides. The emphasis is on the person's interpretation of the environment that aligns with SCCT's perspective. This perspective does not abandon the objective features of the environment, but it gives credence to the individual making meaning of the environment.

Structure opportunity consists of two influences -- distal and proximal. Distal influences are factors that shape interests and self-cognitions. Examples include exposure to different types of career role models, support and discouragement received for participation in specific academic and extracurricular activities, and cultural and gender role socialization (Lent, Brown & Hackett, 1994; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2000). Proximal influences are apparent during important educational and career decision making phases. Informal career contacts and discriminatory hiring practices are

examples of this type of influence. These contextual influences inevitably affect an individual's ability and desire to "transform their career interests into goals and their goals into actions" (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2000, p. 275). They may also directly impact an individual's choices and implementation. Additionally, Lent, Brown, and Hackett (2000) emphasized the need to focus on supportive and positive contextual influences. They purported that supportive aspects of the environment and support systems can facilitate the formation and pursuit of an individual's career choices.

Personal influences. SCCT brings awareness specifically to personal variables such as gender, race, ethnicity, physical health or disability, genetic endowment, and socioeconomic conditions (Lent, Hackett, & Betz, 2000). SCCT perceives gender and race as socially constructed. Hence, this perception moves the focus to the social, cultural, and economic conditions that shape the level of exposure to various learning experiences, the support or lack thereof as it relates to an individual's participation in certain tasks, and the outcomes she comes to anticipate (Lent, et al., 2000). Furthermore, these conditions inform the self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and career goals, and thereby influence interests, career choices, and performance.

SCCT research. Strong support for the SCCT model has been demonstrated through empirical research. Self-efficacy is the primary construct of the model that has received the most examination. Most SCCT research explores the relevance of self-efficacy to outcomes such as vocational interests, academic major choices and achievement indicators (Lent, Brown & Hackett, 2002). Studies have also given attention to gender differences in career related self-efficacy, especially as it relates to the science, technical, engineering, and mathematics-related (STEM) fields (Lent et al.,

2005). These studies have exposed self-efficacy beliefs as having a direct effect on women's entrance into the STEM fields and their commitment to pursue traditional careers held by women (Betz & Schifano, 2000; Schaefers, Epperson, & Nauta, 1997). The results of these studies have provided insight for interventions that would increase women's self-efficacy towards non-traditional career fields.

The research on people of color and SCCT is evolving. More recently, researchers have used the SCCT to understand the role of social cognitions and interest and career choice of Black college students. Like women, this research primarily seeks to understand Black college students' career self-efficacy towards STEM academic and career interests (Byars-Winston, 2006; Gainor & Lent, 1998; Lent et al., 2005; Waller, 2006). This research demonstrates support for the social cognitive variables and the interest and choice models of SCCT. In addition, the research on these students addresses the influence of environmental supports and barriers by studying students attending different types of institutional (i.e., predominately white and historically black colleges and universities).

SCCT has proven to be a comprehensive career theory that allows for examination of the complexities that inform the career behaviors of women, specifically women of color. The use of social cognitions allows women of color to exercise personal agency in their career development while also acknowledging the role of contextual influences in supporting or hindering their progress. The research on SCCT is broad and inclusive and represents a diverse group of people and environments. Yet, there is still a need for expansion on this theory as it relates to women of color and contextual influences. Therefore, SCCT served as the theoretical framework for this study.

Racial Identity and Career Development

While advances have been made to generate theories applicable to women's career development, few theories exist that integrate race, ethnicity and career development. Race and ethnicity are constructs that deserve attention when considering the career development processes for all individuals. The effects of race and ethnicity are acknowledged in some career theoretical models like Holland (1985) and Super (1990) (Patton & McMahon, 1999; Ward & Bingham, 2001). In addition, many proponents of a more integrated theory have created conceptual frameworks that incorporate values espoused by different racial and ethnic groups. Cheatham (1990) proposed a model for Black people that infuses Africentrism and recognizes the cultural values that can inform the career development process. Ward and Bingham (2001) claim that acknowledgement of cultural background is also important for Black people when exploring career development. They also point to the incorporation of racial identity development into career counseling and the career development process that is commonly practiced in psychological counseling.

The data on racial identity development and career development are inconsistent. Researchers have hypothesized that different stages within a racial identity model may inform career behaviors. However, little empirical research actually indicates that racial identity affects one's career development. Gainor and Lent (1998) examined racial identity attitudes and the interaction of social cognitive variables on the mathematics choices of Black college students and discovered that racial identity had minimal effect on the social cognitions. Byars-Winston (2006) explored the relationship between racial ideology and self-efficacy variables, outcome expectations, career interests and perceived

career barriers using the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity theory. The study revealed that nationalist and assimilation ideologies of the model informed self-efficacy, outcome expectations, career interests and perceived barriers for Black undergraduate students at a historically Black university. These mixed results on racial identity and career development suggest the need for additional research in this area. This study seeks to expand Byars-Winston's work using the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI) theory.

MMRI offers a framework that examines the structures and properties of Black racial identity (Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997). Unlike other racial identity models, MMRI does not assume a hierarchical level of racial awareness. Instead, this theory considers race as one aspect of one's identity. Therefore, the theory does not assign a single definition to what it means to be Black, but allows the individual to develop such definition.

MMRI seeks to understand the importance of race in identity formation and the meanings associated with belonging to a specific racial group (Sellers et al., 1997). Four dimensions of the model provide insight into these areas. Salience consists of comprehending the relevancy of race to a person's self-concept during a particular time. Centrality refers to the manner in which a person usually defines herself with regard to race. Ideology refers to the beliefs, opinions, and attitudes that influence an individual's perception of how members of her racial group should behave.

Ideology includes four philosophies, namely, nationalist, oppressed minority, assimilationist and humanist. A nationalist philosophy recognizes the significance of being of African descent, while an oppressed minority philosophy realizes that Black

people and other oppressed groups possess similarities with their experiences.

Assimilationist philosophy moves beyond identifying the commonalities of the oppressed group, but acknowledges the similarities that exist between Black people and all members of American society. A humanist philosophy perceives that all humans can relate to each other due to their commonalities. These philosophies present in four distinct areas political: economic issues, cultural-social activities, intergroup relations and interactions with the dominant group. The last dimension of the MMRI model, regard, relates to a person's positive and negative evaluation of what it means to be affiliated with their racial group.

The ideology component of MMRI appears most suitable for career development exploration. The outlined ideologies permit the individual to articulate their worldview and interpret how contextual influences shape their perceptions and experiences. These ideologies allow for exploration of attitudes and cognitions that contribute to the career development process (Byars-Winston, 2006). They also incorporate the person and contextual influences of the SCCT. Thereby, indicating that the MMRI model could be used when using the SCCT model to understand the career development of Black people.

Social Class and Career Development

Similar to race, social class status is a social construct that has been excluded in the research on career development. Social status has generally been defined according to an individual's socioeconomic status and has often focused on occupational attainment, level of income and occupation prestige (Diemer & Ali, 2009). Using such quantitative and objective measures fails to capture the subjectivity found within social class. A more comprehensive definition of social class acknowledges that an individual

has a significant role in defining her social class status. This subjectivity enables an individual to exercise agency through creating her worldview of social class.

The Social Class Worldview Model (SCWM) is a framework that emphasizes the subjectivity in defining social class. This model is affiliated with the helping profession, but only recently has it been considered for understanding the role of social class in career development (Diemer & Ali, 2009). This model's five domains of consciousness, attitudes, and salience; referent groups; property relationships; lifestyle and behaviors elaborate on an individual's perception of social class. The consciousness, attitudes, and salience domain reflect an individual's ability to comprehend the meaning and the relationship of social class to her environment. Referent groups consist of a people who influence an individual's social class behaviors and her perceptions of social class. The property relationship domain focuses on materialism and how individuals use it to define themselves. The manner in which materialism shapes the individual's worldview and how she uses it to exclude others is also reflected in this domain. An individual's lifestyle choices also contribute to her perception of social class. Time and resources help to facilitate the lifestyle choices that the individual desires to project. The behavior domain simply brings awareness to the learned and socialized behaviors that serve to inform an individual's social class worldview.

The SCWM framework is consistent with the SCCT career development theory. The SCWM relies upon the individual to establish a worldview and create meaning regarding social class. While the SCCT model upholds that individuals have agency in their career development process, SCCT perceives social class status as an influence in career development and seeks to have the individual interpret how social class impacts

their process. It is only fitting that these two models would serve as frameworks for a study exploring the effects of social class on career development.

For the purposes of this study, the MMRI and the SCWM were used to further develop the research on SCCT. This racial identity model and social class model possess components that are necessary to comprehend the career development process of Black women attending women's colleges.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The women's college environment has a history of providing a supportive environment for college women. These institutions have positively influenced the intellectual, psychological, social and career development of women. The studies on the career development of women's college graduates indicate that they identify several variables that contribute to their career choices and plans, including the presence of female faculty members and administrators. They also define the women's college environment as a safe place for them to explore their interests and feel supported during the exploration process.

With the increase in the number of women of color attending women's colleges, it is important to explore their career development processes and the influences of the women's college environment on these processes. In order to expand research in this area, this study seeks to understand the career development experiences of Black college women attending a woman's college. Social cognitive career theory will be used as a context for understanding women's career development and the influence of race, class, and gender on the career development process. The study will address the following research questions:

1. How does a same-gender college environment facilitate the career development of Black women who attend a women's college?

2. How does racial identity contribute to the career development of Black women who attend a women's college?
3. How does social class contribute to the career development of Black women who attend a women's college?

This chapter will include an overview of qualitative research, more specifically the transcendental phenomenological approach, the study context, data collection methods and data analysis procedures.

Phenomenology

In order to understand the career development process for Black women college students, a phenomenological qualitative study research design was used. A phenomenological study seeks to provide meaning of individuals lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). The universal essence of the phenomenon emerges from an analysis of each individual experience (Creswell, 2007). For the purpose of this study, Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenological method was used. This particular method focuses on the description of the participants' experiences with the phenomenon instead of the researcher's interpretation of the experience. It highlights what the individual experienced and how she experienced the phenomenon. The career development process is the phenomenon that the researcher hoped to learn more about in this study.

The core processes of the transcendental phenomenological method include the epoche, transcendental-phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation. Epoche involves the researcher momentarily suspending her previous perceptions, assumptions, understandings and judgments about the experience (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher

gives a fresh look to each individual's experience and allows the data to speak for itself. Epoche is the first step of the transcendental phenomenological method and it prepares the researcher to remain in the present as she seeks to understand the phenomenon.

Transcendental-phenomenological reduction continues the process of transcending from the foreknowledge of the phenomenon into understanding the experience as it is presented. The researcher seeks to provide a total description of the phenomenon by incorporating the participants' perceptions, thoughts and feelings (Moustakas, 1994). The total description leads to the formation of a textual description of the meanings and essences of the phenomenon. In order to develop a textual description, the researcher must be willing to spend time giving attention to the phenomenon through constant reflection, correction, and clarification on how the phenomenon was experienced by the participants. Through reflection, the researcher is able to reduce the phenomenon to its textual description. The transcendental-phenomenological reduction is tied to the data analysis process, therefore, the process for developing such description will be further discussed in the data analysis section.

Imaginative variation involves the researcher creating meanings about the phenomenon through "imagination, different frames of references, employing polarities and reversals, and approaching the phenomenon from divergent perspectives, roles, functions, and positions" (Moustakas, 1994, pp. 97-98). Through this process, the goal is to establish the underlying factors that contribute to the experiences and develop structural meanings of the phenomenon. The focus is on the variation of possibilities about the phenomenon.

Epistemology and Theoretical Paradigm

From a constructivist view, individuals construct meaning through their interactions in the world (Crotty, 1998). This view recognizes the differences in individuals' interpretations of a common experience. Therefore, the focus is on the individual and her experience. This view coupled with a phenomenological framework highlights the essence of the experience for that individual. It is with this foundation that an understanding of the career development process for Black women at women's colleges was studied.

Study Context

The research was conducted at Ida B. Wells College, a small private liberal arts women's college located in a metropolitan area in the southeast. This predominantly white women's institution is highly ranked as an up--and-- coming liberal arts institution. Over 900 students attend Ida B. Wells and these women represent 43 states and territories and 37 countries. More than a third of these students are from underrepresented backgrounds. The average cost to attend this institution is \$41,133 per year and approximately 70% of the students qualify and receive need-based financial aid. Ida B. Wells' mission, vision and values exemplify a commitment to providing a supportive and inclusive environment for all women. The commitment of the institution and the diversity of its student population make Ida B. Wells an ideal institution to include in this study.

Sample Selection

I used a combination of criterion sampling and snowball sampling to identify participants for this study. With criterion sampling, the individuals had to meet certain

criteria before they were selected to participate in the study (Patton, 2002). I was in search of junior or senior women and recent alumnae (alumnae must have graduated no more than two years ago.) who possessed the ability to offer insight about the institution and their career development over the span of their time in college. They had to feel comfortable with discussing their racial identity and their social class status as well. At the conclusion of the interview, they had to be willing to review their transcriptions for accuracy. In terms of snowball sampling, I enlisted the help of departmental contacts and confirmed participants to help identify additional women to participate in the study.

I contacted the Dean of Students, the Department of Intercultural Affairs, the Office of Leadership and Service, the Career Center and a faculty member and asked if they would assist me with identifying participants. They agreed to send an announcement via their listservs and to post advertisements on bulletin boards (see Appendices A and B). The faculty member also invited me to attend a college-wide research day. She thought that it would be a great opportunity for me to make observations of the campus and students.

After the initial e-mails were sent, two women contacted me. I scheduled a screening interview with them for the day of the college-wide research day. I also encouraged them to inform their friends about the study in hopes that I could potentially garner additional interest, either prior to or on the day of the research day. I arrived to the research day and met with the women at our scheduled times. They also brought along friends who were interested in participating. I conducted screening interviews with 11 women on that day (see Appendix C). Next, I sent follow-up e-mails to them and asked to arrange interviews. Only nine women responded. Three additional women contacted

me, and I was able to arrange interviews with them as well. A total of 11 women participated in this study. All of them were graduating seniors who were eager to share their experiences. Each participant received a \$25 gift card for her participation in the study.

Data Collection Methods

In transcendental phenomenology, two central questions facilitate the data collection process: – What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon and what contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994)? These questions are essential in order to obtain the textural and structural meanings of the phenomenon. The researcher may ask a subset of open-ended questions, however, the main focus is the central questions.

Data collection methods for this study included an observation of a college-wide research day and semi-structured interviews. As previously noted, I was invited to attend an annual college-wide research day. On this day, students share the research they have conducted during the previous summer and throughout the academic year. They have poster presentations as well as paper presentation sessions. I arrived shortly after the research day began and left in the mid-afternoon. I was able to view posters and to sit-in on some of the presentations. I made notes of the space where the presentations took place, the interactions of the students, faculty, and staff, and the preparations of the presenters. I also took time to venture to other parts of campus to make observations. I ate lunch in the dining facility and observed how students were grouped. I entered the student center and officially introduced myself to staff members who graciously agreed to help me identify participants. The director of the Career Center gave me a tour of the

Career Center and explained several traditions of the campus that involve celebrating women who have secured employment, or who have been admitted into graduate and professional schools. She also mentioned additional traditions that were represented in various places of the student center. After meeting with her, I returned to hear another presentation before I left campus.

I selected three days to conduct interviews with participants. The interviews took place on campus in a classroom located in the science building. One of the interview dates was prior to their graduation while the other two dates were following graduation. The interviews were audio recorded with each participant's permission. Each interview ranged from 60-90 minutes. I used an interview protocol to guide my conversations with these women (see Appendix D). All interviews were transcribed verbatim to assist with data analysis.

Data Analysis

Due to the emergent nature of qualitative research, data analysis began with data collection (Patton, 2002). After each interview, I made notes about the participant, her responses and my interactions with her. By doing so, I was able to identify some preliminary themes. Prior to the transcription of the interviews, I listened to each interview and made some additional notes about them. After each interview was transcribed, I listened to each interview again while reviewing the transcript. Next, I began with the process of horizontalization, which entailed reviewing each individual transcript and identifying significant statements, sentences or quotes. A coding system was developed and implemented to assist with categorizing the statements. The irrelevant, repetitive and overlapping statements were removed. The remaining

statements, also known as horizons were used to develop themes. From the themes, I created individual textual descriptions for each participant. Textual descriptions described *what* the participants' experienced. Through the process of imaginative variation, the structural descriptions were developed for each participant. Structural descriptions described *how* the participants' experienced the phenomenon. Each individual textual and structural description was integrated to highlight the essence of the individual's career development. I also created a composite textual and structural description that highlighted in general what the women experienced in terms of their career development and how each experienced it. As these descriptions were written, the essence of their experiences was defined.

Trustworthiness and Authenticity

Guba and Lincoln (1989) proposed using trustworthiness and authenticity to evaluate the quality of qualitative research. They noted that trustworthiness consisted of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Credibility requires assurance that the participants' perspectives and the researcher's presentation of these perspectives are the same. Transferability consists of the researcher providing sufficient information so that the reader will determine how the findings of the study may be transferred. Dependability refers to the researcher's responsibility to establish a logical, traceable, and documented process. Confirmability simply confirms that the researcher indeed conducted the research and did not "imagine" the results of the study.

In this study, member checks and the use of two sources for collecting data served to establish credibility. Each participant was asked to review her transcript and to provide feedback if necessary. Once they completed their transcripts, they received a gift

card. Additionally, I reflected on my biases and assumptions in the epoche that is featured later in this chapter. Such reflection helped to ensure the credibility of the study. I allowed for transferability by using excerpts from transcripts and details from observations to provide a thorough account of the participants' experiences. For dependability and confirmability, I maintained an audit trail that outlined my process for conducting this study. The audit trail was written in a manner that would future researchers to replicate the study.

Authenticity stems from the constructivist epistemology and seeks to present a genuine understanding of participants' experiences (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity and tactical authenticity represent the criteria for judging authenticity. Fairness refers to soliciting the participants' perspective and providing a balanced description of the participants' process for making meaning of the phenomenon. Ontological authenticity focuses on the enhancement of the participants' constructions as a result of their participation in the study. Educative authenticity entails enlightening participants about the constructions of others in hopes of increasing their awareness. Catalytic authenticity involves participants feeling compelled to take action from participating in the study while tactical authenticity relates to the extent that they feel empowered to act.

Similar measures of trustworthiness were used for authenticity as well. Member checks were used to ensure fairness and the audit trail confirmed ontological authenticity. It was challenging to address educative authenticity while conducting the study; however, I will provide the participants with an overview of the study findings. By sharing the findings, the participants will be informed of others' experiences. Additionally, I made

the women aware of resources available to them in the event they were inclined to take action regarding their personal experiences or the experiences of others. By doing so, I addressed catalytic authenticity and tactical authenticity.

Ethical Considerations

In order to maintain confidentiality, the participants selected a pseudonym. They were referred to by their pseudonyms throughout the study. Written consent was also obtained from each participant (see Appendix E). The participants were informed of the purpose of the study, their roles in the study and how the information will be used. The study proposal was reviewed by the Institutional Review Board of both the University of Georgia and Ida B. Wells.

Epoche

I have worked as a Career Services professional for over 11 years. During this time, I have primarily worked on college campuses and have developed thoughts about the influence of the college environment on student development. My thoughts and beliefs are based on my experiences at several different types of colleges and universities.

As a Career Services professional, I have experience in working with Black college students and their career development, mainly at co-educational institutions. I serve as the Associate Director of Diversity Programs at my current institution. In this role, I provide career guidance to students from various backgrounds including Black students. From my interactions with these students, I am very much aware of the challenges and the experiences of Black college students.

It is also important to note that I identify as a Black woman and I am not too far removed from my college experience. I understand firsthand the career development

process for Black college students. I acknowledge my personal perception and interpretation of the complexities that women and more specifically Black women experience in their career development.

Although I have not worked at a women's college, my sister attended Ida B. Wells College. I visited my sister numerous times while she was in college. I acknowledge that my perception of the institution and the students are related to my sister's experiences. While my sister had a wonderful experience at Ida B. Wells, I realize that this is not the experience of all women who attend the institution. Therefore, I am open to hearing the story of the participants. Although the phenomenological method states that I should suspend my thoughts about the phenomenon, I realize that it is impossible for me to suspend my thoughts entirely. Therefore, I acknowledge my perspective of women's colleges and I made an effort to not allow my thoughts and feelings to interfere with the study. However, there were moments throughout data collection that reminded me of my sister's experiences at Ida B. Wells. I made note of these moments and continued to focus on each participant's' story.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to understand the career development experiences of Black women attending a predominantly White women's college in the south. The study specifically focused on the influence of the college environment, racial identity and social class on their career development and ultimately their career goals. A transcendental phenomenological qualitative study was used to understand the essence of the women's experience. The experiences of 11 graduating Black women were captured through this study. Through observations and semi-structured interviews, the following research questions were addressed:

1. How does a same-gender college environment facilitate the career development of black women who attend a women's college?
2. How does racial identity contribute to the career development of Black women who attend a women's college?
3. How does social class contribute to the career development of Black women who attend a women's college?

The interviews were transcribed and analyzed according to transcendental phenomenological analysis methods. The process began with horizontalization, and consisted of reviewing the transcripts and identifying significant statements, sentences or quotes. Thematic coding was implemented to assist with categorizing the statements. The irrelevant, repetitive and overlapping statements were removed. The remaining

statements, also known as horizons were used to develop themes. Textual and structural descriptions of each woman's experience were developed in order to understand the essence of those experiences. A composite textual and structural description was also formed. From these descriptions, the collective essence of the women's experiences emerged.

In this chapter, the findings from this study are highlighted. The chapter begins with an introduction to each participant and the essence of her career development experience while students at Ida B. Wells College, a pseudonym used to protect the college and student identities. Following the introductions, the four themes that emerged from the data will be discussed. These themes focus on career planning and outcomes, the influence of the college environment on career goals and the impact of race and social class on career plans.

Participants

The women selected to participate in this study attended Ida B. Wells College, a small women's liberal arts institution. The student population on this campus is less than 1,000 students and a small percentage of these students are Black women. Therefore, too many details about the participants including their majors may reveal their identity. In order to maintain confidentiality, a limited amount of demographic information about each participant will be shared. Each participant chose a pseudonym to protect her identity. All of the women were traditional aged college students. Only one participant was a non-traditional student due to the fact that she has already started a family.

The essence of each woman's experience was created by writing textual and structural descriptions of her experience. The essence of their experiences speaks

specifically to their time at Ida B. Wells College and how the women made decisions about their career interests and career goals (see Table 1).

Table 1

Participants' Career Plans

Participant	Immediate Plans	Future Plans
Alex	Corporate internship and non-profit internship	Law school; non-profit lawyer
Analise	Higher education position	Higher education graduate program; Dean of Students
Chantal	Law school	Non-profit lawyer; college professor; doctoral program
Charlie	School counseling graduate program	School counselor
Chloe	Consultant at affordable housing firm	Urban planning graduate program; city planner
Grace	Research opportunities; full time job	Social work graduate program; social worker
Hope	Applying to graduate school	Sociology graduate program; education advocate
Jamie	Biostatistics position	Biostatistics graduate program
Ms.	Nonprofit position	Non-profit career
Nina	Teacher	Graduate program
Red	Medical school	Medical doctor

Alex

Giving back to others is at the heart of Alex's career interests. She developed such interest through her experience as a Girl Scout. She later discovered that she could

channel her passion for service into a career as a non-profit lawyer. Born to a young teenage mother, Alex possesses a strong “I can do it” attitude. While balancing leadership positions, volunteer work and part-time jobs, Alex graduated from Ida B. Wells with high honors. She and her mother are elated that she was able to succeed despite the odds. During the upcoming year, Alex will leave Ida B. Wells as an intern at a Fortune 500 company and a top non-profit organization. In the meantime, she plans to apply to law school.

Essence of Alex’s experience

As a lifetime Girl Scout member, Alex understands the meaning of service. It was this experience that prompted her to continue serving others while she attended college. Alex was very involved on campus and held several leadership positions within student organizations. From the faculty to the custodial staff, Alex found the college environment to be very supportive of her interests and career goals. She valued the guidance that she received through the Career Center regarding her plans to become a non-profit lawyer. Although the college played an integral role in shaping Alex’s career interest, her participation in the Collegiate Advancement program and the support of her mother also helped solidify her interest in becoming a lawyer.

Analise

Analise attended a predominantly Black girls’ high school, and she was convinced that she would attend a Black women’s college, but a campus tour and awesome financial package lured Analise to Ida B. Wells College. Analise was reared in a single parent working class household and credits her mother for contributing to her debt-free

education at Ida B. Wells. She plans to enroll in a student affairs graduate program and become a student affairs professional.

Essence of Analise's Experience

Through her major coursework, Analise began eliminating careers that did not fit with her caring personality. Analise's residence life positions exposed her to the student affairs field – a field she had not previously considered. She realized that through these positions she could use her helping skills. Additionally, the women that Analise most admired at Ida B. Wells were student affairs professionals. These women served as role models for Analise and taught her what it means to be a professional in the field. Such exposure has led to Analise's desire to pursue a career in student affairs or higher education in general.

Charlie

Reared by a hard-working and determined mother, Charlie knows firsthand the impact of a great education. Her mother funded her private school education that prepared Charlie to excel at Ida B. Wells. As a future educator, she looks forward to transforming the public education system. In the fall, Charlie will enroll in a highly rated school counseling program at a prestigious university. She hopes to further her education by obtaining a specialist degree as well.

Essence of Charlie's Experience

While offering a friend advice on how to approach a guy, Charlie realized that she possessed good counseling skills. She enrolled in college determined to become a psychology major, but an introductory course in education changed her mind. Through her education courses, she learned about education reform and how marginalized groups

are impacted by school systems. She fell in love with the discussions and the teachings of her very vocal professor, a woman who exudes strength and advocacy. A required practicum experience for her academic major requirements provided her with an opportunity to shadow school counselors. She was also able to apply her skills and knowledge as she assisted students. She felt reassured that she was headed in the right direction. The education classes, support of faculty and hands-on experiences gave her the confidence to become a school counselor. Additionally, her mother's commitment and determination to succeed also provided a model for Charlie on how to pursue her passion.

Chantal

After the passing of her mother, Chantal was reared in a single-parent household in Georgia by her aunt, a college professor. She spent her childhood dreaming of becoming a teacher, lawyer or doctor. Her involvement in mock trial in high school led to her confirmation that she was destined to become a lawyer. Chantal decided to attend Ida B. Wells College after she received a wonderful financial aid package that resulted in minimal out of pocket expenses. During her time at Ida B. Wells College, she was involved with a politically affiliated student organization and diversity initiatives on campus. She spoke passionately about her interest in civil rights, race, gender and sexuality issues. With such strong interests, Chantal will attend law school in the fall at one of the nation's top law schools. She plans to become a non-profit lawyer and eventually a college professor.

Essence of Chantal's Experience

The supportive environment at Ida B. Wells College had a positive influence on Chantal's career interests. Her involvement in student organizations, studying abroad, and participating in an internship with a refugee organization enabled her to further develop her interest in becoming a lawyer. Additionally, her coursework in her interdisciplinary major gave her the opportunity to learn more about marginalized groups, social justice, and civil rights issues. She encountered supportive women faculty and staff who encouraged her and were willing to help her accomplish her goal of attending law school. They were committed to helping her get accepted to law school and were willing to help her get connected to the law school community once she was accepted. Such environment at Ida B. Wells contributed to Chantal feeling confident in her ability to graduate from the institution and make a difference in the world.

Chloe

Chloe grew up in a single parent working class household and experienced a lot of instability, which affected her self-esteem. She was not exactly thrilled to be a student at Ida B. Wells College. She initially wanted to attend an engineering program at an out-of-state university, but decided to attend Ida B. Wells because of the financial aid package. Shortly after enrolling in Ida B. Wells, Chloe realized that the institution did not offer majors that were of interest to her. A kinesthetic learner, Chloe had once thought about becoming a dancer, meteorologist, veterinarian, and engineer; however, these were not the careers that Chloe decided to pursue while at Ida B. Wells. Chloe was allowed to take classes from a local state institution and eventually decided to pursue a

career in urban planning. Prior to graduation, she was offered a consultant position with an urban planning organization.

Essence of Chloe's Experience

Chloe had quite a frustrating time in college. She spent the majority of her time learning about academic majors and careers that she did not want to pursue. She found solace during her visit to the Career Center where she learned about urban planning. At that point, she was determined to take classes that would better prepare her for a career in this field. She quickly learned that the college was limited in its course offerings. She decided to enroll in classes at another institution. The classes reignited Chloe's passion for learning and helped her become confident in her ability to succeed as a student. Besides the Career Center, Chloe did not find the support that she needed while in college. She did not consider her academic department to be helpful.

Grace

As a child, Grace knew that she wanted to become a therapist. She could not explain her fascination with therapy, but it followed her through her college years. Grace transferred to Ida B. Wells from a community college located in a neighboring state. She was interested in attending a women's college because she thought it would help boost her self-esteem. While at Ida B. Wells, she developed an interest in research as well. Grace would like to combine her interest in research and therapy to pursue a career as a social worker, eventually becoming a college professor.

Essence of Grace's Experience

During her time at Ida B. Wells College, Grace experienced personal growth and maturity that positively affected her career plans. Through the assistance of a therapist

and the constructive feedback from an advisor, Grace improved her self-efficacy and became more confident in her ability to succeed at Ida B. Wells and become a social worker. While she plans to pursue a master's degree in social work, Grace also believes that as a Black woman, she should consider a doctoral degree. She feels that she should obtain a higher degree in order to have access to resources that necessary in order to assist her clients.

Hope

Hope arrived at Ida B. Wells with the intentions of becoming a lawyer. However, she realized that she was more interested in the education system. Hope was a very involved student and devoted time to conducting research on Black women's issues. She was reared in a single parent household and cherishes the relationship that she has with her mother. Hope plans to apply to a sociology graduate program and begin her studies in the spring. She hopes to obtain a doctoral degree and possibly a law degree. Hope wants to become an advocate for a better education system, and she would like to eventually develop a non-profit organization in her hometown.

Essence of Hope's Experience

Since middle school, Hope has wanted to influence people. She initially thought that she could obtain this goal by becoming a lawyer. During her time in college, she focused her attention on education policy and advocacy work. She credits her mother for stirring this interest in her. However, it has been her experience in college that has made her feel confident that she can pursue her goal. She valued having faculty and staff who cheered her on and interacted with Black alumnae who are successfully working in their career fields.

Jamie

With a knack for math and science, Jamie secured a full-time biostatistics position that she will start shortly after graduation. Jamie came to Ida B. Wells College from a single parent working class household. She was eager to leave her home state and pursue higher education at a diverse women's college. Her time at Ida B. Wells was filled with mixed emotions about her experience; however, she was able to overcome her struggles. Jamie plans to enroll in a biostatistics graduate program in the near future.

Essence of Jamie's Experience

If Jamie had her way, she would be traveling, reading and shooting photography. Her financial status indicates that she needs to find a job after graduation. She wants to have a career that will alleviate some of the hardships she has experienced coming from a working class family. Therefore, she seeks a job that will offer fame, money and stability. Jamie's quest to find such work led to her accessing resources such as the Career Center. The Career Center was resourceful in helping her connect to an alumna working in her field of interest. This connection led Jamie to receive an internship where she applied her mathematical intellect and received validation that further developed her self-confidence. Jamie's support at the college was found more so through resources and individuals outside of her department than through departmental faculty. From her experience, Jamie learned the power of networking and pursuing her goals.

Ms.

Since high school, Ms. has spent countless hours committed to community service. She continued her service while attending Ida B. Wells. Ms. comes from a middle-class family; however, her experience at Ida B. Wells was quite different from

that of her peers. She had additional family responsibilities that limited her involvement on campus. Ms. plans to continue with a non-profit organization and sustainability work after her graduation.

Essence of Ms.'s Experience

The absence of studying African history during her childhood led to Ms.'s desire to teach other Black people about their history. While attending college, Ms. became intrigued with African history. It was through these classes that Ms. developed the idea of becoming a teacher. Devoted to years of community service, it was only natural that Ms. was thinking about other Black people and how she could empower them. She continued her commitment to service by participating in service projects during college including two mentoring programs. She also served as an intern with a non-profit organization. The college offered Ms. the opportunity to increase her knowledge of sustainability by offering sustainability courses. Her enrollment in these courses influenced her decision to identify a career where she could address sustainability issues. The college environment provided an awareness that further contributed to Ms.'s desire to serve other people.

Nina

A storyteller, writer, and future teacher, Nina grew up in a middle-class household with her parents. Their social class status changed when her family had to unexpectedly relocate to another state. Nina always thought she would be a pediatrician, but a few days at youth programs focusing on science, math, and medicine showed her that her true passion is writing. Ida B. Wells was not initially Nina's first choice for college. She had plans to attend a Black women's college, but decided to attend Ida B. Wells after meeting

some warm and friendly women during a campus visit. Nina applied to a well-known teaching program and will be a teacher in the fall.

Essence of Nina's Experience

Nina's time at Ida B. Wells College was life changing. Her peers and a professor whom she considered a mentor helped her to realize her potential and discover a new level of self-confidence. Through the support of her professor, she further developed her love for writing and pursued opportunities that fostered her writing skills and leadership skills. Nina's interactions with confident women showed her how to find her voice and be confident in what she had to offer. She and her family feel indebted to Ida B. Wells for the transformation that has taken place in Nina's life. With the encouragement of her friends, the support of her family and her desire to give back to others, Nina is looking forward to being a teacher and attending graduate school in the future.

Red

A quiet spirit and focused woman, Red grew up questioning a lot of things about life, including the death of her mother. During her quest for an understanding of her mother's death, Red decided to become a medical doctor. Red was reared in a single parent home by a relative. She attended a magnet high school that focused on the health sciences and medicine. She arrived at Ida B. Wells knowing that she wanted to pursue a science major and to apply to medical school. Red will be attending a private medical college with plans to either pursue cardiology or anesthesiology.

Essence of Red's Experience

Red's academic major has a rigorous curriculum that prepared her to meet the demands of applying to and enrolling in medical school. Her confidence was shaped by

faculty members who supported her career goal and who invested time and resources in her. Red also appreciated the sense of community that she established with the other Black women in her program. They offered support to each other as they progressed through their programs and discussed their career plans.

Themes

From this study, four themes emerged that reflect the women's journeys to discovering their career interests and career goals. The influences on their interests and goals are also revealed among these themes (see Table 2). The themes include the process for choosing a career, the influence of the college environment, the challenge of being different, and the impact of social class. Each of these themes addresses the research questions. Theme one, the process for choosing a career and theme two, the influence of the college environment speaks specifically to research question one. These themes highlight factors in the college environment that contributed to the women's career development. Theme three, the challenge of being different answers research question two and theme four, the impact of social class addresses research question three.

Table 2

Significant Themes in Black Women's Career Development

Themes	Categories
Process of Choosing a Career	Early career planning College career planning Career plans and outcomes -Service and social justice careers -Aspirations for graduate and professional school
The Influence of the College Environment	Reasons for enrolling in Ida B. Wells College

	Rigorous academic environment Positive influence on women Influence of faculty and staff Confidence
The Challenges of Being Different	Challenging academic environment The comfortable yet challenging social environment Relating to non-Black women Black identity and career plans
Impact of Social Class	Working class and lower-middle class Middle class and upper-middle class Social class and college experience Social class and career plans

Theme One: Process of Choosing a Career

At the beginning of each interview, I asked each woman to create a visual representation of her journey to discovering her career interests. The women were excited to think about the development of their interests while using a sketch pad and markers. Some used symbols and drawings while others thought words would best describe their journey. For several of them, it was their first time pausing to reflect upon how they made decisions about their future career plans. One participant opted to forego creating a visual representation, but she was able to speak about her process for choosing a career. In fact, each participant had the opportunity to talk about her representation. These depictions served as a great conversation starter for the interview. These women felt comfortable in sharing their career interests from early childhood through their college years. They discussed individuals, situations, environments and even television shows that influenced their interests. They also mentioned their current career goals and their plans for achieving these goals. Throughout the interviews, I often referred to the visual representations. It was clear from these interviews that the process for choosing a

career was significant, more specifically their early career planning, college career planning, career plans and outcomes and the influence of black identity on their career choice.

Early career planning. Like many young children, over 50% of the women in this study began thinking about their ideal careers during childhood. Some of their ideal careers included becoming an astronaut, a figure skater, a doctor, a lawyer, a veterinarian, a teacher and a therapist. Some of these careers were merely whimsical thoughts. Through further exploration of these careers, approximately one-third of the women no longer considered these careers options. Analise was fascinated with becoming a doctor after watching the television show, *Rescue 911*. She decided not to become a doctor after she realized she would have to work with blood. Chantal was discouraged about becoming a doctor after she was informed about the length of time for medical school. For Grace and Red, their career interests remained consistent throughout childhood and even through their college years. Red knew she wanted to become a doctor and she made plans to become one. Grace could not recall how she developed an interest in becoming a therapist, but she realized at a very young age that she was destined to be one. She continued to pursue this career goal in college.

For 45% of the women, family members were the biggest childhood influence. Family members often encouraged the women to consider certain career fields. Jamie's mother strategically planned for her and her sisters to participate in science and mathematics camps. She also desired for them to have a love for music. So, she enrolled them in school band programs. Jamie believed that her mother intentionally encouraged science and mathematics because she believed they would select careers related to these

areas. Jamie and at least one of her sisters are currently in the science and mathematics fields. Parents not only pushed certain careers, but they were also supportive of their career interests. Nina's parents enrolled her in two camps for students interested in the medical field. It was during these camps that Nina discovered that she really was interested in becoming a doctor. She continued to think that she would be a pediatrician. Eventually, she recognized that her true passion was writing. When Alex got older, her mother supported her interest by accompanying her to law school forums. Her mother consistently provided encouragement and praise for Alex pursuing her career interests. Alex's grandmother advised her to pursue a career that would make her happy. Hope's mother always told her that she could be anything that she wanted to be.

Family members served as role models for professions the women considered or decided not to consider. Three of the participants discussed these particular instances. When Analise was a child, her mother studied counseling. Her counseling books intrigued Analise and she began reading them. By reading these books, Analise became interested in the counseling profession. Chantal also had the privilege of observing her aunt, a college instructor and her mother, a nurse. She decided as a young child that she wanted to be a doctor, lawyer, or teacher, because these were the model professions in her family. Unlike Analise and Chantal, Chloe learned that she did not want her parents' careers mainly because of their lifestyles. Her parents are divorced and have individually struggled to make ends meet. Her father is a musician whose music performances are unpredictable. Although Chloe loves music and could see herself studying music, her father's lifestyle deterred her from pursuing a music career. Her mother has held several low-income positions. Chloe dislikes the instability and the lack of money that her

mother has endured due to her job choices. Therefore, she seeks a career where she can have stability and a supporting income.

Once the women progressed through their early educations, they were exposed to different careers through school sponsored programs and organizations. Hope and Alex spoke about career days at their middle school and high school where their peers' parents and professionals in the community talked about their professions. It was during these career days that they decided to become lawyers. Additionally, Hope observed lawyers and judges in action during her class's visit to a courtroom. Alex also received support for becoming a lawyer through her participation in [Collegiate Advancement], a federally funded program for low-income high school students. Through this program, she visited law schools and talked with law students. Chantal also received confirmation that she wanted to become a lawyer while participating in mock trial, a program that helps high school students understand the judicial system while role playing trials. She received feedback and encouragement from local lawyers. These interactions really boosted her confidence.

The high school environment also played a role in these women's career development. Charlie and Hope attended private Catholic high schools. These institutions provided opportunities for career exploration. These women also had teachers and counselors who were very supportive and offered career advice and encouragement once they enrolled in college. Red attended a magnet school with a health sciences focus. This environment allowed her to explore the different areas within medicine. She explained, "It [high school] exposed me to a lot of different fields. We did some shadowing and things like that. Um, so, um, I got exposed to a lot of specific

fields, that I hadn't really been exposed to beforehand, so – that kind of got me interested in anesthesiology at that point.”

College career planning. Almost one-third of the women arrived to Ida B. Wells College knowing the academic major they planned to consider. Their chosen major often reflected their career interests. The women chose majors that have traditionally been associated with women (i.e., education, psychology, English, humanities, etc.) (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). Only two women had majors in the sciences and mathematics areas and that is typical for other college women as well (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). Red knew that she wanted to become a doctor, therefore, she had already planned to select a science-related major. Charlie had decided that she needed a counseling-related major since she was planning to become a school counselor, and Jamie decided on a mathematics-related field due to her interests in mathematics and science. The women also selected minors that complemented their career interests, or the minors eventually led to them considering careers related to those areas. Grace, Charlie and Ms. were unaware of their minors until they arrived on campus. They became intrigued with the subject matter discussed in the classes and decided to incorporate their interests into their career plans.

For 36 percent of the women, choosing a major was no simple task. Ms. had to make sure that she chose a major that her family would support. They questioned whether she would be able to find a job if she majored in English or history. Nina thought she wanted to major in the classics because she thought she wanted to be a doctor; however, she realized that she was excelling in another major which reflected her passion. For Hope and Chloe, they were discouraged because they were interested in

majors that were not represented at Ida B. Wells. While Hope was able to eventually select a major that satisfied her interest, Chloe struggled to find a major that was appealing to her.

But I came in – I actually came to [Ida B. Wells] as a potential engineering major (LAUGHTER). Yeah, because we have a dual degree program with [State Technological Institute] and I was like, yeah, I'm going to try the engineering thing, why not. But that quickly died as soon as I hit first level physics. (LAUGHTER)... Yeah, and so but engineering kind of died and then I was kind of in limbo, like for – like almost the rest of my college. I just didn't really know what I wanted to do anymore. I was down and not confident about myself anymore, because college is hard, especially here at [Ida B. Wells].

She decided on a major because she had the most course credits for that particular major. Although she had a lot of credit in the classes, the classes offered by the department were limiting, and she grew bored with them. She also had difficulty with maintaining good grades in these classes.

Career plans and outcomes. Like many newly graduated college students, all of the women were optimistic about their plans for the future. While it is disconcerting to leave the comfort of an institution they had known for at least four years, they were ready for the next chapter in their lives. Following graduation, the majority of the women will begin working, and a few will begin graduate or professional programs as reflected in Table 1. Two commonalities existed with regards to their career plans. These women expressed interests in the service and social justice fields, and they aspired to attend

graduate or professional school. They also hoped to have successful careers and felt very confident in their abilities to succeed.

Service and social justice careers. It was quite clear from each interview that these women were committed to lives of service. Such interests are not uncommon for Black women given their history of working in helping professions (Hesse-Biber & Carter, 2000). For Alex, Hope, and Ms., their desires to serve others were derived from their service involvement as children and teenagers. They learned about service from their families and through programs like Girl Scouts and by tutoring and mentoring students. They continued to serve during their time at Ida B. Wells. Nina, Chloe, Chantal, Charlie, and Grace learned about serving while attending college. Their classes and campus and community involvements ignited their desires to serve other people.

As these women considered careers, all of them wanted careers where they could be of service and become advocates for marginalized groups, whether it was in the education system, the legal field, the medical field and even urban planning. Chantal recognized the need to care for people besides her family. She learned that from her family members. Chantal believed that being a non-profit lawyer and a professor would allow her to provide such care. Hope and Alex also planned to become lawyers and desire to practice non-profit law. Unlike many college students, Alex, Chantal, and Hope were not concerned about the low salaries associated with non-profit law. They defined success as their service to other people. Nina realized that other people had influenced her development, and she wanted to offer that same influence. Therefore, she decided to become a teacher. Ms. has always tutored and mentored other people; however, her

experience at Ida B. Wells made her realize that she wanted to teach and advocate for sustainability.

Aspirations for graduate and professional school. Enrollment in graduate or a professional program seemed to be the next step for the majority of the women. Tidball et al. (1999) acknowledged that women's college graduates typically have aspirations for pursuing advanced degrees. The women in this study believed that entering a graduate or professional program was necessary for them to reach their career goals. Chloe noted that,

To even be a city planner, to get a job as one, you have to have the graduate degree anyway. So, I can't even do it now, you know, as I am you know today. So to- to be able to get to where I want to, I have to go to grad school.

Their desire to obtain an advanced degree was also influenced by other factors. Nina was inspired by the other women on campus who planned to pursue graduate degrees. Her advisor also suggested that she consider graduate school. Grace believed that her identity as a Black woman was reason enough for her to pursue a degree beyond a master's degree. Although Analise was inspired by her role models to obtain a graduate degree, her mother and sister expected her to attend graduate school as well. Regardless of the influence, all of the women perceived advanced degrees as important. However, 72% of them decided to delay obtaining these degrees. They wanted to work and earn money to help offset the costs of attending graduate or professional school. They also wanted to take time to prepare their applications and take admissions exams.

Chantal, Red and Charlie were the only women who were planning to immediately enroll in graduate and professional schools following graduation. Chantal

was accepted to a top-ranked law school. She never imagined attending such a school. This law program has an emphasis in social justice that aligns with her career goals. Like Chantal, Charlie was surprised that she was accepted to a highly ranked school counseling program. She knows it will be challenging, but she expressed excitement about enrolling in the program. Red was admitted to a well-known private medical college and feels confident that she will perform very well.

For all the women, career planning started at a very early age. With the help of their family members and the environments at their K-12 institutions, they learned about different careers and identified careers they wanted to pursue once they reached adulthood. These women planned to have meaningful careers where they are serving and advocating for people. They were aware of the education and skills that are required in order for them to have successful careers; therefore, they have outlined their plans to accomplish such goals.

Theme Two: The Influence of the College Environment

From the college search until graduation, Ida B. Wells College had a tremendous impact on the women. Various aspects of the environment including the mission statement, traditions, students, faculty, staff, and alumnae contributed to the personal and professional development of these women. This particular theme best describes how a same-gender college environment facilitates not only the women's career development, but overall development.

Reasons for enrolling in Ida B. Wells College. Tucked away on a small campus in the middle of a bustling suburban area, Ida B. Wells was not initially the first choice for many of these women as they prepared their college applications. In fact, the

majority of them had not heard about Ida B. Wells until they reviewed college rankings or received mail from Ida B. Wells. After further investigation of Ida B. Wells, the women learned that Ida B. Wells met their criteria for selecting a college to attend. Grace was looking for a women's college that would help her overcome her shyness. She believed the women's college environment,

Would help me not to have so much anxiety, like in social situations. Um, I think that's – I think I like unconsciously probably realized that it would kind of create – it was more likely to create a different type of environment, like an environment that I was more comfortable in, also.

Grace felt like Ida B. Wells offered such an environment. Ms. also desired a place for personal growth. She believed a women's college environment would improve her self-esteem and confidence. Ms., Charlie, and Red wanted to attend small colleges because they felt like they would perform better by having smaller class sizes. Charlie along with Jamie also wanted to attend a diverse college. Charlie mentioned that her ideal

[College] had to be small. It had to be in the south. It had to have a good percentage of Black students. I was like I would really love it to be four or above because most of the places I was seeing were one or two percent.

Campus tours provided just the insight the women needed to determine if Ida B. Wells College would be the place where they would attend college. The women either toured the campus during special weekends for high school seniors, or they initiated the tours by simply arriving on campus and walking around. During her campus tour, Grace said she fell in love with the institution and realized that she belonged there.

For Analise and Nina, the campus tour helped them decide whether they wanted to attend Ida B. Wells or Coleman College, a Black women's college. Initially, both women were convinced that they were going to attend Coleman. They visited Coleman and Ida B. Wells on the same days and went to Coleman first. Nina provided a vivid account of her tour at Coleman and Ida B. Wells,

And so we went to [Coleman] and I remember pulling up to [Coleman], and I was like, it's in the middle of the hood. This is not in the brochure. (LAUGHTER). So we walked up to the campus and the students, uh, well, I remember thinking the campus was really cramped and I just had it in my mind that it was going to be spread out, but it was cramped. But that was fine with me. We're walking around. We ran into a couple of students and I was I – I asked them, like oh, how do you – how – hello, how are you doing? I'm Nina. I was like, how do you get to the student's center. And, um, they just kind of looked at us like why are you talking to me, like, it's over there. And it was like, oh, okay. And so, I don't know, I just didn't – I don't know, I just didn't feel like it was right. That's only one interaction, but it just told me a lot. And, um, so my parents were like, well, we're in the area, we might as well go visit the Ida B. Wells. I was like, I guess, but you know, I'm sold, even though this happened.

The Coleman tour was very different from the Ida B. Wells tour. In fact, the Ida B. Wells tour convinced Nina that she should reconsider her plans to attend Coleman. She provided a contrasting perspective of the tours.

So we go to [Ida B. Wells] and we get here, they weren't doing campus tours either. My mom and I decided to go check out the student's center, but we

couldn't get any ID to get in, and my dad had wandered off, as normal and, um, these two students saw him and you don't see random guys walking around this campus, so they stopped him and they talked to him. . . But to make a long story short, like they just started talking to my dad. And we started talking and they took me on the tour of the campus. They just took me around the campus and they let me see their – their room and they gave us a personal tour. They were telling us about their college experience. . . And so we ended up taking them out to dinner to thank them. And, um, ever since then they've been my [college] sisters. And I – I knew this was the school for me. Like they were just so down to earth and so nice. And it was just like, I can see myself here.

Nina left Ida B. Wells ready to enroll, however, she did not make a commitment to attend until she received her financial aid package from the institution.

Analise's older sister introduced her to Ida B. Wells. Her sister graduated from a private historically Black university, but she wished she had attended Ida B. Wells.

Analise explained,

My sister, she introduced me to [Ida B. Wells]. I had no idea that it existed. Um, so we came here for a tour and we had toured [Coleman] earlier that day and I was sold on [Coleman]. I was like, why are we coming here [Ida B. Wells]. I – I had to admit, yes, the campus was gorgeous and honestly, my, um, my interest was piqued when they mentioned the honor code thing and you know, they really sell you on that.”

Although Analise and her sister were content with her attending Ida B. Wells, Analise's mother was concerned that she saw few Black women serving as faculty and

administrators at Ida B. Wells. For that reason, she wanted Analise to attend Coleman. Analise eventually decided to attend Ida B. Wells especially after receiving her financial aid package.

Nina and Analise were not the only women to consider their financial aid package a determining factor in them enrolling in Ida B. Wells. All of the women were blown away by the generous financial aid packages they received from Ida B. Wells. The financial generosity began with offering the women fee waivers to apply to the institution, and then, once they applied they received scholarships and grants. Only two women spoke of receiving minimal amounts of loans. In comparison to other colleges where they applied, Ida B. Wells provided a substantial offer. For these women, it was a no brainer that they would enroll in Ida B. Wells. Analise mentioned that she was briefly enrolled at Coleman until she received her financial aid package from Ida B. Wells. She quickly enrolled in Ida B. Wells.

Rigorous academic environment. Grace described her transition to Ida B. Wells College as moving from the kiddie pool to the deep end of a swimming pool. She was not alone with this feeling. The women had difficulty transitioning to Ida B. Wells whether they were coming from high school or a community college. They were used to performing very well in high school or at a community college, but Ida B. Wells presented a new challenge. They were expected to think critically, and to read and write at a level that was foreign to them. Grace began to question whether she should be at Ida B. Wells but soon realized that her peers had similar experiences when they first arrived at Ida B. Wells. Chloe was disappointed in her academic performance. She explained “I’ve never been the person that made bad grades and it wasn’t until college when I

started doing not very well and my confidence was just shot, and I was really just in limbo.” Although one fourth of the participants found their transition difficult, Charlie felt she was academically prepared to succeed at Ida B. Wells. She was surprised that her peers did not have the same level of instructional rigor that she experienced while she was in high school. Charlie and Red believed that the rigorous academic preparation they received prepared them for graduate and medical school.

Positive influence on women. The women spoke of various aspects of the college environment that positively impacted their personal growth. They assessed how they had matured since they initially arrived on campus. One of the main sources contributing to their growth was their belief in Ida B. Wells’ mission statement specifically the part that states that Ida B. Wells College, “educates women to think deeply, live honorably, and engage the intellectual and social challenges of their times.” Throughout various parts of the interview each woman referenced this part of the mission statement. They believed that they could accomplish the mission and they experienced the manifestation of the mission at various levels during their time at Ida B. Wells.

The environment also helped women improve their self-confidence and self-esteem. Nina said that she is the woman she is today because of her experience at Ida B. Wells, and she and her family felt indebted to the institution for her transformation. Grace often mentioned how she worked on her self-efficacy while at Ida B. Wells by working with a therapist and by receiving constructive feedback from one of her professors. These women were also surrounded by peers who were self-confident, and they learned how to become confident through interacting with them. Nina found her voice by observing her more vocal friends. These friends also inspired her to want to

excel and pursue more in life. Ms. also mentioned that her self-confidence was enhanced as a result of her attending Ida B. Wells. These women's experiences confirm that women's colleges lead to positive outcomes for women (Astin, 1993; Riordan, 1994; Smith, Wolf, & Morrison, 1995).

Although 81% of the women in the study had a positive experience at Ida B. Wells, Chloe and Jamie did not have the greatest experiences. Chloe's initial disappointment began with her process for choosing a major. She realized that she was more suitable for majors where she would be able to apply the knowledge she was learning by using her hands. She did not find such majors at Ida B. Wells. She eventually settled on a major, but her academic performance became a concern. She was depressed about receiving poor grades. The saving grace for Chloe was her joint enrollment in a local school where she was able to take classes that required hands-on assignments. She spoke with much excitement as she talked about her experience with these classes. Chloe ultimately believed that "the biggest thing [Ida B. Wells] has contributed to my future, I think has been I've learned a lot what I don't want to do. . . ." She also "felt like the school defeated me. There's many times where I, I felt like, you know, I felt broken, like they- they got me you know. . . ." So, Chloe graduated not feeling as empowered as many of her classmates. She was thrilled to have secured a position related to urban planning and was optimistic that she would perform better in graduate school since she would enroll in a program that is of interest to her.

Jamie's experience at Ida B. Wells did not meet her expectations. She thought she might receive more encouragement from the college given that it is a small institution. However, her experience was exactly the opposite. She found that her

academic department including faculty and her advisor were unwilling to provide the proper guidance that she needed. Jamie had an advisor who was discouraging and even suggested that she was not fit for an internship that she had already secured. She wanted her advisor and the faculty to be more involved with her and to ask questions about her progress and goals. Instead, she learned that she had to take the initiative in communicating her needs to them. Although Jamie wanted a small college experience, she felt that if she was not going to receive support from faculty, then she could have attended a larger college.

Jamie also explained that certain women were considered to be the model Ida B. Wells' woman, and she was not that woman. She noted that these women received a lot of attention, and they had opportunities to represent the college on several occasions. She appeared somewhat bitter about not being included as one of these women. Jamie really had not become as invested in the college like many of the model women. She did not fully participate in all the college's traditions, but she participated in a few. Jamie graduated from Ida B. Wells with a lot of mixed emotions. While she had some positive moments, the negative experiences gave Jamie reason to pause and contemplate whether she really enjoyed her time at Ida B. Wells.

Influence of faculty and staff. During the women's senior year at Ida B. Wells, 109 faculty members were present on campus. Nineteen percent of the faculty were minority and 61% were female faculty. The women found that these faculty members and staff invested in them, supported them and served as role models. The Career Center staff served as a resource for these women. With the assistance of a Career Center staff member, Chloe learned about becoming an urban planner, and Alex received help with

preparing for law school. A staff member connected Jamie with an alumna who was able to help Jamie obtain an internship. The center also offered a program that allowed the women to shadow professionals in the field. Nina took advantage of this opportunity. Hope mentioned that since she told a staff member that she wanted to become a political leader, the staff member consistently sent her information about leadership opportunities. The Career Center was also a place where women could celebrate their recent job offers or acceptance into graduate or professional school. The women could place their names on a wall in the Career Center once they had reached one of these goals. As a college tradition, the women had an opportunity to ring the campus bell in honor of their good fortune.

The faculty was devoted to helping the women accomplish their career goals. Nina's advisor encouraged her to consider opportunities that would enhance her writing skills. She also suggested writing projects and programs Nina should consider once she graduated. Nina described her professor's impact,

Yeah, she – she has been a really big part of my college experience in ways, I think I have conveyed to her, but I don't think she really understands, because every time I was ready to give up on myself, it was like, she would pop up out of nowhere and encourage me to pursue something I never thought I could do.

This professor also urged Nina to consider graduate school. Red, Chantal, and Alex talked about feeling encouraged by professors who wrote recommendation letters on their behalf for jobs and graduate or professional school. Chantal's professors were also willing to connect her to faculty at the law school she will be attending. Analise had a great experience with her on-campus work supervisor who invited her to attend a

professional conference in higher education. The supervisor believed that the conference would give Analise more insight into the field. The assistance that the Career Center and the faculty offered demonstrated to these women that they believed in them and their career plans.

The women found the faculty and staff open to developing relationships with them. These relationships served as a support system. Red appreciated her professors being approachable and willing to meet with her as needed. Grace's relationship with her advisor enabled her to receive constructive feedback that improved her performance as a student. Chantal, Charlie, and Hope spoke of faculty who were able to help them cope with being in an often-challenging environment. These women relied on the comfort of faculty, staff and administrators who would validate their feelings. Chantal explained, "there are like rough times on campus, too, but when you have – that support system is always there for you, or that is, um, letting you know that you're worth something." Like Chantal, Charlie, and Hope felt that it was important for women of color to have such support on a predominantly White campus. Alex established relationships with the support staff on campus. She encountered dining hall and custodial workers who were always inquiring about her status as a student and gave praise for her accomplishments. These relationships that the women formed with the faculty and staff had a lasting impression on these women.

Faculty and administrators, especially the women of color, were perceived as role models. Analise observed the women deans at the institution and noted, "I just see them and I'm like, yes, that's how I want to be. You know, just influencing all these young minds and showing them that they can have this work/life balance and, you know, to find

their way.” She also perceived that these women exhibited the standard for excellence in the higher education profession and desired to obtain a doctoral degree because many of them had doctorates. Charlie and Chantal were glad to have strong women of color identities on campus who were able to hold their positions while also representing their Black identity. Charlie and Chantal found the presence of these women reassuring in that they could have successful careers as Black women. These women’s perceptions proved the significance of faculty and administrator role models to the women’s career plans (Tidball et al., 1999).

Confidence. The women in this study were confident in their abilities to pursue their career plans. Two women expressed a little concern about their future plans, but all of the women were pretty confident. Ms. was uncertain about her immediate plans, but she was confident that she would fulfill her career goal. Jamie spoke about appearing confident rather than feeling confident. She said she appears confident because she works hard to overcompensate for her lack of knowledge in some areas. For example, when she interviewed for her internship and her job, she did not know much about these fields, but she committed a lot of time to researching the fields. Therefore, during the interviews she appeared very confident and was able to land the positions. The women discussed many factors that contributed to their confidence. Chloe, Grace, Chantal, Ms. and Alex talked about having expectations for themselves and believing in their abilities to accomplish their goals. They also mentioned supportive family and friends who provided encouragement along the way. However, the majority of their influences related to the environment at Ida B. Wells.

The environment provided the preparation they needed in order to be successful after graduation. The opportunity to be exposed to different ways of thinking, perceiving and experiencing the world gave these women more than they could have ever imagined. Chantal, Nina, Charlie, and Hope spoke about how these opportunities shaped them and prepared them to be launched into the real world. With this preparation, they were confident that they could make a difference in the world and that they could handle the adversity that comes with being a woman and being Black.

Through their classes and experiential learning, they were able to explore, eliminate, and confirm their career interests. The experiential opportunities included internships, a practicum, campus involvement, enrichment programs, service, studying abroad, and participating in shadowing days. Some of these experiences were required as a part of their coursework while other experiences were simply voluntary. From these experiences, they developed skills and knowledge that they thought would be useful in their future jobs and during graduate and professional school experiences. Charlie described her practicum experience as being significant to her confidence. She stated,

The best thing that has happened to me this far has been this placement this semester, because being able to see how easily some things come to me . . . and it was so exciting to know that I could do it, and that there was evidence of me doing it.

The annual college-wide research day was a confidence booster and an empowering moment for the women who presented as well as those who attended. I observed the presentations of two women who participated in this study. These women were well prepared and conducted themselves in a professional manner. Their presentations were

thorough and demonstrated their ability to produce scholarly work. They were supported by their peers, faculty, and staff. During their interviews, they revealed their interests in future research and their plans to obtain doctorate degrees. From this research day, they developed the confidence to pursue their future plans.

The confirmation and validation that the women received from faculty, staff, and internship supervisors also contributed to the women's confidence. Charlie, Jamie, Hope, and Alex appreciated the praise they received. They had faculty and staff cheering them along the way telling them they could accomplish their career goals. Jamie also received positive feedback from her internship supervisor. Jamie's supervisor gave her challenging tasks because she believed Jamie could accomplish them. She applauded Jamie for doing a great job. Hearing these messages and having someone to support their goals was the encouragement these women needed to feel confident.

These women also became confident in their abilities as they watched faculty, staff, their peers and alumnae. If these women could have success, the participants believed that they could as well. They perceived these women as paving the way for them. Nina was inspired by her friends who participated in the teaching program that she planned to enter. They provided a model for her. For Analise, Hope, and Chantal, the faculty gave them a sense of hope that they could also become accomplished faculty members. Meeting with alumnae who had thriving careers was also an indication to the women that their career goals were obtainable.

It is evident that the participants' confidence was shaped by many factors including their abilities to perform tasks related to their career interests, observations of career professionals, comments from faculty and staff and their emotional arousal. Lent,

Brown, and Hackett (2002) perceived these factors to be important to individual's confidence thereby, influencing their career development.

From prior enrollment to their career plans, the environment at Ida B. Wells played an integral role in these women's lives. The administrators, faculty, and staff created an atmosphere that exuded with high expectations for these women. The expectations were clearly noted in the mission statement, and they were evident through the rigorous coursework and the experiential opportunities afforded to these women. The women were surrounded by supportive administrators, faculty, and staff who wanted them to excel and demonstrated that support through positive and constructive feedback, and thereby investing in their futures. The environment also allowed the women to inspire each other. All these attributes of the Ida B. Wells environment contributed to the women's confidence and made them realize they had the power to be successful in their future careers.

Theme Three: The Challenge of Being Different

Prior to the interview, each woman stated that she identified as a Black woman. Throughout the interview, they used Black and African-American interchangeably. The women were asked what it means to be a Black woman at Ida B. Wells College. Their initial reactions began with big sighs, deep breaths, long pauses, smiles, and laughter. These reactions were followed by comments such as "that's a big question" or "that's a loaded question." All these responses were an indication that the women had interesting stories to tell about their experience as a Black woman at Ida B. Wells. These stories addressed how the women's racial identity contributed to their college experience and career development.

As Black women, several messages had been communicated to them about what it means to be a Black woman. A lot of these messages focused on the adversity that these women would have to overcome because they are Black. They mainly talked about having to work harder than their peers in order to excel in life. They were simply referring to external influences that present as barriers in their lives (Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996). Charlie felt she had to endure double discrimination because she is Black and she is a woman. She and Ms. believed that Black women had to be strong and resilient. These women received these messages from their family members, and some women drew these conclusions from their personal experiences. Despite the challenges that they perceived they would encounter, these women were adamant that they would overcome discrimination and stereotypes. They were optimistic that they would not contribute to the negative images and statistics about Black women.

The women identified others who exemplified what it means to be a Black woman. They consistently described these women as strong and hardworking. Chantal talked about noticing the strong Black women in her family including her aunts and grandmothers. To her, they captured the essence of what it means to be hardworking, caring, and supportive to others. They set the expectation of what it means to be a Black woman. Charlie came from a female- dominated family. Her mother and aunts are strong women who are open about their strength. Charlie's mother worked three jobs in order to pay for Charlie's early private schooling. She also completed bachelor's and master's degrees while working. To Charlie, her mother's dedication was an example of strength and love. Her mother taught her how to work hard, and she also set the expectation for pursuing advanced degrees. Red also desired to model herself after the

hardworking women in her family. Chloe shared with excitement how she perceived her ex-boyfriend's mother to be her role model. This woman overcame a lot of adversity and she was proof to Chloe that she could make it. From these examples, the women were able to comprehend the significance of perseverance for Black women. It is with this same determination that the Black women in this study were able to face the challenges presented at Ida B. Wells.

To be a Black woman at Ida B. Wells was not easy. In some ways, the women thought being Black at Ida B. Wells was similar to being Black in America. They also found Ida B. Wells, however, to be more progressive in terms of the institution's willingness to have more diversity represented on campus. While the institution was supportive of more diversity, the women were quick to note that discrimination and racism were still very apparent on campus. The women felt they were perceived as being "different" or considered as "other" by their peers on campus. They were considered different because of their hairstyles, their family backgrounds, and their racial and ethnic pride. These differences were not always appreciated and respected by their peers.

The challenging academic environment. Analise seemed to capture the feelings of the other women by stating, "where blackness really rears its head is – is almost in – in the academic forum ...". Within their academic departments, few faculty of color were present and these women were usually the only Black seniors, the only Black woman in their major or one of few Black women in their major. Red discussed how the Black women in her department worked together and formed a community of support. Jamie was one of a few Black women in her major. Although she initially formed a great

relationship with the other Black woman in her major, their relationship ended due to their competitiveness.

In the classroom, the Black women noticed that most of the time they were the only Black student in the class. Analise recalled sitting in her classes on the first day of class and scanning the room to determine if other Black women were in the class. If other Black women were present, then they usually sat together in class. Since so few Black women were in the classes, these women felt compelled to share their experiences. Analise often described herself as “repin’ her race” during classroom discussions. These women were frequently frustrated with their White peers who refused to acknowledge or understand the experience of people of color. Nina remembered being in a class where she shared a story that she wrote about the life and the death of a young Black man. Her story reflected common issues often present in the Black community. Nina’s White peers questioned the issues she raised in the story and believed that they were unrealistic. This interaction was a learning moment for Nina. She noted that these interactions “taught me how to really just express myself and make sure that they understand where I’m coming from. Like I have a very different life experience from you and so that’s what I write about. And, um, I’m actually happy to have had this happen to me, because I think it really prepares me for some of the things I’m going to encounter in this world.” The comments made by Nina’s classmates were not unusual for the Black women to hear. Charlie noticed that the White women in her classes were uncomfortable discussing race-related topics and would often remark that they did not understand why the issues being presented were significant. Charlie described their responses as “It’s the convenient, you

know, leaving off this doesn't make sense to me.” Alex also witnessed that her White classmates were not open to learning about the Black experience.

Jamie perceived that when her White classmates would discuss race relations they would speak from an elitist mindset. Her classmates raised issues that had nothing to do with race, however, the underlying tone of their conversations implied that they were referring to specific racial groups. They also assumed that because Jamie attended Ida B. Wells that she was not a part of the group of Black people that were referred to in class. Therefore, they spoke about Black people without regard for Jamie. Jamie had to quickly learn not to take the responses personally, however, she became very annoyed with her classmates.

These women often had to contend with professors who were unprepared to handle discourse about race-related topics. After the class ended, when Nina shared the story she had written, her professor congratulated her for the way she responded to her classmates. Nina wanted to know why the professor did not come to her rescue during the class. Jamie was appalled by one of her professor's strong objection in class to the type of public education Jamie received. After class, Jamie mentioned to the professor that she had been educated in that particular school environment and the professor questioned why Jamie attended such a school. This professor demonstrated to Jamie that she did not care about Jamie's background. Analise was upset with the research that faculty presented about Black women during classes. Chantal experienced racism from a faculty member within her initial academic department, but she decided that it was too risky to report the faculty member to the department chair. She also asked a professor if the department offered courses on the Black experience, she was referred to take classes

at another institution where such courses were available. After these unfortunate incidents, Chantal decided to change her major.

The situations presented in the classroom created an uncomfortable atmosphere for the women. The women appeared to be satisfied overall with their experiences at Ida B. Wells; however, the learning environment was less than satisfactory. This particular finding begins to address the reasons that some Black women may feel less engaged and satisfied with their experiences at women's colleges (Kinzie et al., 2007).

The comfortable, yet challenging social environment. Outside of the classroom, the women typically enjoyed their interactions with their peers; however, they still had to endure conversations about race-related topics within their residence halls, student organizations, dining halls, and other social environments. They found themselves defending the need for the Black national anthem and the annual Black alumnae event. They also had to confront their peers about offensive statements, events, and displays. Nina remembered assisting with an event that included publicity that was quite offensive to Black women. She had to talk with the organizer of the event about changing the publicity. Although the organizer did not understand the reasoning for creating new publicity, she accommodated Nina's request.

The Black women in this study found solace through their relationship with other Black women on campus. During her reflection on a recent gathering with Black women, Charlie felt camaraderie among the women. On that evening, Charlie said "We were talking and laughing and that type of thing, and there was very much a sense of love and the sense of community there, but I don't always get that feeling when the group is mixed." Red agreed that the Black women experienced this heightened sense of comfort

when they were together. She recognized that during her first year of college she was drawn to the Black women's organization because she knew she would find the support she needed from other Black women. Nina also acknowledged that she was comforted in the presence of other Black women, because they can relate to each other's experiences.

Unlike the classroom, most women found support through the diversity-related offices on campus and the Black women's organizations. The college has a diversity administrator who oversees the diversity initiatives for the college, including a diversity programming office. The diversity programming office offered services to support women from diverse backgrounds, but they also offered educational programs for the entire college community. In fact, the Black women's student organizations leadership reported to this programming office. Analise and Chantal were very familiar with the diversity administrator and the diversity programming office. Analise said that when she thinks of diversity on campus, she thinks of the diversity administrator and the impact she has made on the campus. Chantal's interest in social justice issues led her to be involved with diversity programming through this office.

Two Black women's organizations exist on campus, Ujamaa and the West Indian Cultural Organization. Ujamaa is open to all Black women on campus; however, the West Indian students are mainly members of the West Indian Cultural Organization. Hope and Alex served as officers in Ujamaa. Several of the women spoke about how these organizations allowed them to encourage each other. Alex mentioned that Ujamaa offered a positive and uplifting environment for her and other members. She recognized that such environment was needed for Black women attending a predominantly White institution. Through Ujamaa, Hope received the support she needed to pursue her career

goals. She noted that members of Ujamaa were open to discussing their career goals and received praise from peers who urged them to accomplish their goals. Ujamaa also sponsored an annual Black alumnae networking event which was a highlight for the Black women in this study. During this event, alumnae including the first Black woman to graduate from the college would interact with the Black students and share their experiences. The Black women found the women at this event to be inspiring. It was beneficial for them to witness successful Black alumnae who offered advice on how these women could be successful as well.

Charlie and Red did not necessarily find comfort in the student organizations. Charlie considered herself socially selective and developed relationships with women through other organizations and interests on campus. Although Red was initially a member of Ujamaa, she formed friendships with other Black women in her major.

Relating to non-Black women. Approximately 54% of the women in this study relied upon their high school experience to help them forge relationship with non-Black women on campus. Alex, Red, and Chantal attended very diverse high schools and were friends with women outside of their race. When they transitioned to Ida B. Wells, they were comfortable with interacting with women from various backgrounds on campus. Ms. attended a predominantly White high school and was intentional in connecting with Black women when she arrived on campus. Her goal was to have more Black friendships. Hope was enrolled in predominantly White institutions the majority of her life. From these educational experiences, she became aware of how to interact with other women. Analise was a graduate of a predominantly Black school. When she arrived at Ida B. Wells, she was surprised by the diversity on campus and had quite a learning

curve. Regardless of whether the women were familiar with women outside of their race, they were willing to learn about other people and listen to different perspectives.

Code switching was a coping mechanism for these women. Code switching is simply “customizing style of speech to the audience or group being addressed” (Urban Dictionary, 2011). The women learned to interact with women outside of their race by code switching. Nina said that when she is around other women “I feel like I put on a façade. Like I’m me, but I’m not me, I’m me-on-around other women. And I find that interesting, and I’m like, why do I do that?” Charlie described code switching as knowing who to be, when and where. She mentioned a situation in the dining hall where the Black women were seated together and enjoying a conversation. If they laughed too loudly, then they would receive stares from other women in the dining hall. However, she felt that White women did not receive that same reaction when they were loud in the dining hall. So, for Charlie, she thought that Black women had to learn how to behave differently in the company of their non-Black peers. Grace did not necessarily feel that she had to code switch in order to relate to her White peers. However, she acknowledged that her conversations with her White friends may be different from her conversations with her Black friends.

Black identity and career plans. Seventy-two percent of the participants believed their Black identities influenced their career plans, but it was not a determining factor in their career decision-making. Charlie, Chantal, Ms., and Hope specifically discussed wanting to work with the Black community. Chantal mentioned that her social consciousness developed at a very young age and that she always knew that she wanted to help Black people based on her experiences and knowledge of the treatment of Black

people. She became interested in helping other marginalized groups after learning more about their struggles. Charlie was aware of how marginalized groups were treated in the education system, and she felt a responsibility to respond and become an advocate. Hope had similar thoughts about the education system and also desired to become an advocate. She was interested in giving back to the Black community. Ms. learned a lot of Black history while attending college. She was amazed at how much she did not know and realized that other Black people did not possess this knowledge as well. She hoped to inform other Black people about Black history. While Red was committed to serving the Black community through her medical career, her Black identity was not the driving force behind her interest. She realized that through her study of cardiology, she could help her family and the Black community.

Ward and Bingham (2000) indicated that Black women often receive negative messages about careers they should not pursue because of their racial identity. The women in this study did not see their Black identity as a hindrance, but as an asset. Nina, Jamie, Hope, and Analise were motivated to pursue their career interests because of their Black identities. Jamie intentionally looked for career opportunities where not a lot of Black people were present. She believed that if she was the only Black or one of a few Blacks in a particular career, then she might have access to more money. Additionally, she would have the notoriety and fame that she preferred. Hope desired to contribute to the number of Blacks in a career field. She thought it was important for Black people to continually be represented in different fields. Nina indicated that it was important for her to be a successful Black woman and move beyond negative stereotypes about Black women. Initially, Analise was interested in pursuing a career field that did not have a lot

of Black women present. However, she was comforted in knowing that a lot of Black people held positions within the field of her current career interest.

Grace, Chloe, and Alex did not necessarily think that their Black identities influenced their career plans. Grace wanted to acquire money and access to resources in order to help all people regardless of their race. Chloe did not initially think that her career interest related to being a Black woman; however, during our conversation, she indicated that her work as a city planner could potentially address issues within the Black community. It was common for Alex to interact with Black lawyers, and she realized that a lot of Black women at the college were considering becoming lawyers. This, however, did not influence her interest in becoming a lawyer.

The lessons learned from their Black women role models proved to be beneficial to these women during their time at Ida B. Wells. Just like their role models had to deal with many misfortunes in life, the women had to deal with racial challenges within the academic environment that were frustrating and offensive. While the Black women were willing to learn about their peers' experiences, their peers doubted the likelihood of their stories being real. Neither their peers nor faculty provided the support in the classroom to address the discrimination these women felt. Through their social outlets, they found the support the needed in order to make it through their time at Ida B. Wells.

Theme Four: The Impact of Social Class

Each participant was asked to define her family's social class background. They were not prompted with a definition, but each was given the opportunity to define her social class as she saw it. The majority of the participants indicated their social class based on their family's income and used words like working class, lower-middle class,

middle class, and upper-middle class to note their social class status. Alex and Hope mentioned their financial status, but they also believed that social class should be based on who you are as a person and according to the person's commitment to give back to others. This definition was important to these women, because they lived a life of service and planned to continue serving others after graduation.

Working class and lower-middle class. Seventy-two percent of the women identified themselves as working class or lower-middle class, which is a common trend within higher education (Sax, 2008; Sax & Arms, 2008). Forty-five percent of them lived in single-parent household where the mother or female guardian was the head of the household. Chloe and Jamie had once lived with both of their parents and thought they were middle class until their parents divorced. They attributed the divorce to their becoming working class. Working class and lower-middle class typically meant that they had enough money to cover their needs with little money left for additional expenses. Chloe also encountered a lot of instability and had to move around a lot due to her mother's inability to maintain a job that would pay enough money for them to secure housing. To Jamie, working class was also an indication that she was not able to have every possession that she wanted or that she was not able to participate in some activities. Through one of her classes at Ida B. Wells, Analise learned that her family is working class. She was unaware of her social class, because she comes from a very homogenous environment where everyone had similar jobs, and they were willing to help each other. She eventually realized that everyone from her home community was working class.

Nina's family moved from upper-middle class to lower-middle class after they had to relocate from one state to another due to much destruction that took place in her

hometown. Her parents had worked hard to insure that Nina and her sibling would not have to grow-up in the projects. They were intentional in choosing their neighborhood and the schools that Nina would attend. After they relocated, they purchased a home but quickly lost it. Nina began to notice the shift in their finances, and that led her to believe that they were now lower-middle class.

Chantal was familiar with working class and middle-class lifestyles. Her mother's family represented the middle class, because they had professional occupations such as nurses and teachers. Her father's family had more blue-collar positions and was considered working-class. So, Chantal was aware of the affordances of the middle-class background and the struggles of a working-class background.

From their working-class and lower-middle class upbringings, certain values were significant for them. Nina and Chloe's family communicated the importance of hard work. Chloe and Analise learned the importance of higher education. Chloe's family wanted her to attend Ivy League institutions, while Analise's mother expected her to obtain at least a graduate degree. Chantal was taught to care for other people. Jamie's family emphasized the importance of spending time together, saving and being independent. Security and stability were of value to Grace.

Middle-class and upper-middle-class. Charlie, Ms., Red and Hope identified as either middle-class or upper-middle class. Charlie had the opportunity to witness her family move from working-class to upper-middle class. She remembers when her family's needs were not met, including the absence of running water, and now she is able to afford luxury items such as an iPad. She said that being upper-middle class has

allowed her family to save in order to plan for emergencies. From her experience, Charlie has a sense of gratitude that exudes in all aspects of her life.

Red and Hope were from single parent middle-class environments. Red's family was able to afford a home in the suburbs, and she does not remember a time when her needs were not met. Her family valued respecting others. Hope was reared by her hard-working mother, who not only provided resources for Hope, but also provided them for her extended family as well. Her middle-class upbringing taught her how to care for other people.

Ms.'s social status background was somewhat complicated. She initially said that her family is middle class. Her parents own their home. Her mother is a stay-at-home mother and her father works in the legal field. Ms.'s parents can afford for her father to travel between two homes in different locations. As a middle-class family, education is important; therefore, Ms. attended college. While Ms.'s parents' social class status has not changed, Ms. has acquired additional responsibilities that have led to her living as a lower middle-class woman at Ida B. Wells.

Social class and college experience. Since the majority of the women were from working-class or lower-middle class families, they had financial responsibilities that had an impact on their college experience. For many of them, their families could not assist them with their school expenses, which left them often worrying about how they were going to make it from day-to-day and year-to-year. Chloe described herself as the most privileged underprivileged person. She was fortunate to attend Ida B. Wells, but every year she was unsure if she would be able to return due to her financial situation.

Alex noted that the increase in tuition during her time at Ida B. Wells left her unsure about where she would obtain the extra money to complete her time in college.

Grace, Analise, Nina, Ms., Jamie, and Alex had to work in order to cover their additional expenses. Grace, Analise and Alex actually worked multiple jobs at a time. In fact, Analise remembered one year when all of her paychecks went to the accounting office to pay on her student account. These women had to learn how to balance their jobs and academic commitments, and they were exhausted from managing their many responsibilities. Alex, Nina, and Analise would have preferred not to work so they could devote more time to class assignments. Jamie and Alex also worked during the summer break in order to meet financial responsibilities. Jamie explained,

My sister and I, at least my older sister and I, um, we have really taken a lot of responsibility over things that pertain to us and things to do with our family, as far as like – like every summer, I work. And not necessarily because I want to, because if I – if it was completely up to me, I'd be traveling somewhere. But, um, because I know that over Christmas Break, I want a place to go home to...

Working to pay for school and to cover family expenses was an added pressure for Jamie.

Chloe, Ms. and Jamie revealed that their social class background also prohibited their involvement in some college activities and traditions. Unlike many of their peers, Chloe and Ms. were unable to individually purchase their class ring, which signified their connection to the college. Purchasing this ring was one of the college traditions. Ms. also desired to study abroad but was unable to due to her financial situation. Jamie talked about how a working class background might hinder her from being able to have a tutor or to take certain classes because of additional fees.

The women from working-class and lower-middle-class backgrounds were surprised to learn that their peers did not necessarily have the same experiences as them. Nina assumed that everyone at Ida B. Wells worked, but she quickly learned that some of her peers had the luxury of simply attending classes. She, along with Chloe, Analise, and Alex, were amazed that some of their peers could afford to attend college without either financial assistance or working. Analise was also shocked by her peers' expensive material possessions such as MacBooks and luxury cars.

The working-class and lower-middle-class women were more comfortable with their peers who had similar social class experiences. They were open with them about their struggles and served as support to each other. They found it difficult to relate to their roommates, hall mates and classmates who were middle-class and upper-middle class. Chloe spoke about a roommate whom she liked but found it hard to connect with her, because her roommate could not comprehend the issues she encountered as a woman from a working class family. Alex mentioned that it would have been difficult for her to have had wealthier friends who did not know what it meant to not have enough money to cover basic necessities. Alex's friends were typically in similar same situations as her, and they could rely on each other to get them through their financial situations.

When Charlie, Chantal and Red were asked about their experiences at Ida B. Wells given their social class status, they did not directly speak about themselves. Instead, they spoke of their peers' experiences and their reactions to their peers who were from different backgrounds. They gave little insight to the middle-class and upper-middle-class influence on their time in college.

Although the working-class and lower-middle-class women had a lot of financial responsibilities, they graduated from Ida B. Wells with minimal debt. As previously mentioned, the institution was generous in providing financial aid. Analise was the only participant who noted that she graduated with no student loan debt. She was grateful to her mother who also worked diligently to help Analise pay for her college expenses. Analise was impressed with her mother's ability to do this especially since she lived outside of the United States and the value of a dollar was much lower.

Social class and career plans. Only 36% of the women indicated that their social class status had an influence on their career interests and plans. These women were working-class or lower-middle class. They planned to avoid careers that would pay them little money. They wanted to make enough money to have disposable income. Chloe was initially motivated to pursue engineering because she knew it was a lucrative career, and she wanted to avoid being poor like her parents. Jamie believed that if she had come from an affluent family, then she could have followed her heart and traveled abroad and pursued photography after graduation. Instead, she is in search of careers that offer a lot of money, because she wants to have some financial stability. Ms.'s and Grace's parents were concerned about them pursuing careers that offer low pay. Ms.'s parents questioned her ability to obtain a good paying job, if she pursued a major within the humanities. Grace's mother does not want her to become a social worker due to the low salary.

For the working-class and lower-middle-class women, social class was significant to their experiences at Ida B. Wells. They were faced with financial challenges that

several of their peers did not have to encounter. They managed to endure their hardships and to make the best of their time at Ida B. Wells.

Composite Descriptions

The composite textual and structural descriptions highlight the collective experience of the Black women in this study. The textual descriptions speak to *what* the women experienced regarding their career development, while the structural descriptions address *how* the women experienced the career development process. Based on these descriptions, the essence of their experiences emerges.

Composite Textual Description

The women in this study began exploring their career interests as young children. They identified careers based upon parental guidance, interactions with professionals in specific careers, and through their involvements in different youth programs. Through career exploration, they recognized the importance of serving and advocating for other people, and that led to them selecting careers related to service and social justice. They realized that an advanced degree would enable them to accomplish their career goals and would also leverage their opportunity to make a greater difference in their communities, thereby, impacting the world.

While the academic environment at Ida B. Wells provided a space for the women to further explore their career interests, the women experienced several moments within their classes where they felt ostracized. From these moments, they learned how to handle adversities and how to support each other. They did not allow these experiences to overshadow the positive influences of Ida B. Wells. They remained proud of their Black identity and realized its impact on their career interests. As Black women, some of them

desired to represent their race in their given professions and they also planned to serve the Black community.

Social class status also had an effect on the women's experiences at Ida B. Wells. For the middle-class and upper-middle-class women, they recognized their social statuses afforded them a privilege that was not accessible for their peers. For lower-middle-class and working-class women, they had the additional responsibility of working while attending college. They did not necessarily want to work, but they needed to work in order to meet their financial commitments. They appreciated bonding with other women with similar situations. For some of these women, they wanted to avoid the struggles that they had experienced as lower-middle-class and working-class young women. They desired careers that would give them hope for ending their financial issues.

Composite Structural Description

Through the Ida B. Wells environment, the women gained the confidence they needed for personal growth and for pursuing their career interests. The women's confidence was shaped by their relationships with the faculty and staff and through their various experiences outside of the classroom. The faculty and staff offered compliments that indicated they recognized the women's potential and believed they could excel in college and in their future careers. The faculty and staff also modeled professionalism and gave the women hope in their abilities to exude such professionalism in their future careers.

The experiential opportunities in which the women were involved throughout college enabled them to apply knowledge learned from classes and to develop skills that

were applicable to their future careers. These experiences gave them the confidence they needed to move forward with pursuing their career goals.

These women were also supported by family members who encouraged their efforts to learn about different careers. Their family members exposed them to certain career ideas, and they also provided opportunities for the women to explore their interests through participation in camps and various youth programs. Some women also gravitated towards careers that different family members had pursued.

Essence of Their Experiences

These Black women's career development processes began in childhood and continued throughout their years at Ida B. Wells. During their formative years, they were introduced to various careers. Throughout their childhood and teenage years, they found some careers more appealing than others. During college, they began to narrow their interests and to gravitate towards specific careers. Ida B. Wells College offered an environment where these women flourished as they further developed into mature young women. The environment also offered them opportunities to explore their career interests and to develop a knowledge base and a skill set that made them confident in their abilities to pursue such careers. Family, faculty, staff, alumnae and peers provided the support system the women needed in order to feel reassured that they had chosen appropriate career paths.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to understand the career development experiences of Black women attending a predominantly White women's college in the South. From the interviews with 11 women, four themes emerged. These themes reflected the

influences of the environment, Black identity, and social class status on these women's career development. Theme one began with the women's initial thoughts about ideal careers and concluded with the women's post-graduation plans. Theme two highlighted the factors in the women's college environment that played a role in not only the women's career development, but in their overall development as young college women. Theme three illustrated how the women's Black identity presented challenges inside and outside of the classroom. Yet, the majority of these women found their Black identity important to their future career plans. Theme four addressed the women's social class status and its impact on their college experiences. Few women perceived their social class status as significant to their career choices. The findings within these themes provided insight into the unique experiences of Black women attending a women's college.

These themes will be further discussed in the following chapter. Connections will be made between the themes and the literature. Implications, recommendations for practice and future research will also be presented.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Women's colleges are known for their positive effect on women. From personal development to career development, these institutions have contributed significantly to the lives of women. Most recently, many women's colleges have increased their efforts to expand their student diversity (Langdon & Giovengo, 2003). Black women represent a large percentage of the diversity on these campuses yet minimal research exists about their experiences and the impact of the women's college environment on their career development. This qualitative study was designed to understand the career development experience of Black women attending a small, predominantly White liberal arts women's college in the South. The study focused on the influence of the college, racial identity and social class status on these women's career development. The study addressed the following research questions:

1. How does a same-gender college environment facilitate the career development of Black women who attend a women's college?
2. How does racial identity contribute to the career development of Black women who attend a women's college?
3. How does social class contribute to the career development of Black women who attend a women's college?

Eleven Black women graduating from Ida B. Wells College were selected to participate in the study. Through a series of observations and interviews, data were

collected about the women's experiences. Transcendental phenomenological data analysis methods were employed to analyze the data. From the data, four significant themes emerged: the process for choosing a career, the influence of the college environment, the challenge of being different, and the impact of social class.

In this chapter, the findings of this study will be discussed further in relation to the research on women's career development and the theoretical lenses that guided this study. Implications for practice and recommendations for future research will also be addressed. I previously acknowledged my higher education experiences, more specifically career services work, and my prior visits to Ida B. Wells. Although I gave individual attention to each participant's account of their time at Ida B. Wells, it was impossible for me to completely refrain from reflecting upon my knowledge of Black women's career development and women's colleges. Therefore, the chapter also includes my reflection on the study.

Discussion

The College Environment

A growing trend among women's colleges is the recruitment of students who represent a broad spectrum of diversity including racial, ethnic, social class status, lifestyle, and age (Langdon & Giovengo, 2003). Ida B. Wells is no different from her sister institutions. Black women represent a large number of the racial and ethnic diversity at Ida B. Wells. Approximately, one third of the student body is racially diverse and 27% of the students are Black women. From this study, it was apparent that these Black women also represent social class diversity as well. Seventy-two percent of these women were classified as working-class or lower-middle class. These women were

drawn to the college because they were offered financial aid packages that made college more affordable for them. This finding is consistent with research about women from low-income backgrounds being more likely to attend institutions that provide financial assistance (Sax, 2008; Sax & Arms, 2008). By offering these women a substantial financial package, Ida B. Wells was able to attract more diversity to its campus.

In this study, the women's college environment had a positive influence on the women, and that confirms previous research about women's colleges. The women attributed the environment as the source of their improvements in their self-esteem, confidence, intellectual development, social development and career development. Women's colleges are known to impact these aspects of women's development (Astin, 1993; Riordan, 1994; Smith, Wolf, & Morrison, 1995). The faculty and staff were significant contributors to this effect on the women. The faculty supported the women's academic and career interests, provided comfort during challenging times, and served as professional role models for the women. In her study of women college graduates and their career achievements, Tidball et al. (1999) asserted that the presence of women faculty and administrators influenced the women's career achievement. The Black women in this study acknowledged the women faculty and staff for helping them to refine their career interests, develop their career plans, and invest in their career plans. The Black women faculty and administrators served as role models for how to balance their Black identities and their professional identities. With these role models, the women believed they could be successful in their careers as well.

Tidball et al. (1999) also discovered that women's college graduates are more likely to be recognized for their career achievements. Although it is impossible to

determine whether the participants in this study will have notable career achievements, Ida B. Wells created an atmosphere that challenged the women to be successful and to make a difference in the world. This message was communicated through the mission statement, the college traditions, the academic curriculum, campus activities, and service commitments. The faculty, staff, and administrators' support also demonstrated to the women that they were more than capable of becoming positive contributing members of society.

In their research on the negative effects of the co-educational institutions on women, Hall and Sandler (1982) described these institutions as "chilly climates" due to the lack of support offered to women. Although they were referring to co-educational institutions, the "chilly climate" exists at women's colleges as well. For the Black women in this study, they experienced the "chilly climate" within the academic environment. In the classroom, the women's White peers discounted their experiences as Black women and the faculty failed to support the Black women during the heated conversations regarding racial issues. Such behaviors created an unwelcoming environment for the Black women to share their experiences and to discuss issues unique to the Black community. Despite these difficulties, the women still managed to have a great experience at Ida B. Wells.

The Effects of Career Choice

The women's career plans are reflective of the traditional career fields for women. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), most women work in education, health care, and social assistance. In essence, their careers involve caring for and assisting people. All of the women in this study planned to pursue such careers. It is inevitable

that these women would consider these careers given that their professional role models were in service careers, and that the women have contributed a lot of their time to serving others through their various campus and community involvements. This commonality among the women also questions whether the college also promotes service careers as well. Although the participants did not directly mention the college's influence on their interest in service careers, I learned through conversations with professionals who have worked at or graduated from the college that Ida B. Wells encourages a commitment to service. For these women, the college may have reinforced or confirmed their commitments to serving other people.

Service careers generally offer low salaries, which have contributed to the gap in the salaries between women and men. For Black women, they have often received salaries much lower than men's salaries and White women's salaries (National Committee on Pay Equity, 2010). In this study, Chantal, Alex, and Hope were aware that their career choices may lead to a low salary, but they are more dedicated to service work than receiving a higher salary. They realized that non-profit lawyers make less money than other lawyers, yet they still preferred to advocate for people. The women in this study did not allow their lower-middle class and working-class backgrounds to deter them from pursuing their career goals. While their career goals are commendable, the realization is that these women may fall into a category of women who continue to receive less pay than men, and more specifically, a group of Black women who continue to receive lower salaries.

Women's colleges are known for cultivating an environment that is conducive to women pursuing academic majors in science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

In this study, only two participants chose majors in science and mathematics, and nine women selected majors within the social sciences and humanities areas. The woman who pursued a science major felt supported by her academic department, while the woman, who was a mathematics major, desired to have had a supportive academic department. The science major mentioned that a large number of Black women were represented in the sciences; however, the sample for this study only consisted of one Black woman in the sciences. Regardless of the women's academic major, it is evident that they selected majors that supported their career interests, and that is common among college women (Kroc, 2011).

Another interesting aspect of the women's career plans was their plans to attend graduate or professional school. Each participant was making plans to obtain an advanced degree. After further investigation, I learned that it is not uncommon for the women at Ida B. Wells to aspire to attend graduate or professional school. According to their 2010 senior class survey, 49% of the seniors were planning to attend graduate or professional school, and 29% of the seniors had already been accepted into graduate or professional programs. The strong interest in graduate and professional programs leads me to conclude that the liberal arts education and the women's career interests facilitate the need for additional education.

Career Self-efficacy, Career Outcomes, and Influences

Social cognitive career theory (SCCT) served as a theoretical underpinning for this study. The theory postulates that an individual's career development process consists of the interaction of social cognitive variables, namely self-efficacy, outcome expectations, goals, personal attributes, and contextual and environmental factors. In this

study, the women's career self-efficacy and outcome expectations were the focus. Career self-efficacy was measured according to the women's confidence in their abilities to pursue their career interests. Outcome expectations were identified according to the participants' beliefs about the results of their career planning. The women indicated that they were confident that they would enter the career fields of their choice, and they expected to have successful careers. They believed that their steps towards accomplishing their career goals would lead to positive outcomes.

The contributing factors to the women's career self-efficacy and outcome expectations are categorized as performance accomplishments, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion and emotional arousal. Performance accomplishments refer to activities that enabled the women to become familiar with tasks associated with their career interests. Internships, practicums, campus leadership positions, jobs, and volunteer work provided the women with such insight. Vicarious experiences include the women's observations of others working in their desired career fields. The women's professional role models were family members, faculty, staff, administrators and alumnae. Their observations of these women made them confident in their abilities to enter into their chosen careers.

Verbal persuasion refers to the encouragement or lack of encouragement the women received about their abilities. In this case, the women received a lot of praise from family, their peers, supervisors, faculty, staff, and administrators. Emotional arousal focuses on the anxiety levels of the women. The women were excited about accomplishing their career goals and only perceived that money for graduate or professional school may be an obstacle. Regardless, they were optimistic about their

futures. It appears that all four sources – performance accomplishments, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion and emotional arousal – worked together to positively impact the career self-efficacy and the outcome expectations of these women.

The SCCT also asserts that contextual influences affect an individual's career development. Given the women's experience at Ida B. Wells, the environment was comprised of contextual affordances and distal influences that contributed to the development of the women's career interests and career plans. Contextual affordances such as access to internships, thought-provoking classes, service opportunities, supportive faculty and staff, and networking events with alumnae enabled the women to make career decisions and feel capable of implementing their career plans. Distal influences such as exposure to professional role models and compliments from faculty, and staff also motivated these women to pursue their goals. These contextual influences also extended beyond the Ida B. Wells' campus into the families and communities of these women. The women were appreciative of family, former teachers and counselors, and previous experiences that served as resources during their periods of career exploration and preparation.

Black Identity and Career Development

According to the SCCT, race identity should be considered when examining the career development process. The Multidimensional Model of Race Identity (MMRI) theory was used to complement SCCT, specifically the ideology component of MMRI was applied to this study. Ideology refers to the beliefs, opinions, and attitudes that influence an individual's perception of how members of their racial group behave. The women spoke specifically about the negative and positive perceptions about Black

women. Using descriptors such as strong, hardworking and caring, these women revealed the personality and the work ethic of familiar Black women. The women asserted that Black women had to exceed expectations in order to prove themselves. These beliefs, opinions, and attitudes about Black women were communicated to these women at a young age, and they remained with them throughout their college years.

Within the ideology component are four philosophies – nationalist, oppressed minority, assimilationist, and humanist. In this study, the nationalist and oppressed minority philosophies had an effect on the women's self-efficacy, outcome expectations and career interests. These effects are similar to the results of a previous study examining the relationship between racial identity and career development (Byars-Winston, 2006); however, the Black students in that study aligned with the national and assimilationist philosophies.

From the nationalist perspective, the individual recognizes the significance of her African ancestry. Over 60% of the women in this study found their Black identities to be important to their career interests and plans. They feel a connection to the Black community and want to inspire other members of the community. On a larger scale, they planned to position themselves so that they could develop and implement policies that would address issues plaguing the Black community. They also realized that their presence in their chosen career fields would increase the representation and improve the reputation of Black people in that particular field. With this mindset, these women were confident that their Black identities would have a positive effect on their career plans and the individuals they would serve.

Charlie and Chantal's desire to help marginalized groups in general is reflective of the oppressed minority philosophy. As their knowledge about different groups expanded, they acknowledged the similarities among the groups and aspired to advocate on behalf of all groups. They were confident that they could make a difference in the lives of all oppressed groups.

Social Class Status and Implications on Career Plans

The women from working-class and lower-middle-class backgrounds expressed an impact of their social class status. Their status dictated their lifestyles and financial obligations while at Ida B. Wells. As specified within the Social Class Worldview Model (SCWM), the women possessed a worldview and meaning of social class status unlike their peers who were from middle-class and upper-middle-class backgrounds. These women easily discussed their beliefs and attitudes towards their social class status and the influences on their status including family and environment. They perceived materialism as providing a unique distinction between them and their peers. Their peers from more affluent backgrounds had more materialistic possessions than these women. While these possessions were attractive, they were not the motivation for these women to consider lifestyles or careers that would elevate them to a different social class status.

Social class status was most significant for Chloe and Jamie's career plans. Their living conditions were instrumental in prompting their desires to have more stability and more money. The other women in this study, specifically those from working-class and lower-middle-class backgrounds did not perceive their social class status as a factor in developing their career interests or career plans. These women were more focused on

pursuing a rewarding career. Perhaps, these women were content with their current lifestyles and avoided allowing their social classes to determine their future successes.

Limitations

This study draws attention to a small private liberal arts women's college, which is not representative of all women's colleges. Other types of women's colleges may provide a distinct environment, therefore, influencing the career development process of its students in a different way. The reader of the study must determine whether the findings are applicable and transferable to another institution.

Class year does not necessarily dictate a college student's stage of career development. College students represent varying levels of the career development process. This study specifically focused on graduating seniors and their processes for establishing their interests and career choices. It is quite possible that first year students, sophomores and juniors have confirmed their interests and career choices as well; however, their experiences do not equate to amount of time that graduating seniors would have spent at a women's college. Graduating seniors generally have been in college for three to four years or longer and will be able to reflect upon their career development experiences over an extended period. The researcher recognizes that only identifying graduating seniors for this study is a limitation.

The literature and research on SCCT indicates the need for research applying this model to women of color. This study addressed this need by exploring the experiences of Black college women at women's colleges. Therefore, the experiences presented in this study only speak to the experiences of a small sample of Black women.

Implications

From this study, several implications for higher education professionals and settings were derived. These implications provide insight regarding variables that facilitate the career development of college students, specifically black women. They also bring attention to environmental conditions that contribute to the overall development of college students.

Throughout their upbringing to their final days in college, the women's parents and guardians were salient to their career development. Their parents and guardians introduced them to careers at an early age, modeled successful and unsuccessful career paths, and offered guidance and affirmed their career decisions. The parents and guardians served as contextual influences that shaped the career self-efficacy of the women (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2002). The women appeared more confident if they had positive interactions with their parents and guardians. These influences demonstrate the need to explore students' relationships with parents and guardians when assisting them with their career development processes. These influences may positively or negatively inform a student's career decision making.

When referring to parents and guardians, the women often spoke specifically about the women who reared them and their influences on their lives. For these women, their mothers and female guardians defined the essence of Black womanhood and modeled for them how to conduct themselves as Black women. They also set the expectations for their career development including encouraging the women to attend college and to consider advanced degrees. These mothers and female guardians were also contextual influences for these women (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2002). This

emphasis on the women in their family illustrates the effectiveness of Black college women having positive role models in their family.

Experiential learning opportunities were important to the career development of the Black women in this study. From internships to service work, these students developed their confidence in pursuing their career interests. Their confidence increased the more they were exposed to tasks that aligned with their career interests. These experiential opportunities confirmed performance activities contribute to individuals' career self-efficacy (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2002). These students' experiences prove the need for students to engage in activities outside of the classroom where they can develop and apply knowledge and skills. Higher education institutions should offer such opportunities in order for their students to become successful graduates. By offering these opportunities, the institution demonstrates their commitment to the overall development of students.

Black women have a history of pursuing service-oriented careers (Hesse-Biber & Carter, 2000). This history begins with the domestic and service jobs that Black women occupied during Reconstruction in this country. This was during a time when these were the only type of jobs available to them. This study revealed Black women still have a strong desire to pursue careers in professions where they can serve others. This may be tied to the cultural emphasis of service and giving back. While there is nothing wrong with these women's desires to seek careers in service-related professions, it is important for them and other women with the same interests to understand they can engage in service opportunities and give back to the community in all types of careers. Even

corporations are bringing attention to their commitments to social responsibility as a way to encourage others to consider opportunities with corporations.

Faculty, staff, and administrator relationships are significant for college students. At women's colleges these relationships are especially important because they also influence the career development of the students (Tidball et al.,1999). The small college environment makes it easier for students to forge relationships with them. Students can easily access these higher education professionals, and they look to them for guidance and encouragement. These relationships were essential to the overall development of college students in this study. The professionals' belief in and commitment to helping students maximize their potential made the students feel confident and connected to the university community. Regardless of the size of the college campus, it is clear that higher education professionals need to develop relationships with students in order to provide a more rewarding experience for college students.

After reviewing the findings from this study, it became clear that not only was SCCT suitable for this study but also career construction theory. Career construction theory aligns with the epistemology and theoretical paradigm for this study. This particular theory perceives career development from constructivist and social constructivist lenses. It affirms the subjective nature of career and the individuals' ability to define her meaning of career through her vocational behaviors and occupational experiences (Savickas, 2005). Career construction theory consists of three components vocational personality, career adaptability, and life themes which address the what, how, and why of vocational behavior respectively. Vocational personality relates to an individual's abilities, needs, values and interests. Career adaptability focuses on their

attitudes, competencies, and behaviors. Life themes refer to an individual's ability to share his or her career story. The goal of career construction theory is to identify patterns across the stories that will foster an understanding of the individual's career interests. These three components must be examined together in order to fully comprehend the career development of an individual.

Considering the premise and the components of the career construction theory, these areas were reflected in the current study. The women's vocational personality revealed that their interests and values related to service and social justice work. Their career adaptabilities spoke to their confidence and their outcome expectations. The qualitative nature of this study presented an opportunity for the women to share their career stories and for me to consider the life themes that contributed to their career development. The career construction theory offers more flexibility for individuals to define her career and for career practitioners to develop a more comprehensive understanding of an individuals' career decision-making. Given the nature of this theory, it should be considered in career counseling and for future qualitative research focusing on the career development of students.

Recommendations for Practice

The "chilly climate" existed in the classroom for the Black women at Ida B. Wells (Hall & Sandler, 1982). To address this issue, it is necessary for faculty to become multiculturally competent in order to reach all students in their classrooms. Faculty should be required to participate in diversity sensitivity training. Through training, they would learn about the various forms of diversity and how to embrace diversity within the classroom. Such training would make faculty feel more equipped to initiate and facilitate

conversations in their classes involving diversity issues. Additionally, resources addressing multicultural competency should be made available to faculty. Resources may include a list of helpful websites and campus contacts that can assist faculty in creating a classroom environment that is respectful and accepting of all forms of diversity. Several universities, including The University of Georgia, offer a diversity resource website for faculty. These websites serve as good examples for other universities to follow.

This study confirms the need for formal and informal support systems for underrepresented students at women's colleges. Formal and informal support systems can address the women's dissatisfaction with aspects of the environment and lead to more engagement within the campus community (Kinzie et al., 2007). Student affairs offices such as multicultural services and programs have often provided underrepresented students with the academic and emotional support needed. It is important that students are aware of these offices and other resources that can help them during their college years.

As more students from working-class and lower-middle-class families arrive on college campuses, higher educational professionals must acknowledge these students' lifestyles, values and the challenges that they face with managing their financial responsibilities and academic commitments (Langdon & Giovengo, 2003; Sax, 2008). Professionals should be cognizant of programs, events, and traditions that may cause financial hardships for students and offer financial assistance as needed. Professionals should also offer a listening ear as well as offer strategies for helping students establish balance in their lives. Since the women in this study discussed the difficulties in

connecting with someone from a different social class status, it would be helpful for faculty and staff to better understand issues associated with class and privilege and also teach students how to engage in meaningful dialogue with peers from different backgrounds. Dialogue could lead to students becoming more comfortable with their social class status.

Recommendations for Future Research

Tidball et al. (1999) documented the career successes of women's college graduates. While this study focused on the development of Black women's career interests and plans, it would be beneficial to further investigate the career accomplishments of these women. A study of this nature may reveal if the career self-efficacy and outcome expectations of these women actually led to them fulfilling their career plans.

Several types of women's colleges exist (Harwarth et al., 1997). In this study, Black women's experiences at a predominantly White small liberal arts women's college were explored. Future studies may address the experiences of Black women at different types of women's colleges including public, religious affiliated and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Of particular interest may be the experiences of women at HBCUs especially given that two of the Black women in this study were considering an HBCU women's college. Additionally, HBCUs have a reputation for creating positive experiences for their students.

During my career services experiences over the past seven years, I have witnessed an increase in parental involvement in the career planning of college students. Parents represent their college students at career fairs and call employers to negotiate job

opportunities on behalf of their students. While these are merely observations that my colleagues and I have made of this generation of college students, this study on Black women's career development revealed that parental involvement is significant to this process. Given this finding, parental involvement in college students' career development deserves further exploration. Further investigation may explore whether differences exist among gender, race, ethnicity, and social class status with regard to parental involvement.

This study adds to the research on college students and social class status. More specifically, the challenges experienced by Black women from working-class and lower-middle-class backgrounds were highlighted. The nature of their experiences indicates that additional research on college students from low-income backgrounds should be conducted. Such research will assist higher education professionals with better understanding and supporting these students.

My Reflection

During the data collection and analysis processes, I had several reactions to my participants' experiences. My reactions were based on the fact that these women's time in college resembled my college experience and my sister's experience. When my sister and I attended college, we came from a single parent household headed by our mother. We attended private liberal arts colleges that were unaffordable for us unless we received financial assistance. As previously mentioned, my sister attended Ida B. Wells and I attended a small college in the northeast. Similar to the women in this study, I remember and still perceive my mother as a strong influential role model. She was very supportive of my time in college and made sure that I had an enjoyable experience by assisting me in

every way imaginable. Her nurture, care, and strength were very reminiscent of the women that the participants described. From listening to my participants and reviewing their interview transcripts, I realized that the Black women in their lives whether they were their mother, aunts, cousins, or friends were very support prior to the women enrolling in Ida B. Wells. This support helped them to become the women that they are today, and it gave them the courage to attend college and become successful women. Ultimately, these relationships pointed to the power of young Black women having positive Black women in their lives.

During my initial conversations with the women about their reasons for attending Ida B. Wells, I was surprised by the comments of women who talked about the financial assistance that they received. After more reflection, I realized that since the majority of the women were from a low-income background, then it should not be surprising that they would attend an institution that would basically offer them a full ride to college. I recalled being in their shoes and receiving a financial package that sealed my fate to attend college. It is exciting to receive a letter that indicates that you will receive more money than you actually have. However, like these women, I was unaware of the struggles that I would still have to endure once I arrived on campus. These women were blindsided by the money and did not realize that their social class status would remain the same even if they received financial aid. They would still have to work hard to make ends meet, not only individually, but for their families as a whole. While I applaud the institution for seeking to diversify the student body by paying for their tuition, room and board, institutions must also realize the additional financial burdens that come along with attending a high priced institution.

I expected more women to talk about attending other women's colleges or at least Coleman College. I remember when I first met Grace, she asked me if I was also interviewing women at Coleman. She was not the first person to ask me this question. I had colleagues who made the same inquiry. When my sister went to college, she was always asked why she did not attend Coleman as if there was an expectation that Black women attending a women's college should quite naturally attend Coleman. Only two women in this study seriously considered Coleman. I believe the other women in this study were not initially seeking to attend a women's college, and therefore, did not give thought to attending Coleman.

As a Career Services professional, I have encountered students pursuing liberal arts majors who were unsure about their career plans. In fact, there is a common myth that liberal arts majors lead to no jobs. The women in this study debunked this myth in that they chose liberal arts majors and had clear plans for their next steps. I believe their experiences inside and outside of the classroom provided guidance and confirmation about their career goals. Additionally, from my experience in working with the current generation of college students, my colleagues and I have noticed that students are interested in serving others and they desire to work for companies that offer service opportunities. These women's interests are similar to those of their peers'; however, they actually wanted to pursue service careers. Their interests extended beyond just working for a corporation or organization that offered service projects or rewarded employees for volunteering. Their desire to help others was reflected in their career choices.

Each woman had a unique perspective to offer on her time at Ida B. Wells. Their stories provided great insight, yet they also resonated with aspects of my college experience as well as my professional experience.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to understand the career development process of Black women at a small private liberal arts women's college in the South. More specifically, the study explored the influences of the college environment, racial identity, and social class status on their career development. The 11 women in this study gave personal accounts of their experiences, which delineated the factors that contributed to the development of their career interests and career plans. The college environment and racial identity had a positive influence on the women's career development, while their social class status had a minimal effect.

The focus of this study was the career development process of Black women at a women's college, yet, this study also revealed intriguing aspects of these women's journeys at the college. The women were impressed with the college and found it to offer opportunities and resources that led to personal and professional growth. They also encountered some difficult moments, but they were able to overcome these situations through their support systems.

The findings from this study offer a new perspective on the experience of Black college women, specifically women attending a women's college. They offer higher education professionals insight on conditions that appear beneficial to Black college women and their career development. The findings also outline aspects of the college environment that can be detrimental to the Black college women's experiences. Higher

education professionals should consider using this insight when thinking about conditions that will enable Black college women to be successful.

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Appendix A Recruitment Letter

April 2011

Dear Ida B. Wells' women:

I am a graduate student under the direction of Dr. Richard Mullendore in the Department of Counseling and Human Services at The University of Georgia. I invite you to participate in a research study entitled "Creating a Space for the Unknown: The Career Development Process of Black Women Attending a Southern Predominantly White Women's College." The purpose of this study is to understand the career development process of Black women who attend a predominantly white women's college.

I am seeking Black women from Ida B. Wells College who are juniors, seniors or recent alumni (up to six months or one year). Your participation will involve 1) participating in pre-screen interview to determine if you meet the participant requirements (10 minutes); 2) reviewing and completing a consent form and a participant information form; 3) participating in an interview which will be audio-recorded (60-90 minutes); 4) allowing me to observe your participation in classes, programs, and campus involvement (1 hour). Following the interview, you will be contacted in order to receive clarification of your responses and for you to review the transcript from the interview (10 -30 minutes). Your total participation in the study should only take about 3- 3.5 hours. You will receive a \$25 gift card for your participation.

Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. No individually-identifiable information about you, or provided by you during the research including the name of the institution where you attended college, will be shared with others without your written permission. You will select a pseudonym which will be used to maintain confidentiality during this study. The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used. In fact, the published results will be presented in summary form only. Your identity will not be associated with your responses in any published format.

This study seeks to expand the research on Black women's experiences in a women's college environment while developing an understanding of how a small sample of women develop their career interests and career choices. As a participant, you will have the opportunity to discuss your career interests and career choices and your potential post-graduation plans. While no risks are anticipated, it is possible that you may experience some discomfort. If you experience discomfort, you may choose to skip any question

that you do not wish to answer or you may discontinue your participation in the study. Additionally, I will provide you with assistance in identifying the appropriate resources needed to address your discomfort.

If you are interested in participating in this study or if you have questions about this research project, please contact Marian Higgins at [REDACTED] or send an e-mail to [REDACTED]. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to The Chairperson, University of Georgia Institutional Review Board, 629 Boyd GSRC, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; telephone (706) 542-3199; email address irb@uga.edu.

Thank you for your consideration!

Sincerely,

Marian Higgins

**Appendix B
Recruitment Flyer**

**Seeking Black Women from Ida B. Wells
College!**

**Must be a junior, senior or a recent alumna who graduated within
the last six months to a year!**



Participate in a study conducted by a University of Georgia (UGA) graduate student on the career development experience of Black women at a women's college.

**Receive a \$25 gift card for your
participation!**

Participants will:

- Be pre-screened to determine eligibility
- Participate in 60-90 minute interview
- Allow the researcher to observe them in classes, programs or campus involvement
- Review their interview transcripts

If you are interested in participating in this study, contact Marian Higgins at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED].

This study has been approved by the University of Georgia Institutional Review Board and the Ida B. Wells College Institutional Review Board.

Appendix C **Screening Questionnaire**

Hello, my name is Marian Higgins and I am conducting a research study under the direction of Dr. Richard Mullendore, in the Department of Counseling & Human Services at the University of Georgia. The purpose of this study is to understand the career development process of Black women who attend a Southern predominantly white women's college. This study will expand the research on Black women's experiences at women's colleges while developing an understanding of how these women develop their career interests and career choices.

I appreciate you responding to my e-mail indicating the need for participants for this study. I would like to ask you some questions to determine if you might qualify for this study. This should only take 10 minutes of your time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. You may stop this interview at any time. If you qualify for this study, you will be asked to

- Review and complete a consent form and a participant information form;
- Participate in a 60-90 minute interview which will be audio-recorded and;
- Allow me to observe your participation in classes, programs, and campus involvement;
- Review the transcript and the identified themes from your interview.

Your participation in the study should only take about 3- 3.5 hours. Upon your completion of reviewing your transcript, you will receive a \$25 gift card for your participation in the study.

If you do not qualify for this study, the information you give me today will be stored at my home and destroyed at the conclusion of the study. Do I have your permission to proceed?

Name: _____

1. Are you currently enrolled at Ida B. Wells or did you recently graduate from Ida B. Wells (up to 6 months to a year ago)?

2. What is/was your major (s)?

3. Do you identify as Black?

4. Do you identify as a woman?
5. Are you willing to participate in a 60-90 minute in-depth interview where you will discuss your career development process since your enrollment at Ida B. Wells?
6. Are you willing to allow me to observe your participation in classes, programs and campus involvement?
7. After participating in the interview, are you willing to review your interview transcript and identified themes from your interview?

Thank you for answering my question(s) today. You do/do not qualify to participate in this research study. [If qualified to participate] I would like to arrange a convenient place/time to meet to discuss the study and obtain your consent to participate. Are you interested in participating in this study?

If you have any questions regarding this study, please call me at [REDACTED] or e-mail me at [REDACTED].

If you have any questions or problems about your rights as a research participant, please call The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia at 706-542-3199.

Appendix D

Interview Protocol

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. The purpose of this study is to understand the career development process of Black women who attend a predominantly white women's college in the south. This study will expand the research on Black women's experiences in a women's college environment while developing an understanding of how a small sample of women develop their career interests and career choices.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You can refuse to participate or stop taking part at anytime without giving any reason, and without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You can ask to have all of the information about you returned to you, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

As a participant in this study, I will ask you to:

- Review and complete a consent form and a participant information form;
- Participate in a 60-90 minute interview which will be audio-recorded;
- Allow me to observe your participation in classes, programs, and campus involvement; and
- Review the transcript and the identified themes from your interview.

Your participation in the study should only take about 3- 3.5 hours. Upon your completion of reviewing your transcript, you will receive a \$25 gift card for your participation in the study.

(Provide the participant with a copy of the consent form and participation form.)

Let's begin the interview. I will ask you some questions regarding your career development experience as a Black woman at a women's college. I am interested in learning about how you developed your career interests and career goals. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. You may stop this interview at any time.

Interview Questions

Part I

Consider your own life's journey. Recall the first moment you had a thought about a chosen career. Using this sheet of paper, create a visual representation of how you developed your career interests and your career goals. You may use symbols and colors to reflect different aspects of your experience.

Be sure to include any experiences that enhanced your desire to pursue a chosen career or any changes in your thinking or career interests. Please note which factors or experiences may have fostered those changes. I am interested in your life path relative to career development and socialization about a future career.

(After the participant creates the visual representation, I will ask her to explain it and will ask some follow-up questions including the questions listed in Part II.)

Part II

- How confident are you in your ability to pursue your current career interests and career goals?
- Which factors have contributed to your confidence (or lack of)? (Probes – what experiences have prepared you to pursue your career interests and career goals?; What role models do you have in the field? What types of messages have been communicated to you?)
- What steps are you taking or have you taken to pursue your current career interests and career goals?
- What do you expect to be the outcome(s) of your pursuit of your current career interests and career goals?

Part III

- This study focuses specifically on Black women and their development of career interests and career goals while attending a predominantly white women's college in the southeast. You indicated that you identify as a Black woman. What does it mean to be a Black woman at Ida B. Wells College? (Probes – What beliefs, attitudes, opinions do you possess about being a Black woman? What factors contribute to your perception? How important is being Black to you? How do you relate to other women on campus?)
- Has your Black identity influenced your career interests and career goals? Please explain your response.
- How would you define your family's social class status? (Probes-What is important to your well-being and status in society? How do you feel about your social class status? How does your environment play a role in social class status?)
- Describe your experience as a woman (insert participant's social class status description) at Ida B. Wells College.
- Has your family's social class status influenced your career interests and career goals? Please explain your response.
- In general, how has your experience at Ida B. Wells affected your career development?

Is there anything else you would like to share about your career development experience as a Black woman attending a predominately white women's college in the south?

Appendix E

Consent Form

I, _____, agree to participate in a research study titled “Creating a Space for the Unknown: The Career Development Process of Black Women Attending a Southern Predominantly White Women's College” conducted by Marian Higgins from the Department of Counseling and Human Development Services at the University of Georgia (██████████) under the direction of Dr. Richard Mullendore, Department of Counseling and Human Services, University of Georgia (██████████). I understand that my participation is voluntary. I can refuse to participate or stop taking part at anytime without giving any reason, and without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I can ask to have all of the information about me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The reason for this study is to understand the career development process of Black women who attend a Southern predominantly White women’s college.

If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to do the following things:

- 1) Participate in a 60-90 minute in-depth face-to-face or telephone interview which will be audio-recorded;
- 2) Complete a participant information form;
- 3) Allow the researcher to observe my participation in classes, programs, and campus involvement (1 hour); and
- 4) Review the interview transcript and the themes identified from the interview (10-30 minutes)

The benefits for me include the opportunity to discuss my career development process and my potential post-graduation plans. By sharing my experience, I may feel confident or reassured that I am accomplishing my career goals. I may also feel compelled to identify additional resources or opportunities that will help me in the process. My contributions will also help to expand the research on Black women’s experiences at women’s colleges while developing an understanding of how these women develop their career interests and career choices.

I understand that I will receive a \$25 gift card for my participation in this study. I will receive the gift card after I have reviewed my transcript. I understand that in order to receive this gift card I will have to complete the participation voucher which will require me to provide my name, signature, and choice of gift card.

No risk is expected but I may experience some discomfort when reflecting upon my career development experience. If this occurs, the researcher will provide me with

assistance in identifying the appropriate resources needed to address my discomfort. I also recognize that I may refuse to answer an interview question or withdraw from the study at any time.

No individually-identifiable information about me, or provided by me during the research including the name of the institution, will be shared with others without my written permission unless required by law. I will select a pseudonym which will be used to maintain confidentiality during this study. The pseudonym will be used during the audio-recording of the interview and on the transcripts. Only the researcher, her committee members (Dr. Richard Mullendore, Dr. Diane Cooper, Dr. Rosemary Phelps, and Dr. Tera Hurt) and a transcriptionist will have access to the interview recorded files and the transcripts I have provided. The interview files will be stored on a password-protected server and in a locked file cabinet. I understand that the results of this study may be published in a professional journal or presented at a professional conference, however, no individually-identifiable information about me or provided by me during the research will be disclosed. I understand my individually-identifiable information will be destroyed within six months of the completion of the study.

The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached by telephone at [REDACTED].

My signature below indicates that the researcher has answered all of my questions to my satisfaction and that I consent to volunteer for this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

_____	_____	_____
Name of Researcher	Signature	Date
Telephone: _____		
Email: _____		
_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Signature	Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 629 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu