Who Can I Trust? A Case Study of Black Scholarship Students' Experiences of Relationships on a Predominantly White Campus Through the Lenses of Critical Race Theory and Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth Model

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Cultural Wealth Model

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Abstract

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<u>Who Can I Trust? A Case Study of Black Scholarship Students' Lived Experiences of Relationships on a Predominantly White Campus Through the Lenses of Critical Race Theory and Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth Model</u>

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The purpose of the study is to explore the role relationships play in the lived experiences of students who self-identified as Black or African American and were current or former recipients of a multicultural academic scholarship as they pursued their degree on a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) campus in the Midwest. By examining the lived experiences of students who self-identified as Black or African American, the study sought to understand the role relationships played as they pursued their degrees. Critical Race Theory was used as the macro theory to elevate the marginalized voices and Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth model was the micro theory to uncover the role relationships played in their collegiate experience as they pursued their degree. The study employed a homogeneous sampling to select 9 participants who self-identified as Black or African American and were current or former students in a multicultural academic scholarship program with a cohort.

Dedication

To my parents, Ora and Harold Mundy, who believed in the value of education but did not have the opportunity to go as far as I did, this dissertation is dedicated to you. It is also dedicated to my family, especially my loving husband and adult children.

Acknowledgments

Chapter One: A Problem of Practice

Problem of Practice

Black students continue to enroll in predominantly White institutions (PWIs), with a record number failing to attain degrees. The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2017) reported that Black students had the lowest six-year completion rate (38.0%) among all the students who started in four-year public institutions. Asian and white students had the highest completion rates (63.2% and 62.0%, respectively), followed by Hispanic with 45.8%. Even in Indiana, Black students held the bottom seat. The Indiana Commission for Higher Education (2022) reported that the full-time Black student on-time completion rate was 23.1%, with a six-year completion rate of 42.1%. We must do better. Most research addressed the academic achievement gap by examining processes, procedures, and academic preparedness, with only a dearth of literature related to relationships. This qualitative design sought to explore the role relationships played in the collegiate experience of Black students as they pursued their degree attainment. It also broadens existing research by extending the knowledge of the lived experiences of Black college students.

Background

Businesses and parents/guardians expect higher education to educate students with the skillsets they need to enter the workforce and be productive employees. Evidence indicated that the workforce must possess advanced skills; Johns (2018) found that universities and colleges typically provide these skills. Black students who started college as first-time, full-time, and first-year students faced unique challenges throughout their collegiate lived experiences as they navigated through the systems at PWIs. Only about 4 in 10 (41%) Black students who started college as first-time, full-time first-year students earned bachelor's degrees from those institutions within six years – a rate 22% below that of their White peers (Nichols & Evans-Bell, 2017). The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2023) reported

an increase in graduation rates for White (1.1%), Black (1.9%), Asian (.3%), other (1.0%) and Latinx (1.2%) students, with the most significant jump for Black students. However, even with the most significant increase, Black students continued to occupy the bottom seat, a 29.4% difference from Asian students, who hold the number one seat nationally with a 73.7% completion rate. National completion rates for Black females and males were 49.0% and 38.8%, respectively. The National Student Clearinghouse Center (2023) expanded to capture eight-year completion rates. Whether I examined six- or eight-year completion rates, Indiana must do better. The Indiana Commission for Higher Education (2022) reported that Black students remained at the bottom after a 6-year completion rate of 42.1%. The 6-year completion rate for Hispanic/Latino students was 62.4%. Institutions have implemented initiatives to increase the graduation rates of Black students, but their success at persistence consistently lags behind other ethnic groups in advancing from college to the workplace. Carnevale and Strohl (2013) observed that high-scoring African Americans were less likely to graduate with a bachelor's degree than high-scoring White students. Although laws have been passed throughout history to close the gap, the recurrent struggle for racial equity is surprising (Harper et al., 2009).

Previous studies revealed that academic advising, academic preparedness, campus climate, campus interventions, grit, and microaggressions all played a role in persistence, success, and graduation attainment (Museus & Ravello, 2021; D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Cabrera et al., 2013). Duckworth and Gross (2014) define "grit" as the tenacious pursuit of a dominant superordinate goal despite setbacks, but Buzzetto-Hollywood et al. (2019) say the term has become too commonplace. Microaggressions are a form of everyday discrimination that describes innocuous and explicit discriminatory communications to persons from racially and socioeconomically marginalized groups (Pierce et al., 1977). Microaggressions subtlety demean and invalidate a person's identity, experiences, and historical background and are conveyed in derogatory verbal, behavioral, and environmental

undertones (Capodilupo & Holder, 2008; Sue et al., 2007, as cited by Ellis et al., 2019). There are distinct types of microaggressions, and their power can affect relationships and impact a person's feeling of belonging to a community. Sue et al. (2007) stated that racial microaggressions were potentially present whenever human interactions involved participants who differed in race and culture.

Decisions are made daily on university campuses. These decisions impact community members' ability to succeed and feel a sense of belonging. Community members can be anyone associated with the university, which includes students and employees. To meet the needs of the future, universities and colleges must create a climate conducive to elevating all students' educational experiences. Institutions are unique in having the substantial capacity for advancing knowledge and fostering learning (Scott, 2020). Black students struggle to graduate; it is crucial to understand the role relationships play in their academic success.

I selected this public university for research because it prides itself on being a friendly campus community where all students are valued. Inclusive and diverse communities are one of their core values. They have four colleges offering over 130 areas of study, with an average class size of 20. The Indiana Commission for Higher Education (2023) reported this institution's enrollment was over 9000 students, with 90.8% representing White, Asian, and other, 4.4% Hispanic/Latino and 4.8% Black. They have over 130 registered student organizations. These organizations contribute to developing leadership skills, creating a vibrant campus culture, enhancing the student's quality of life and student experience.

The university also had a Multicultural Center where students could participate in various opportunities to help create a sense of belonging while building community. The Center sponsored programs, provided services, and advised student groups, such as the Black Student Union. Some of the initiatives included a mentoring program for Black and Brown male students, a mentoring program for

Black and Brown female students, and a multicultural scholarship program. This scholarship program

provided comprehensive support to those first time, full-time, first-year students who were selected.

Theoretical Framework

This phenomenological case study used Critical Race Theory and Yosso's Community Cultural

Wealth model as the framework. Critical Race Theory served as the macro theory and Yosso's

Community Cultural Wealth model seared as the micro theory. This study design was selected to gain in-

depth knowledge about the role relationships played in the collegiate experience of Black students in

degree attainment. Creswell and Creswell (2018) defined phenomenological case studies as a design of

inquiry where the researcher develops an in-depth analysis of a program, event, activity, process, or one

or more individuals. Harper et al. (2016) used Critical Race Theory (CRT) to analyze structural problems

that undermine persistence and degree completion, a sense of belonging, and Black students' academic

achievement. CRT seeks to transform the relationship between race, racism, and power (Delgado &

Stefancic, 2017). I used the lens of CRT to help elevate marginalized voices. CRT's "voice" component

provided a way to communicate the experience and realities (Ladson-Billings, 1999, p. 16). For years, the

dominant culture has told Black people's narratives. Today Black students must reveal their lived

experiences of Black students. Using their "voice" added authenticity and validity to their "truths."

Ladson-Billings (1999) says that authentic voices of people of color are necessary for us to say or know

anything useful.

Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth model served as the micro theory. Esterberg (2002), as cited

by Lee (2016), determined that macro theories act as the overarching viewpoint or "lens" through which

the researcher examines a phenomenon. In contrast, micro or mid-level theories (discipline-specific

theories) guide understanding and practice specific to the discipline. Collectively, the macro and micro

theories provided a foundation to explore the lived experiences of Black students attending a PWI and the role relationships played in their quest for success.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to explore the role relationships played in the lived experiences of students who self-identified as Black or African American and were current or former recipients of a multicultural academic scholarship as they pursued their degree on a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) campus in the Midwest. In doing so, the insights gained from this phenomenological case study will help faculty, administrators, staff, and stakeholders understand how the role relationships play in the lived experiences of students who self-identify as Black or African American students on a PWI campus and the affect their relationships had on their academic success. I used three research questions to address students' perspectives and the challenges they faced in developing relationships on a PWI campus.

Research Questions

Three research questions were selected for this study to address the role relationships played in the lived experiences of Black students as they strived to achieve academic success.

Question 1: What are the lived experiences of Black current and former students who are recipients of a multicultural scholarship program while attending a midwestern public PWI?

Question 2: How do internal and external relationships affect current and former Black students' degree completion in a multicultural scholarship program at a midwestern public PWI?

Question 3: What are current and former Black students in a multicultural scholarship program perceptions of the role of relationships in their academic success?

Research Methods

A phenomenological research method was selected to gather and analyze data. Strategies were identified to promote trustworthiness as I explored the lived experiences of relationships of Black students in a scholarship program with a cohort attending a Midwest PWI. The sampling process for identifying participants is identified and explained in Chapter 3. One university was selected to gain access to participants using homogeneous sampling. An interview protocol for the one-on-one interview was established.

Definition of Terms

Black or African American. A person having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa. Terms such as "Haitian" or "Negro" are used interchangeably in addition to "Black or African American" (Revisions to the Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity, 1997).

Culture. Refers to behaviors and values learned, shared, and exhibited by a group of people (Yosso *, 2005).

Deficit Thinking. Deficit thinking takes the position that minority students and families are at fault for poor academic performance because (a) students enter school without the normative cultural knowledge and skills; and (b) parents neither value nor support their child's education (Yosso *, 2005).

Phenomenological Case Study. An ethnography is a variation in that the research provides an in-depth exploration of a bounded system (e.g., an activity, an event, a process, or an individual) based on extensive data collection (Creswell & Guetterman, 2021; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Critical Race Theory. The progressive legal movement seeks to transform the relationship between race, racism, and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

Predominantly White Institutions. Colleges and universities with White students comprise the student population more than any other student racial group (Bourke, 2016).

Chapter 2: A Review of Relevant Literature

A brief introduction of the research problem was provided in Chapter 1, including background information and context. Chapter 2 will expand on the theoretical framework of this study and give a review of the literature. In this chapter, the components of Critical Race Theory and the Community Cultural Wealth Model are presented as the ways they can work together to create a foundation to understand the role relationships play in the lived experiences of Black current and former students in a multicultural scholarship program who attended a medium, primarily residential, 4-year public PWI with a high undergraduate enrollment profile in the Midwest in 2023. Following the theoretical framework is a review of relevant literature. This review examines the history of higher education, the history of Black college students in higher education, lived experiences of Black Students attending a PWI, and the role relationships or mentors play in the student's quest for success.

Theoretical Framework

Within the qualitative study, theory can be presented as macro and micro theories to help situate data within a framework (Lee, 2016). Critical Race Theory served as the macro theory for this research. Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth model served as the micro theory. Esterberg (2002), as cited by Lee (2016), determined that macro theories act as the overarching viewpoint or "lens" through which the researcher examines a phenomenon. In contrast, micro or mid-level theories (discipline-specific theories) guide understanding and practice specific to the discipline. Collectively, the macro and micro theories will provide a foundation to explore the lived experiences of Black students attending a PWI and the role relationships play in their quest for success.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory originated in the writing of eight American legal scholars: Alan Freeman, Patricia Williams, Derrick Bell, Mari Matsuda, Kimberle Crenshaw, Charles Lawrence III, Richard Delgado,

and Cheryl Harris (Wagner, 2021). It is a framework that can be used to theorize, examine, and challenge how race and racism implicitly and explicitly impact social structures, practices, and discourses (Yosso, 2005). In his investigation of the current body of research on CRT and implications for future research, Hartlep (2009) identified the five central tenets of CRT: (a) the notion that racism is ordinary and not aberrational, (b) the idea of interest convergence, (c) the social construction of race, (d) the idea of storytelling and counter-storytelling, and (e) the notion that Whites have been recipients of civil rights legislation. The CRT approach to education involves a commitment to developing schools that acknowledge the multiple strengths of Communities of Color to serve a large purpose of struggle toward social and racial justice (Yosso, 2005).

Community Cultural Wealth Model

Yosso developed community cultural wealth, which acknowledges various forms of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities, and relationships held by marginalized families and communities that are often unrecognized in the literature (Luedke, 2020). Communities of Color use tenets of Yosso's model to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression (Yosso, 2005). The main goals of identifying and documenting cultural wealth are to transform education and empower People of Color to utilize assets already abundant in their communities (Yosso, 2005). The model comprises six forms of capital that Students of Color bring to school (Boettcher et al., 2022) to engage, navigate and succeed in educational settings (Henderson et al., 2023). Figure 1 shows seriate aspirational capital, familial capital, linguistic capital, navigational capital, resistant capital, and social capital. These various forms of capital are not mutually exclusive or static but are dynamic processes that build on one another as part of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). This model was used to frame the research to uncover the role relationships played in the collegiate experience of Black students as they pursued their degree attainment.

Figure 1

Yosso's Cultural Capital Wealth Model
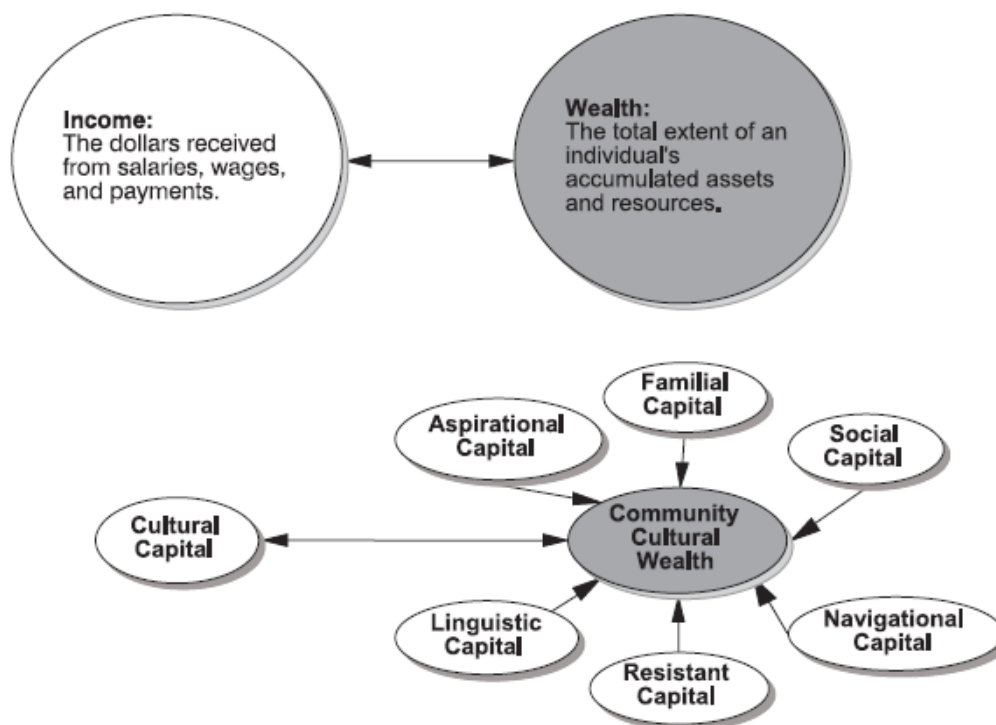
Note. Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth. Adapted from: Oliver & Shapiro, 1995

History of Higher Education in the United States

In the United States, higher education has undergone a significant transformation. Thelin (2019) recounts the history of Higher Education in America, beginning in the 1700s-2010; he documents who had access and who did not have access to education. On the other hand, Labaree (2017) argues that regardless of who is included or excluded, the U.S. system is a big mess. Wechsler (1997); Gordon (1997); and Anderson (1997), respected authors of higher education history, provided historical accounts of three groups of people with different identities as they challenged the social order inflicted on them and the implications. Those groups included individuals who self-identified as Jews, women, and Black people. Higher-education officials, and often students from traditional constituencies, usually

perceived the arrival of new groups not as a time for rejoicing but as a problem, a threat to an

institution's stated and unstated missions (official fear) or its social life (student fear) (Wechsler, 1997).

The Context of Jews in Higher Education in the United States

The White male believed Jews did not have the character to afford them the privilege of being

accepted into their club. Wechsler (1997) stated that some administrators did not believe they posed a

threat to institutional missions and that students could settle any differences they had amongst

themselves. However, the Jewish community responded to social exclusion by increasing their academic

work or establishing academic and social organizations (Wechsler, 1997).

The Context of Women in Higher Education in the United States

Unlike the Jewish experience, Gordon (1997) concluded that men believed the woman's place

was at home taking care of the children and that the public, political, and economic world belonged to

men, and women were limited to household chores. The acceptance of women was only after women

convinced their spouses of the benefits of them attending college, such as raising children. Southerners

also believed that women's education would uphold, not subvert, their slave-holding patriarchal culture

(Gordon, 1997).

The Context of Blacks in Higher Education in the United States

Some people had different experiences attempting to access higher education. Anderson (1997)

wrote about the emergence of Black land-grant colleges. Of the 7,513 students enrolled in the combined

twenty-three Black land-grant and state schools, 4,061 were classified as elementary-level students,

3,400 were considered a secondary-level students, and only 12 were enrolled in the collegiate

curriculum (Anderson, 1997).

During the brief tenure of Harvard President Edward (1846-1848), it became known that a Black

student would present himself for the college's admissions examination. Although the student

had tutored one of Edward's sons and was the best scholar in his class, rumors spread that

Harvard would not permit his matriculation, no matter how well he performed on the exams

(Wechsler, 1997).

This is an example of an academically prepared Black student's attempt to enter the halls of higher

education and his lived experience of exclusion. This exclusion denied him the opportunity to build

relationships with other academically prepared White students because of his race. Stukes (2021)

reported that teaching Blacks reading and writing skills was unlawful. Nevertheless, missionaries argued

that it was essential for education to introduce ex-slaves to the values and rules of modern society. They

concluded that Blacks would rapidly degenerate without education and become a national menace to

American civilization (Anderson, 1997).

History of Black College Students in Higher Education

Therefore, HBCUs were established with the assistance of the Freedman's Bureau, Black

churches, Northern missionaries, private philanthropists, and governmental initiatives (i.e., Morrill Act

of 1890) to provide access to higher education for African Americans (Palmer & Gasman, 2008). Early

work by Wechsler (1997) showed that it took centuries before Black students were allowed in

segregated colleges. For example, the Supreme Court case Brown v. Board of Education (1954) was

another legislative piece passed to create access to public schools. However, Derrick Bell, Allen

Freeman, and Richard Delgado believed the civil rights era of the 1960s had stalled, and Brown v. Board

of Education (1954) did not accomplish its intent. With a focus on the legal system, Wagner (2021)

indicated that these legal scholars, activists, and lawyers were puzzled as they tried to understand why

the victories were gradually eroded.

Nevertheless, these writers put their minds to the task as they began to hold workshops

nationwide to develop new strategies to combat racism that was gaining ground (Delgado & Stefancic,

(2017); Hartlep, N. D. (2009); Wagner, 2021). Delgado and Stefancic (2017) reported that Kimberle Crenshaw, Angela Harris, Cheryl Harris, Charles Lawrence, Mari Matsuda, and Patricia Williams were also significant early figures in this movement. In effect, they challenged the legal discourse that the law is neutral and colorblind by examining these traditions as vehicles for self-interest, power, and privilege offered to those with wealth and power (Richardson, 2017). With the expansion of this movement came the emergence of what Delgado and Stefancic (2017) described as the critical race theory (CRT) movement, with a collection of activists and scholars engaged in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power.

Regents of University of California v. Bakke (1978), the Supreme Court ruled that race could be considered in university admissions to promote diversity. Years later in Grutter v. Bollinger (2003) the Supreme Court used as its backdrop the opinion of Regents of University of California v. Bakke (1978) to deliver its opinion to say education benefits from a diverse student body. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor read the opinion and said, "We expect that 25 years from now, the use of racial preferences will no longer be necessary to further the interest that we approve today." Unfortunately, she was wrong because June 29, 2023, Chief Justice Roberts delivered the opinion of the Court in Student for Fair Admission, Inc. v. President and Fellows of Harvard College (2023) stating that the race-based admissions programs violate the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. In 2023, critical legal studies and critical race theory is still relevant as Black Scholars continue to seek access and entrance into PWIs.

Lived Experiences

Having the historical perspective of why higher education came to be, and the roadblocks Blacks experienced in their attempt to access higher education helps in understanding the lived experiences of Black students. Therefore, we must explore these students' lived experiences to understand the lived

reality of connecting to an academic community that does not exhibit a significant representation of African American ethnicity (Johns, 2018). In their research, Payne and Suddler (2014) noted that the experiences of these students at PWIs are of particular interest, given that these university-based institutions are often perceived to be unwelcoming of Black Americans. In their study examining the experience of Black students living in residence halls, Hotchkins and Dancy (2017) noted that Black students, males in particular, are considered out of place when attending PWIs and under continual hyper-surveillance due to potential sources of criminality assumptions.

According to CRT, all individuals must consider their racialized experiences and understand the ways their racial experiences affect their interactions with the world (Lee, 2018). These historical relationships and interactions with oppression, survival, and community must be acknowledged (Porter & Dean, 2015). The exploration of research by Goodwill et al. (2022) uncovered existing work identifying social support as a critical component of both psychological well-being and academic success. However, it noted that we still do not know exactly which sources of social support are most salient. Since we still do not know which sources of social support are most salient, this study sought to understand the role relationships played in the lived experiences of Black current and former students in a multicultural scholarship program who attended a medium, primarily residential, 4-year predominately White institution (PWI).

Relationships

The U.S. economy is projected to add 8.3 million jobs from 2021 to 2031 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2022). Although they have yet to determine what the future jobs will be, LinkedIn (2022) reports that there are specific skills a jobseeker should develop. Various key individuals provided input to develop a list of top skills to accelerate careers in uncertain times (LinkedIn, 2022). One skill submitted for this report was "networking." In short, Ratna Juita, founder and CEO of The Mindgem, "Singapore

suggested networking was more than collecting name cards, it was building and nurturing relationships"

(LinkedIn, 2022). With employers seeking to diversify their workforce and relationships representing one

skill set, Black students must develop their ability to cultivate meaningful relationships.

There is a belief that schools are considered the neutral space where everyone receives equal

treatment (Wagner, 2021). However, history has revealed to us that inequities still exist. CRT gave

special attention to the historical implications for Blacks and considered how those experiences

structured their current society (Richardson, 2017). As Wagner (2021) indicated, individual experiences

or stories are invaluable with the right filter.

Internal Relationships

In 2016, Lee conducted a qualitative study that examined several influential factors of Black

student success, one of which was relationships. This study examined the intersections of identities and

how those intersections interacted with institutional, communal (e.g., community-based resources and

relationships), and personal factors (e.g., behaviors, habits, skills, and personal relationships) to bolster

academic resilience in higher education (Lee, 2016). Relationships can be positive or negative Morley

(2003), and Black students' challenges can range from getting connected to seeking academic resources

(Lee, 2018). Thus, considering academic resilience in conjunction with relationships and environments in

which they interact is vital and valuable (Lee, 2016). Garvey et al., 2018 concluded that a student's sense

of belonging is a fluid and dynamic process influenced by relational, community, and identity.

In their study on the relationships that African American males develop while attending an

HBCU, Palmer and Gasman (2008) noted that these relations proved a rich source of social capital for

them that many minority students attending Historically White Institutions (HWIs) may not experience.

In another study, Hotchkins and Dancy (2017) determined that communally informed resilience,

exhibited by participants in this study, served as a valued form of group self-care by providing

navigational information about avoiding being traumatized. They also noted that the participants' perceptions were that residential life lacked culturally competent employees or could create opportunities for Black students to exist holistically without experiencing racial incidents. In another study examining the Black student experience in residence halls, Volpe and Jones (2023) investigated the lived experiences of the students attending a PWI. They noted that experiencing racism in intimate residential settings threatens Black college student's health and academic success, as the residential setting is crucial for many basic needs, such as safety, privacy, and capacity to rest. However, they discovered that the students transformed this physical space into a counter space by building a community where Black cultures and identities were valued.

Also, in another qualitative study, Roscoe determined (2015) advisors, particularly White advisors, brought little knowledge, experience, or desire to advising interactions; they could understand how racialized experiences impacted Black students or developed valuable relationships with all their students.

The research of Porter and Dean (2015) on the Black undergraduate woman's experience on a PWI revealed that African American women must negotiate multiple identities and recognize how those identities shape their interactions and relationships with others. As they attempted to make meaning out of their identity development, they needed to see administrators who looked like them in leadership positions on campus. African American women found value in the support and trust of administrators and faculty members who genuinely care about their well-being, success, and overall identity development (Porter & Dean (2015).

Inside the classroom or outside the classroom Harper (2015) stated that few would argue against the significance of studying and documenting the institutional factors that led to such high attrition rates among Black male collegians.

Whether relationships are internal (e.g., classroom, residence halls, outside the classroom on campus, with faculty, academic advisors, administrators, staff, and peers) or external (parents, siblings, grandparents, mentors, and former teachers), they all played a role in Black students' completion (Johnson-Durgans, 1994; Wartman & Savage, 2008; Winkle-Wagner, 2009; Carnaje, 2016; Lee, 2016; Lee, 2018; Durkee et al., 2020; Guiffrida & Douthit, 2020; Museus & Ravello, 2021; McLean, 2022). For minority students, the family typically included grandparents, aunts and uncles, and cousins (Morley, 2003).

External Relationships

Wartman and Savage, (2008). Wintre and Yaffe, 2000, cited by Winkle-Wagner (2009), determined that family relationships influence students' initial college transitions and continued college experience. However, there is considerable debate on the role of prior familial relationships for African American college students (Winkle-Wagner, 2009). Guiffrida and Douthit (2010) explored the Black college student experience at PWIs and discovered that Black students were coping with issues of abandoning relatives and friends in their home environment. On the other hand, Winkle-Wagner (2009) found the notion of bringing family along linked to succeeding on behalf of one's family, serving as a representative of one's family, or planning to give the fruits of education back to family or community in some way but also noted that succeeding on campus could sometimes mean cutting ties with family and previous relationships. In their study, Lee (2016) observed that participants' experiences suggested that relationships with various people and groups were vitally important.

Success in college does not lie in the hands of any one person; instead, the entire university community is responsible for deploying social capital to promote student persistence and retention (Palmer & Gasman, 2008). The most important institutions for the growth, development, and administration of social capital in the communities are educational institutions, especially universities

and the higher education system (Tonkaboni et al., 2013). As Lee explored the academic resilience of

Black students on a PWI,

> the sense of obligation to succeed and remain resilient regardless of barriers was tightly coupled
>
> with the broader sense of relationship to a community of others who are like themselves. More
>
> specifically, being connected to the broader community was deeply interwoven with
>
> participants, a sense of Blackness, and how their Blackness tied them to other Black people and
>
> the broader Black community (Lee, 2016).

Hotchkins and Dancy (2017) concluded that Black students were uncomfortable with the complete

normalcy of Whiteness and practiced White peer avoidance as a form of coping. Morley (2003) added

that students who did not fit in with their peers relied heavily on family member encouragement to

remain in school. Consequently, when students decide to leave an institution because of a negative

experience, he/she communicates their experiences with prospective students. This may make the

college or university appear insensitive (Roscoe, 2015). Therefore, Lee (2016) uncovered in their

research that the characteristics of higher education institutions, student communities, and long-term,

meaningful, and sustainable interpersonal relationships play a crucial role in academic resilience.

Summary

The research revealed an increased need for professionals with a specific skill set, one of which

is relationships. Blacks will not be competitive if they do not graduate from college. There is a wealth of

research on the Black male experience attending a PWI. However, there is a gap in the research that

examines the Black students, lived experiences of relationships of both current and former students in a

scholarship cohort attending a PWI.

Chapter 3: Methodology

With Black students continuing to hold the bottom seat among all other races/ethnicities in completion rates across the United States and Indiana, the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2017), and the Indiana Commission for Higher Education (2022), it was essential to understand if relationships were a factor in their completion of a degree. This chapter describes the methodological framework for this study. It includes the research design and procedures, which outline participant selection, data collection, and analysis. The discussions include ethical considerations. This phenomenological case study sought to understand the role relationships played in the lived experiences of Black current and former students in a multicultural scholarship program who attended a medium, primarily residential, 4-year public PWI with a high undergraduate enrollment profile in the Midwest in 2023.

Research Design

A qualitative design was selected to understand the role relationships played in the lived experiences of current and former students in a multicultural scholarship program. A phenomenological case study approach was used to pursue three research questions with Critical Race Theory as the framework. Critical Race Theory has five central tenets or components: (a) the notion that racism is ordinary and not aberrational, (b) the idea of an interest convergence, (c) the social construction of race, (d) the idea of storytelling and counter-storytelling, and (e) the notion that Whites have been recipients of civil rights legislation (Delgado & Stefancic (2017); (Harper et al., 2018); Wagner (2021); Hartlep (2009). This research design focused on the essence of relationships' effect on Black students' collegiate experiences who were recipients of a multicultural scholarship and degree attainment through their lived experiences. The overall intent of this design was to describe the student's experiences using their voice (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Guetterman, 2021). Creswell and Creswell (2018) defined

phenomenological case studies as a design of inquiry where the researcher describes the lived

experience and an in-depth analysis of a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals. A

phenomenological study was selected to gain in-depth knowledge about the role relationships played in

the collegiate experience of Black students in degree completion. Harper et al. (2016) used Critical Race

Theory (CRT) to analyze structural problems that undermine persistence and degree completion, a sense

of belonging, and Black students' academic achievement. CRT seeks to transform the relationship

between race, racism, and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). I used the lens of CRT to help elevate

marginalized voices. CRT's "voice" component provided a way to communicate the experience and

realities (Ladson-Billings, 1999, p. 16).

Research Questions

The following research questions were selected to guide this study.

Question 1: What are the lived experiences of Black current and former students who are recipients of

a multicultural scholarship program while attending a midwestern public PWI?

Question 2: How do internal and external relationships affect current and former Black students'

degree completion in a multicultural scholarship program at a midwestern public PWI?

Question 3: What are current and former Black students in a multicultural scholarship program

perceptions of the role of relationships in their academic success?

Context

Black students continue to enroll in predominantly White institutions (PWIs), with a record

number failing to attain degrees. The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2017) reported

that Black students had the lowest six-year completion rate (38.0%) among all the students who started

in four-year public institutions. Most research addressed the academic achievement gap by examining

processes, procedures, and academic preparedness, with only a dearth of literature related to

relationships. This qualitative design sought to explore the role relationships played in the collegiate experience of Black students as they pursued their degree attainment. It was important that I broaden existing research by extending the knowledge of the lived experiences of Black college students.

Ethical Concerns and Reciprocity

Steps were put in place to protect the welfare of the co-participants of this study. An IRB Application FORM A was submitted to the university's Institutional Review Board, IRB, to obtain approval to conduct the research. This standing university committee established under federal regulations evaluated the methods proposed to determine if they were appropriate for human study. After receiving approval, I recruited participants by providing potential participants with an explanation of the study's purpose and the criteria used to select participants. I discussed the interview process with the participants and shared contact information of the dissertation chair if participants wanted to report questionable practices. I emailed a Qualtrics "Informed Consent Document" Form to the participants to sign. By submitting the "Informed Consent Document" Form they agreed to participate in the research in Zoom and be recorded.

Prior to the interviews, all participants received the "Informed Consent Document" form. This form informed the participants that participating in this research would not affect their relationship with anyone connected with the institution. The document addressed their right to refuse to answer any part of the interview questions. My path has crossed with potential participants. All personal identifiers, such as names, majors, hometowns, and institutions, were masked to protect the participants. Protocols were established to protect the participant's identity and the study's integrity. I strived for honesty in all aspects of the study to respect the participants and create a narrative that represented an accurate account of their experience.

Electronic "Informed Consent Documents", recordings, transcriptions, coded files, physical notes, and any other electronic data was stored on my password-protected computer and backed up on Microsoft Cloud, which was password protected, and an external hard drive was placed in a locked, secured location within my home. I was the only one that had access to the primary data.

Reflexivity and Positionality

Creswell and Creswell (2018) remind us that reflexivity is a core characteristic of qualitative research. Knowing their identities and how they may influence the research they want to conduct is crucial for a researcher. As a first-generation Black female, a heterosexual, Christian woman from a two-parent low socioeconomic family where neither parent graduated from high school, it was crucial for me to understand that my life experiences could impact my understanding of the experiences of others. From the beginning of my educational journey, I have always attended a school where I was the only Black in my classes. From the early stages of elementary school, I faced minority stress as one of the few Black people in a predominately White school. High school was no exception. While attending a PWI for my baccalaureate degree, I had the opportunity to participate in a cohort of minority students. This platform allowed students who self-identified as Black or African American to experience a sense of belonging within the group. Although I could not identify the issues with navigating the systems, I took pride in my self-identified identities. I used the experiences with my professors to build my self-efficacy as a student. During this time, I began to understand the value of relationships. By acknowledging my perspectives, I guarded against hearing, seeing, and presenting results that might have confirmed my experiences and assumptions about myself and others. As a Black woman doctoral student with over 40 years of experience in higher education, I honored the participants' voices as they shared the role relationships played in their lived experiences. I constantly self-reflected as I sought to balance my passion for this research using the voices of current and former students.

Research Procedures

Participants

All study participants were enrolled at the same mid-size PWI in a Midwest state. Selecting one university allowed me to investigate the participants' perspectives on the role relationships played in the lived experiences of Black undergraduate students in a scholarship program at the same institution. In addition, participants in this study experienced the culture of being in a cohort in a scholarship program. Therefore, a homogeneous sampling was used to select participants. Creswell and Guetterman (2019) define homogeneous sampling as the researcher purposefully sampling individuals or sites based on membership in a subgroup with defining characteristics. In this case, it was Black students in a scholarship program at a PWI in the Midwest.

The potential pool of students was 30. I reached out to one of the gatekeepers of the site at to gain access to potential participants. A gatekeeper is an individual who has an official or unofficial role at the site and can help researchers locate individuals Creswell & Guetterman (2019). Interviews should begin from the premise that a power imbalance exists between the data collector and the participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Therefore, first-time, full-time, first-year students enrolled for classes in fall 2023 were not considered for the study since these students were enrolled in my first-year seminar course. Again, this was done out of respect for the potential power imbalance. Eligible participants for this phenomenological case study were students who self-identify as African American or Black students.

Phenomenology involves a range of 3-10 participants (Creswell & Creswell (2018). Whereas Creswell and Creswell (2018) stated that case studies involve a range of 4-5 cases. Since this was a phenomenological case study, my goal was a minimum of four and a maximum of ten cases for this research study. My total number of participants was nine. I wanted all participants to attend the same

mid-size regional PWI in a Midwest state in the United States. I reached out to current and former

recipients of a multicultural scholarship program that functions with cohorts of students. Participants

had to complete their first year in the program. The ages of the participants ranged from 18-26, with

English as their first language. They came from different social-economic backgrounds and geographical

regions. Since participants came from different geographical areas, they were required to have access to

the internet or a Wi-Fi connection. Participants had to enter the scholarship program as first-time, full-

time, first-year students. Those agreeing to be participants chose pseudonyms to protect their identity.

Data Collection

The data collection for the phenomenological case study was conducted according to the

description in Chapter 3. I sent introductory emails to all 30 potential participants inviting them to

participate in my research. If I did not receive a response, I sent a follow-up introductory email. The

purpose was to invite each participant for a 10-to-15-minute pre-interview through Zoom to ensure the

participants understood the study's intent. Video conferencing addressed the issue of geographic

distance (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Contact was made with potential participants using an

introductory email. Nine appropriate participants were secured. Appropriate was defined as a

willingness to participate in the interview process for a period of up to 90 minutes for the first interview,

up to 60 minutes for a second interview if the first proposed interview did not allow for data saturation,

a last 30-minute virtual meeting for member checking, willingness to be recorded during the interviews

and willingness to review transcripts for clarity and correctness. The total time expected to spend with

each participant lasted up to 3 hours and 15 minutes.

Interviews

Interviews were used as the instrument to collect the data because they generated discussion

surrounding a vital research question (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Creswell & Creswell, 2018;

Rudestam & Newton, 2015). As mentioned earlier, I met individually with participants in an introductory/pre-interview to ensure that they did not feel as though they were being coerced and fully understood and agreed to the time commitment of the study. If the participant agreed to proceed with the study, they were informed about how the data would be collected, used, and stored. At that time, the participant was informed that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the study. The "Informed Consent Document" form was emailed to the participant during the pre-interview, using Qualtrics to the participant if they agreed to move forward for their signature and date. Once I received the fully executed document, a mutually agreed-upon date and time for the first interview was scheduled during the pre-interview. All one-on-one interviews were audio recorded. Prior to the beginning of each interview, I read the "Informed Consent Document" form to see if the participant had any questions, shared the amount of time it would take to complete the interview and reminded them the interview was being recorded and that I would take notes in the event the recording failed. I reminded the participants that they could withdraw from the study at any time. I also shared that I would stop the interview if I noticed the participant becoming distressed or if the participant chose to withdraw from the study. The first interview lasted approximately 60 minutes for each participant.

A second 60-minute interview was scheduled during the first interview because if data saturation did not occur, which it did not, I wanted to ensure the truth. Prior to the second interview, I reviewed the interview transcripts to develop a second round of questions, to ensure data saturation and to clarify information shared during the first interview. There was no third interview. Throughout the interview process, data was shared with the participants. Creswell and Creswell (2018) identify this as member checking. After each session, I thanked the participants for participating in the study and assured them of the confidentiality of the responses. During the last session, I asked the participants if they wanted a study summary. Each participant received $25 in gift cards as a participant in this study.

They received a $5 gift card for the introductory meeting, a $10 gift card for the first Zoom interview, and a $10 gift card for the second Zoom interview.

Data Analysis

In an overview of data analysis provided by Creswell and Creswell (2018), there are four basic steps. They include organizing and preparing data, reading, or looking at all data to become familiar with it, coding or bracketing all data, generating themes, and using a narrative approach to convey findings. To accomplish this phenomenological data analysis for this study Moustakas' (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method was used. Moustakas documents four distinct steps for data collection. I followed each step in sequential order. In the first step I obtained a complete description of the experience of the phenomenon. All Zoom interviews were recorded with participant's permission. Next, from the verbatim transcript, I considered each statement for significance, captured relevant statements, listed nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping statements, clustered into themes, synthesize and included verbatim examples, reflected, and constructed a textual-structural description of the meanings and essences of the experience. Interview transcripts were read multiple times and edited. Next, I used the same steps for each participant. Lastly, following Moustakas' (1994) plan, I created a universal description of the experience representing the group. I manually stored, coded, and compared data.

Validity

To ensure validity, I checked for the accuracy of the findings by employing multiple procedures (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). First, I was transparent about my biases by stating my positionality within the study and with participants. This transparency was accomplished through self-reflection, known as reflexivity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Second, I used the perspectives of various participants to build a coherent understanding of themes. Lastly, member checking was used to increase the study's validity by sharing significant themes and findings with participants during the last virtual meeting.

Assumptions, Scope

This study employed a narrative inquiry approach of a small sample of participants to interview nine Black students in a scholarship program at the university. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to Black students or other ethnicities with this research. Secondly, this research's scope did not consider all data collection options to eliminate biases. The study was conducted at one institution, which did not allow me to generalize the findings. Lastly, this research limited my understanding of the lived experiences at other institutions.

Chapter 4: Findings

This research aimed to learn the role relationships played in the lived experiences of Black students as they pursued their degrees on a PWI campus in the Midwest. Critical Race Theory served as the macro theory for this research. Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth model served as the micro theory in this phenomenological case study. CRT seeks to transform the relationship between race, racism, and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The researcher used CRT to elevate the marginalized voices and CCW to frame the research to uncover the role relationships played in the collegiate experience of Black students as they pursued their degrees. Thus, the backdrop of being a Black student in a multicultural scholarship cohort at a PWI in the Midwest and how relationships influenced the participants' lived experiences.

The researcher interviewed nine participants about the role relationships played in their lived experiences as a Black current or former student in a multicultural scholarship program who attended a medium, primarily residential, 4-year public PWI with a high undergraduate enrollment profile in the Midwest in 2023. Interview text was used to describe participants' conscious experiences (Moutakas, 1994). These experiences come in the form of thoughts, feelings, and examples. Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth model was used to analyze the text. This model involves acknowledging that Black students bring their talents, strengths, and experiences to college.

Three research questions guided this phenomenological case study.

Question 1: What are the lived experiences of Black current and former students who are recipients of a multicultural scholarship program while attending a midwestern public PWI?

Question 2: How do internal and external relationships affect current and former Black students' degree completion in a multicultural scholarship program at a midwestern public PWI?

Question 3: What are current and former Black students in a multicultural scholarship program perceptions of the role of relationships in their academic success?

All participants attended the same university. For confidentiality, participants were allowed to select their pseudonyms. Alyssa, Anna Smith, Kevin, Kourtney, Michael, Mickey, Skyler, Wallace, and Z each participated in a pre-interview and two one-on-one interviews. The researcher used Zoom with audio and video recordings, with the transcription feature enabled for all seven pre-interviews and fourteen one-on-one interviews. All interviews took place in late August and September 2023. The researcher reviewed all video recordings and transcripts for accuracy. The first review of each transcript took approximately 3 hours each for a total of 54 hours. The participants were part of a cohort of scholars, but not all were in the same cohort. The researcher reached out to participants of the first six cohorts of the program. As depicted in Table 1, scholars from five of the six cohorts participated in the study, cohorts 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6. One participant from cohort one agreed to participate in a pre-interview but contacted the researcher to reschedule due to a conflict. Of those who participated, five were females, and four were males. Some are currently attending, some graduated, and some did not graduate.

Table 1

Participants by cohort

Participant	Cohort	Age at Matriculation	Gender	First Generation	Classification
Skyler	2	18	F	No	Graduated
Michael	3	18	M	No	Graduated
Wallace	3	19	M	Yes	Graduate
Z	3	18	M	No	Did not graduate
Anna Smith	4	18	F	No	Did not graduate
Kourtney	4	18	F	Yes	Junior
Alyssa	5	18	F	No	Junior
Kevin	6	18	M	No	Sophomore
Mickey	6	18	F	No	Sophomore

By gender 55.6% were self-identified as female compared to 44.4% self-identifying as male, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Participants by gender

Participant	Gender	First Generation	Classification	Major
Alyssa	F	No	Junior	Exercise Science
Anna Smith	F	No	Did not graduate	Theatre Arts
Kourtney	F	Yes	Junior	Individualized Studies
Mickey	F	No	Sophomore	Pre-dental Hygiene
Skyler	F	No	Graduated	Sport Management
Kevin	M	No	Sophomore	Business Administration
Michael	M	No	Graduated	Social Work
Wallace	M	Yes	Graduated	Communications
Z	M	No	Did not graduate	Art

Participant Profiles

Alyssa

Alyssa describes her family as non-traditional. She spent half her life seeing them divorced, and they got back together. Alyssa explained it as "weird" because even though they were back together, there were many times she did not see either one of them. However, they reinforced that she had to get good grades because no one could take that away from her and that she should serve her community. Her dad also stressed athletics because it would also help prepare her for real life by being in a team.

Before college, Alyssa never hung out with many of her friends in high school. The few friends she had resulted from them having to undergo scrutiny by her mom, which she said was embarrassing.

Alyssa called her mom a "helicopter" mom but now realizes she just wanted to ensure she was safe. She and those few friends are still close today. Alyssa believes she placed a lot of self-inflicted mental barriers on herself, such as saying she was not smart enough to go to college. She stated her grades were good, with a 3.8 GPA, and she believed she was academically competent but did not know what she wanted to do.

Alyssa is a junior who attended college as a biology major. Initially, she wanted to be a medical doctor to impress her dad. She said the career path she chose was for him because he told her he wanted her to be a doctor and to have a doctor in the family. Alyssa believes it was for "status" because her grandfather wanted a general in their family. However, during her first year, she realized that STEM courses were not for her and did not want to make life-or-death decisions. Every day, she would call her mom, as she explains, sobbing, stating that she hated it there and hated her classes. Alyssa's mom told her to find something she liked, so she switched to exercise science. There was structure growing up on her dad's side of the family, and she attributes it to all of them serving in the military. However, her mom's side of the family is more maternal and welcomes every emotion. Both parents graduated from college, so Alyssa is not a first-generation student. She and her father would butt heads because she challenged the structure.

Alyssa states that she has dealt with microaggressions since middle school and did not know how to confront them. She believes that she can educate people but cannot change them. Her paternal grandparents, whom she spent much time with, are her motivators regarding education. They were a part of the Civil Rights Movement and continue to remind her that she cannot contribute to the negative stereotypes that White people have about Black people and that no one can take that away from her once she has her education. Alyssa states:

If I continue to educate myself, my kids will look up to me and see they can be educated. I hope for the best for myself in the future that I do well, but I also hope for future generations to do well because they have good role models.

The experiences with her friends and family helped shape her beliefs, values, and lessons learned. Her mother's side of the family says to be careful who you let in and keep your guard up. Her father's side of the family says that she needs to learn the hard way. Alyssa admits that she struggles with asking for help and letting people in.

Alyssa believes that identifying as a Black or African American student can be both a strength and a challenge. She provided examples of microaggressions she has experienced, which she believes have strengthened and challenged her. Sometimes, she was caught off guard and did not know what to say or how to manage a situation. Sometimes, she would let it roll off her shoulder because she did not want to be labeled, and other times, she would report it to school officials or her parents. She states that her mother is still overprotective, and when it comes to microaggressions, she will not share those with her because Alyssa believes her mother will "blow things out of proportion." What gets her through difficult situations is prayer. Alyssa has someone from the Multicultural Center because of the academic scholarship and someone from Athletics because she is active in athletics outside her sport that she feels comfortable going to.

While a student at the university, Alyssa has developed formal and informal relationships. The things that have stood out the most for her during her undergraduate years are the support from the university, learning from others to become a more well-rounded individual, and the fact that they have caused her to become more resourceful. Pre-week with her multicultural scholarship because it gave her a solid foundation from day one. She believes it would have been harder for her to find people she "clicked" with and find the Multicultural Center had she not received the scholarship because coaches

do not tell them about the Center on recruitment tours. Alyssa lived on campus her first year but lives off campus.

Anna Smith

Up through high school, Anna Smith lived with her biological parents and sister. She describes it as "a pretty good family life." Everybody was home for dinner, and she had a sound support system. Her mom was definitely there for her, and her dad was. She says her mom was her biggest inspiration because she is a very hard worker and constantly reminds her to keep going when she feels like giving up. Anna Smith hopes she will be like her mother someday. Her mom has comforted her through bad times, and she provides graduating during COVID as an example; it was a pretty depressing time for her. Her mother has supported her in many ways, such as verbal support.

During high school, Anna Smith never dreaded going to school and liked the routine it provided. She had many friends and was active in school, theater, and choir. She was in every extracurricular activity imaginable. She and her friends did the same activities together. Her friends helped her get through the hard times with the classes. They helped each other by studying together. Anna Smith has always loved school and knew she would go to college.

While in college, the support she had grown accustomed to looked different. During COVID, she and her family had to communicate by phone. Anna preferred to be physically home with her family and friends. Most of her friends attended other universities and colleges but tried to see each other during their breaks. Eventually, they lost touch with one another. Anna Smith is no longer attending the university. She currently works two jobs and plans to go back to school. She works two jobs to pay her bills. Knowing that both of her parents worked two jobs while in college, had a family, and made something out of nothing has taught Anna Smith that working hard and perseverance are good qualities.

Thinking about when she was attending the university, Anna Smith sees being a Black or African American student as a strength and reflects on her experience as a multicultural scholar. She says,

> We all embraced where we came from and worked together as a team; even though we were all
>
> different, it brought us together. That made our cohort strong. Spending time together helped
>
> me form my opinion about people.

She liked seeing people blossom and grow but did not explain how being a Black or African-American student on a college campus was a strength.

As she navigated through difficult situations, she had two very close friends that she would vent to. While in college, they were her support system. Anna Smith lived on campus and had a suitemate. They both had single rooms. She credits her suitemate with getting her through tough times, especially when she was stressed out. She believes she would not have been able to get through school while she was there had it not been for her suitemate. Her suitemate will graduate this year and get married. Anna Smith will be at the wedding, hoping they can remain lifelong friends. Her method of navigating through difficult times was to throw herself in there and deal with it. She believes she is good at adapting to her environment. While a student, Anna Smith recalls when a student called Black students the "N" word. She recalls it being a complicated situation and could see both sides. She knew of the student and did not know him personally.

Although Anna Smith leaned on her two friends for support, when she or her family had specific questions related to school, they reached out to a staff member in the Multicultural Center and her supervisor in theatre, who had been her teacher at one time. The supervisor became an excellent resource for her as she navigated through the field of theatre. The supervisor was beneficial as she struggled to understand why women were treated differently in a male-dominated field. Anna Smith stated:

The staff member in the Multicultural Center

helped her academically and emotionally to get through the tough times. Whenever I spoke

with them, it was about family things and internal struggles that I was dealing with personally.

They treated her respectfully, and she would recommend anyone to contact them if they needed help

within the university.

Kevin

Kevin was raised in a two-parent household until his senior year when his parents divorced. His

parents had joint custody. After the divorce, his father stayed in the original family home, and his mom

got an apartment. Depending on the days, Kevin would go back and forth until his mom moved to a

different state.

Before college, Kevin played soccer 3-4 days a week after school. He also had a part-time job. On

Sunday, he attended church. Kevin did not spend much time with friends because soccer consumed

most of his time. He experienced some barriers because he was the only Black person playing the sport

in his hometown. In his opinion, people did not expect him to play soccer; it is not known as a sport

many Black people play. Kevin was a member of a soccer club consisting of 3-4 thousand kids. It was

intimidating, mainly as he describes it, trying to get in his head, which shook his confidence. They had

jokes about food, being athletic, such as all Black people running fast, his knowledge of the game and

techniques, and he could tell they had not been around Black people. It worsened when they played

clubs from a metro area or a private school. When school was on break, sometimes he and his friends

would ride around his small town because, as he describes it, there was not much to do. Although Kevin

does not play collegiate soccer, he plays soccer through intramurals every once in a while.

He was also a Future Business Leaders of America member, with multiple chapters at his high

school. There were few Black people as members, and sometimes they did not think Kevin knew what

he was doing, nor would they expect much from him. Kevin felt the standards were lower for him, making him work harder. His strength comes from God, his grandpa, his mom, and his dad. His grandpa is a pastor, and his great-grandpa was a pastor. Each one has pushed him to be strong in his faith. He believes being a competitor in sports has also caused him to strive to improve. It is important to Kevin to keep his family name good out of respect for his grandfather. His goal is to honor his grandpa and make him proud. Kevin states he has not witnessed or experienced any injustice on campus.

Kevin knew college was his plan because he initially wanted to be an engineer. Then he thought about taking over the family business and convinced himself he did not need a degree. However, since he wanted to stand out from the crowd, he decided to continue his education. Kevin wanted to gain additional knowledge and have experiences outside of what his dad could provide. The support that Kevin receives for his dreams comes mostly from his mom's side of the family. He believes that it is due to him being around them the most. Kevin says being the oldest grandchild comes with benefits, such as positive affirmations and caring for him, and these remind him that he is a child of God. His roommate is firm in his faith and helps him stay grounded. However, one of the most significant events in Kevin's life that impacted him happened in seventh grade when his brother passed. He said:

> My brother always pushed through his illness, which hit him hard. He kept a smile even in the hospital and never had any complaints. My grandpa said it could always be worse. Kevin said those two people caused him to appreciate what he has and to strive for more.

Kevin sees strength and weakness as traits of being a Black or African American student. He shared that when you are the only Black person in a group of White people, and you excel, they are more likely to remember who you are as an individual. An example he provided as a weakness was being on campus and yearning for a brotherhood where he could converse about life experiences. He found that brotherhood in a Black male mentoring program offered on campus. When Kevin is faced with a

challenge in the classroom, he usually tries to figure it out by studying in his room. Sometimes, he will reach out to the professor and sometimes use the writer's lab. He will also go to the Multicultural Center to see if other students have gone through what he is experiencing.

During the Pre-Week for his scholarship, he first became aware of the social norms and institutional values. Having various staff come to speak gave him an idea of the expectations and that they wanted everyone to feel welcome. He also noticed the flags from various countries hung in the dining area. Kevin has experienced formal and informal relationships with people on campus. He cites that his most formal relationship is with the university president, and his informal relationships lie with students on campus. Having the opportunity to travel to Ghana with the president, receiving the multicultural scholarship, and connecting with the Multicultural Center are his most memorable experiences. He believes that, as a recipient of the scholarship, he was able to connect with the Multicultural Center sooner, and that has been his vehicle to other opportunities and resources for him and his mom. He is grateful to have the opportunity to travel to Ghana with the president and says it speaks volumes to the beliefs of the school and the experiences they want students to have.

Kourtney

Before attending college, Kourtney described her family life as normal. She considers a normal family to be what she experienced in her life. She describes "normal" as:

A normal family has a mom, a father figure, and grandparents in their life.

Kourtney lived with her mother. Her mother and father were never married, but he was around. She would see her father occasionally, maybe on weekends or every other weekend. Kourtney says not the visits were not consistent. She describes her relationship with her father as "I'll see you when I see you." She shared that she has a brother who lives with her dad. The fact that her father had a consistent relationship with him but not her sometimes makes her want to push away other people in her life.

Starting her first year during COVID also impacted whether or not she wanted to establish a relationship with others. Kourtney believes her relationship with her father has impacted her life, so she does not want a strong relationship with anyone because they might be "wishy-washy" with her. However, three significant lessons she learned from her family were that you are always family at the end of the day, never go against each other, and always stick together.

Before coming to college, Kourtney and her friends were getting along, and everyone was staying on track with their plans to attend college. They wanted to do something with their lives. They wanted to do more than work every day. The years in high school went smoothly, and she shared that not having a grandpa was a barrier for her. Kourtney copes with barriers and challenges by praying a lot. Her grandma instilled that in her at an early age. She told her anytime she was feeling happy, sad, in trouble, depressed, whatever – pray. Her church family, surrounding family, and mom constantly provide encouragement and remind her of what she knows God can do for her. They stress her to keep pushing forward.

Kourtney matriculated to the university to major in nursing. Her passion for nursing came when she helped care for her grandma before passing. She currently has an individualized studies major. However, there were times when Kourtney thought that college was not for her.

I thought I would not go to college because I saw people not going to college. They were making a living and not having to go to extra schooling. They were going to work every day and making money every day. They have everything they need without having a post-secondary education.

From the eyes of a college student, she says being Black is a strength and a challenge. She believes it to be a challenge because people look at us differently. After all, our skin tone is different from their skin tone. Kourtney says, "Being Black is a strength because of all the things we have gone through, and we are still standing." She shares that the opinions come from what she was taught by her

mom, father, grandparents, and the people she grew up around. She now uses the lessons learned to form her own opinions. However, she was not able to provide any examples. Kourtney had never been called the N-word until she came to college, but she felt a sense of comfort after hearing the president speak.

Kourtney stopped out of school and briefly enrolled in a community college before returning to the university. Although she was no longer eligible to receive the scholarship, the friends she made within her cohort continued to include her in the group chat and never lost touch. Kourtney credits being a recipient of the multicultural scholarship with connecting her to the Multicultural Center. She also provided names of individuals she trusts to guide and advise her through her academic journey.

Michael

Although Michael grew up in a one-parent household with his mom and sister, he still had contact with his father on some weekends. His parents played basketball when they were in college. Michael played sports, too. He was always bored in school because it came easy, and he needed motivation to stay focused. Michael never said he wanted to go to college. However, he did share what his parents told him.

If you are trying to get into college and you are trying to be successful, then you have to apply

yourself. You have to be motivated to achieve and be the best possible you that you can be.

His parents and coaches were his motivators in high school. Any question about his family always led back to him constantly describing his neighborhood and the schools he attended.

Michael grew up in a predominantly Black area surrounded by people who looked like him. He attended a primarily Black school for half his life. For half his life, he was the majority, and that was what he was comfortable with. All of his friends were Black. It was not until he attended a private Christian high school that he began to include a more diverse group of friends in his friend group. Since the high

school was predominately White, he had to adjust to his environment. Playing sports helped him form connections and build relationships quickly.

Michael graduated from the university with a bachelor's degree in psychology. He also was a collegiate athlete, like both parents. He is currently enrolled at the same university, pursuing a master's in social work. Throughout life, his mom has been his go-to when he becomes stressed and dealing with challenges. He called his mom weekly to talk because he knew she would provide his needed support. Every once in a while, he would call his father. The support he received was mental and financial.

Being a student of a multicultural scholarship provided the platform for Michael to establish friendships more easily with other students in the cohort. Although the university was a PWI, it didn't stop him from finding friends that he genuinely liked and liked him. He saw this as creating his own family. Family, friends, and relationships are important to Michael. He sees being a Black student on a PWI campus as a strength because you stand out in the classroom. He believes teachers closely watched him, and Michael used that to his advantage. So, he made sure to give his best. Michael believes you should make the best of any environment you are in. He takes breaks whenever stressed and tries to surround himself with people going through similar experiences or with whom he has something in common. When returning to campus during COVID, Michael became aware of the institution's social norms and values regarding how people worked and functioned. He created his own set of standards within his circle, including adaptation. During his first year, Michael recalls a group of students driving past him, yelling out the window that he should not be on campus. He could tell by the tone of their voice that he was not welcome. He just brushed it off. Michael said,

> I was not going to let that affect how I saw people who may not look like me or be of the same race or color. It really got to me and caused me to speak out more about discrimination. I began to inform people about things like this.

Michael relied on his mentors throughout his undergraduate years, mainly from the Multicultural Center. He was connected to the Multicultural Center because he received a multicultural scholarship. They put him in situations where he could grow. Michael describes his relationships as a "mixed bag." Although most of his relationships with others are informal, he has formal relationships with higher-ups and mentors. The most important experience that stands out the most for him is being in a community that genuinely wants to help you and wants you to succeed. The name stands out the most for him in the multicultural scholarship program. The title gave him what he needed to motivate and push him to be his best self. He lived on campus all four years, which helped him gain independence by learning to live independently. Michael puts a strong emphasis on building relationships.

Mickey

Mickey grew up with a supportive family. She lives with her mom and stepdad. Her biological mom and dad were never married. Both married other people. She indicated that she has a perfect relationship with both of them. Mickey was incredibly involved in activities in high school, and both sets of parents were always there to support her. In Mickey's words, it was better for me because I had more people always helping me. Mickey's dad is in the military and frequently moves from state to state. However, she can visit him during the summer months. She believes one of the biggest lessons learned from her family came from her mom and dad's situation.

> She made things work, but it could have been better. We moved around a lot when I was young, and I learned from hearing my mom talk about finances with my grandma. At one point, we went back to move with my grandma. But then I saw her grow from that, and she bought her first home. Having a kid young can affect your whole life. Knowing her financial and emotional struggles taught Mickey she should do it differently.

Mickey had a small group of friends she considered her best friends in high school. They participated in sports together and spent time together on weekends. In her first year, she was on the cheer team. She also played volleyball and tennis. In her junior year, she was on the track team. One of her biggest challenges was deciding where she wanted to attend college and what she wanted to study. She relied heavily on her family and friends for guidance. She asked her parents what they thought her strengths were and what they thought she would be good at. She also valued her high school teachers' opinions and contacted them. Mickey stressed that she is a Christian and her reasoning behind her decisions was her trust in God and praying that she is where she is supposed to be.

Mickey is a sophomore majoring in pre-dental hygiene. Her family continues to be just as supportive of her in college as they were in her earlier years. She admits it is tough to do that from a distance. However, her mom, stepdad, and grandparents on my mom's side have learned to support her from a distance. Also, her father is stationed much closer to her now, making it easier for him to help her. They use social media and phone calls to connect. Whenever Mickey can go home, she makes the most of the visit.

Life in college looks a little different now. She does not see her high school best friends as much. She has now met like-minded people in college, not only in her major but also in organizations with which she is involved. Since she has been in college, Mickey believes her friendships have changed for the better. Mickey considers being Black a strength. She came from a predominantly White high school, which helped her to form her opinion that when you come from a place where few look like you, it is almost a strength to connect with those who are like you. She felt strengthened in a multicultural scholarship cohort with others who looked like her. Praying and taking things day by day helps her navigate through difficult situations. She is also in a campus ministry organization, and when they come together on Thursday evenings, they pray. When she had her first chemistry exam, she asked for prayer.

Mickey spent ten years in 4 H, attending training and holding various leadership roles. This experience has influenced her mindset. She could not think of a time that she witnessed or experienced injustice.

Mickey credits the Multicultural Center and her advisor for connecting her to her needed resources. She connected to the Multicultural Center through being in the multicultural scholarship program. Mickey has shared the information she has received with her roommate. Her formal relationships represent her friends, and her informal relationships mean her professors because she does not know any of her professors closely enough. Of all the relationships she has built, her most significant connection is with her roommates and the organizations that she is in.

Skyler

Skyler grew up in a two-parent household: her mom, dad, and dog. Her parents were there for her during her transformative years, and she relied on her parents a lot. The rest of the family lived far away, so Skyler rarely saw them. She mentioned Arizona, Texas, and Massachusetts. Her parents attended every single sporting event where she was a participant. They also traveled to the tournaments. Before college, she had four friends. They were in classes together and played sports together. She and her friends were all in the National Honor Society. After high school, Skyler got closer to her parents and extended family, living farther away. She reflected by saying,

> It helped a lot to miss them because it brought us closer together, and they missed me, too. For my extended family as I got older, I was able to reach out to them more and feel more confident. But I still do not really have a strong connection with them because they were not really around when I was a kid.

Skyler's relationship with her parents is much stronger than with her extended family. She mentioned that some of her relatives came to senior night, which was important. Even though she may not see them often, relationships are vital to her.

Skyler was fortunate not to have significant barriers or challenges in high school. She attributes that to having a great support system from her parents and friends. They believed in Skyler and pushed her to do things she didn't think she could do. She had a great relationship with her parents and felt comfortable having conversations with them. When there were times when she felt like she could not do something, they reassured her that she was not inferior or stupid. She said her parents were her biggest motivators, and they never let her feel she was not good enough. They pushed Skyler to attend a university. Syler said,

> I think I would get in more trouble if I decided I was not going to college. However, I was afraid of going to a school where I did not know anybody, and I had never been far away from home. I was pushed to get a higher education.

Skyler's dream was to play sports at the collegiate level. Her parents would provide her with examples of people who were similar to her who made it. Skyler says you do not see many Black athletes playing the sport she plays because she says it is known as a "white" girl's sport. They instilled in her that she could be her own person and did not have to fit the stereotypical mold of a "light-skinned blonde girl" to achieve her dream. She now describes her teammates as family because they have helped her through situations. They have been and always will be there for her.

Her teammates, who are friends, have helped her shape her beliefs and values. They are different from her, come from other places, and have lived very different lives. They helped to dispel some of Skyler's preconceived notions of people from the North versus people from the South, and she believes she would have never had that experience without getting to know them. Skyler sees being a Black or African American as a strength. Skyler was raised not to see her color as an obstacle. Seeing the president address the students at the beginning of her first year as a college student with confidence raised her level of confidence. Skyler shares the following as an example.

People were referring to playing "Lift Every Voice" at sporting events. The volleyball team decided to play it at every game, and Skyler thought it was cool. But, a girl was like, oh, they are just going to change that to the National Anthem, and they're probably going to make it a booty twerking song and stuff like that.

Skyler stood her ground and educated the students about the song and how it began as a poem. She also talked about what was happening around the world today and questioned why the student would say what she did. She felt like, in the moment, she had enough backbone to address it; on top of that, it was one of her teammates. She attributes her strength to her mom. As Skyler put it, "My mom is the definition of a strong, independent, Black woman." She won't back down and will fight for what is right. Skyler was raised to address things she knows are not right or devalue her. She has seen many Confederate flags traveling home and had never seen one except on a bumper sticker. Initially, it made her scared. After her first year, her emotions went from scared to feeling angry. Her final explanation was, "They just do not understand." She states,

They only see images and portrayals of what Black people are and never have that experience and knowledge of getting to know someone and why that flag can be hurtful.

Having the coach and teammates with her made her feel good and safe in uncomfortable situations traveling with the team. There have been times when Skyler did not speak up and just let things go. She received a lot of confused faces and did not know if it was her race or something else. She has seen injustice play out on campus, and, in her opinion, the university could have handled the situation differently. Those who positively impacted her life while a student was the Multicultural Center, her academic advisor, and her coach. She found out about the Multicultural Center staff when she went on the school's website to apply for the scholarship and the coach from being recruited to play a sport. Once on campus, she visited her coach every day for four years. There have been times when she just

wanted to talk to someone who would listen to her, and that is when she went to the Multicultural

Center. Skyler said,

> You know they have their office hours. Sometimes you talk to them just for fun, or sometimes
>
> you speak to them when something is going on, and sometimes, like I asked them for help with
>
> job applications, you know, back when I was starting to fill out grad school applications and stuff
>
> like that.

There were others she could mention, but they were just too busy.

Skyler has had formal and informal relationships as an undergraduate student. She classifies

friends, student groups, teammates, and classmates as informal. The committees she has served on,

professors, and members of the Board of Athletic department are formal. Skyler has served on

numerous university committees, which include search committees. The experiences that stand out the

most are the ability to meet people from different parts of the university, enjoying the school spirit, and

the supportiveness of everyone. One person in particular with the multicultural scholarship profoundly

impacted her life because she felt comfortable coming to talk to them, and their door was always open.

Wallace

During his younger years, three or four weeks old, Wallace was raised by a family friend he

called Nanny. He described her as "awesome." She raised his mom beginning at the age of 6 months. His

family circle consisted of his mom, her mom, and Nanny. He is very close to Nanny and says the last

thing he wanted to do was disappoint her because she has given everything to them as a family. Before

college, Wallace grew up in a two-parent household with his mom and stepdad. However, they

separated during his first year in high school. He explained that he did not have a father figure; it was

just him and his mom 24/7. I can tell he thinks about this often because he mentioned several times that

it was just him and his mom. He gets his inspiration to go after his hopes and dreams from seeing his

mom work to support them. He told himself he needed a college education but was concerned about the cost. There was no other route, and his mother supported his decision. Wallace cited two barriers, money and exposure. Money because he and his mother worked to make ends meet, unlike those with two parents working. Wallace said he was not exposed to the opportunities other high school students had that would help pave their way to college acceptance and scholarships.

Wallace attended a STEM high school. He described it as unique. During his junior and senior years, Wallace was part of a radio TV broadcasting program, where he learned a lot about production and had the opportunity to interview the mayor. He hung out with a couple of really close friends. They played tennis and baseball. They were competitive and also played fantasy football. He and his high school friends did not discuss college much, but they supported each other. However, they no longer stay in contact.

After receiving the multicultural scholarship, Wallace enrolled at the university to pursue a degree in psychology. He was a commuter student. Peers at the university, family friends, and a professor who may have been an adjunct kept telling him that a degree in psychology was worthless, so Wallace changed his major to communication. He struggled with being told his major was worthless, and it was at this time he was ready to drop out. Wallace made new friends in college. He values the experiences his mom, grandma, and Nanny have shared with him and appreciates them allowing him to be himself. These things alone provide him the foundation to keep progressing in achieving his goals. As an African-American male, he did not have many challenges. His main challenge was with the African-American community. Wallace grew up in a white family, attending predominately white elementary and high schools. He was excited to be around people who looked like him. However, they laughed at him when he asked questions about his culture. He said,

The hardest thing was trying to fit in and learn when I did not have those cultural experiences. I did not have the exposure, and I did not have the understanding. I can understand more about where I came from, where people like me, or who look like me, had the opportunity to grow up in communities that I did not. That was one of the more prominent barriers, where I felt like an outlier with my people.

When faced with challenges, he acknowledged that he did not do it alone and always asked for help. He had no problem contacting his professors for extra practice worksheets and eventually became a supplemental instructor. His peers would not accept his advice on how to overcome their struggles. They called him "brown nose" and said that he was kissing up to the teachers. He always gives credit to his support system regardless of what Wallace was dealing with. He is aware of two instances when professors did not allow additional time on an exam for a student who had a learning disability and had cleared it through the Disability Office. Wallace became frustrated about the situation but was glad in the end that it got resolved.

The Multicultural Center was the principal place he used to gain information and stay current on things going on as an undergraduate student, especially his first two years. The Multicultural Center stood out because,

I was there all the time. We would grab lunch, and my girlfriend and I, who is white, would come in, and everyone was welcoming. If you needed to study or print things, you could. Having the opportunity to go in was huge, and I met so many people who disagreed with many people. Having the opportunity to meet the cohort and stay in contact throughout the four years, having friends there, and just having a place to hang out was necessary. That was huge for me. People are amazing, and they became a support system.

The Multicultural Center made a huge difference in him and his mom. They were open honest, and helped him in any way he needed. His mom contacted the Bursar's Office regarding payment plans and questions about his bill.

When it came to relationships, Wallace described them as a "mixed bag" for him. The relationships with faculty and staff were cordial. In contrast, Wallace identified peer relationships as informal. His good college friends dwindled. An example would be the friends he played co-ed sports with. He had retained and communicated more with those in formal relationships.

Z

Z is an introvert who lives at home with his mother and brother. His relationship with his brother is strong. He described his family as being supportive. In high school, he knew that he wanted to attend a university. He said he wanted to go to college; he was encouraged by his mom and people in high school. Although he was encouraged to attend a university, he did not take it as a demand. He had a good relationship with his principal and family friends, who advised him to attend a university. Some graduated, and some did not. Z has always lived with his mom and trusted what she says. He did not have many friends and thought attending college would give him a fresh start to making more friends. His few friends during high school said Z should further his education. Some of his friends went to college, while others did not. His challenges consist of legal battles and working a 9-5 job. He is trying to learn patience. He is trying not to look at the success of others and compare it to where he is and what he is doing. Some people recognize Z's creative mind, and that helps to validate what he is thinking.

When Z enrolled in a university, he was nervous to meet new people, even though he said he wanted to make new friends. He was raised around adults, mainly his mom, so he is skeptical when it comes to trusting males. However, as a recipient of one of the multicultural scholarships, he was

connected with an administrator in the Multicultural Center. This person grew on him and caused him to

rethink his perspective on males. Z shared the following.

> I appreciate him and everybody in the Multicultural Center just reaching out to me, taking care
>
> of me, and checking in on me. It just meant a lot to me. It kept me moving forward, and it kept
>
> my head up.

It was evident Z required support and positive affirmations to be successful. Z's college life was

challenging. While in college, he lived on campus. He experienced roommate conflicts. He moved to a

room alone because he was distracted by his living environment until he was not focused on his classes

and academics. His mom and brother would periodically drive to town to check on him. He appreciated

the support and the relationship they had during his college years. Z's roommate needed to respect his

personal space, and his roommate should not eat his food. These things were monumental to Z.

Although he moved, his focus improved but needed to be where it should be. It took him longer to

break things down, so he was tutored. Z acknowledged the tutoring helped him a lot. He liked tutoring

because it provided him with one-on-one interaction.

There were many times when Z felt like college was not for him. In his own words, "it is dead."

He knows he can do the work, but he lost interest. His focus is on being an artist. His goal is to save his

money and invest in his artwork. He has yet to make plans to finish college. College overwhelmed Z, and

he needed time to relax and take his mind off things. While attending the University, he did not stay in

contact with his high school friends but met new friends in college. They were supportive relationships.

He and his friends kept busy and were very active on campus. On the other hand, he saw being Black or

African American on a PWI as a challenge because he and his peers came from different backgrounds

and did not always see things the same way in class, but he stood by what he believed in and went on to

say it was challenging.

Some days, I would feel different from everybody else in the class. I felt awkward. Some days, I

would feel secluded when it came to my opinions versus theirs. Some people's presentations

had the Confederate flag in them. Some students also had the flag in their apartments.

While in college, Z reached out to people who had his best interest in mind.

The multicultural scholarship program was instrumental in helping him navigate through difficult

situations because it connected him to the Multicultural Center staff. The staff was able to help when he

was stressed out or overwhelmed about school. When his grades were slipping, they were able to uplift

him. He had a couple of meetings with the president of the University and was able to share his

experience and what he was going through. Those meetings helped him a lot. He met the dean of his

college through his connections with the Multicultural Center.

His connection involvement with the cheer team, bible study, and other events helped relieve

some of the stress he was experiencing. Z does not recall when he first became aware of the norms and

values of the institution. However, he does remember when he and a friend were sitting down, and

another student came up and called them the "N" word. It happened again to him in bible study. He felt

awkward and felt disrespected. He did not report it. It happened a third time to him, and by that time,

someone else submitted a report. In hindsight, he feels like he should have reported it.

Z and his mom stayed in contact with the staff of the Multicultural Center. There was one

person that he met with regularly, at least every two weeks. The person would assist with assignments

and life. They continue to stay in contact with one another. They found out about the Multicultural

Center through the multicultural scholarship. Based on his experience, he would recommend it to

anyone there. In Z's own words, there is a lot of patience, and there was a lot of time invested in me.

While on campus, he was able to form formal and informal relationships with people. What stands out

the most about his experience at the University is when his mentor asked him to draw a picture of a

speaker coming to campus, and he presented it to the speaker. That had a positive impact on his life, and he was able to establish a relationship with him. What stands out the most about his experience at the multicultural scholarship program is the people with his best interests, the mentors, and the love they shared. Z lived on campus and valued his friendships with students majoring in the same thing; he still stays in contact with some of them.

Findings Organized by Research Questions

I used three research questions to ascertain the role relationships play in the lived experiences of Black students on a PWI. A semi-structured interview protocol was used. The framework to capture and analyze the data was Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth Model (Yosso (2005). Nine participants completed the expectations of the research with one pre-interview and two one-on-one interviews in Zoom. Table 3 summarizes the data captured through the two interviews. The table includes pseudonyms selected by the participants to guarantee confidentiality. Of the nine participants, only one student is from a two-parent household with both biological parents. Four participants are still enrolled in college, pursuing their bachelor's degree. Three graduated with a four-year degree. Of the three, two are currently enrolled at the same University pursuing a master's degree. All three are presently employed: two full-time and one part-time. Two students still need to graduate; however, they are both employed. One now works two part-time jobs and plans to continue their education at a community college. The other participant works full-time and is an artist part-time. Once they can save enough money, they aim to resign from their full-time job and pursue their dream of becoming a full-time artist.

Table 3

Summary of all participants

Participant	Household	Parent(s) Earn Four Year Degree	Where Are They Now
Alyssa	Single Parent	Yes (both parents)	Still Enrolled
Anna Smith	Two Parents	Yes (both parents)	Working two jobs
Kevin	Two Parent*	Mother (yes) Father (no)	Still Enrolled
Kourtney	Single Parent	No	Still Enrolled
Michael	Single Parent	Yes (both parents)	Graduate Student
Mickey	Two Parent**	Yes (all four parents)	Still Enrolled
Skyler	Two Parents	Mother (yes) Father (no)	Assistant Coach/Graduate Student
Wallace	Single Parent	No	Recruiter for a Financial Institution
Z	Single Parent	Mother (yes) Father (don't know)	Food Service/Artist

*Divorced senior year in high school

**Biological parents never married/has two step-parents

Research Question One

What are the lived experiences of Black current and former students who are recipients of a

multicultural scholarship program while attending a midwestern public PWI?

   Hopes and Dreams. All nine participants aspired to achieve something beyond high school.

Although the idea of attending college emerged before they matriculated to college, it looked very

different for some. It also showed up at different times in their life. For some, dreaming of attending a

university occurred at an earlier age; for others, it only happened in high school. For others, it was

through persuasion or out of fear. When asked about their hopes and dreams while in college, here is

how the participants responded. Alyssa said:

> Yes, I wanted to do something college-related in my first year. But I wasn't in the right field because I was a biology major and wanted to be a doctor to impress my dad.

Although Alyssa knew she wanted to go to college, she was living out her dad's dream. Anna Smith, on the other hand, responded by saying:

> I've always loved school, so I always knew I would go to college because, after high school, I knew I wanted to do more. I knew I wanted a degree. I've always had a good relationship with school. I've been pretty good in school. I've always looked forward to school, and it's refreshing. I like having stability, and the school provides that. It teaches you to be punctual, leads you to be attentive and observant, communicate with others, and socialize with others.

Anna Smith knew she wanted to attend college and spoke of the by-products but not the primary product – the degree and profession she wanted. Kourtney, on the other hand, shared:

> The family has yet to attend a four-year college and complete a degree.

Kourtney was attempting to accomplish something no one else had in her family. As a high school student, Mickey set goals for herself and said:

> One of my most well-known goals is to go to school, get an education, and make a life for myself.

Mickey set goals for herself, and so did Skyler by stating:

> I always wanted to be a college softball player. My example of who made it was Kelly Montalvo, who was a shorter, multiracial athlete who played my position. She was my biggest hero at the time, which I looked up to when I was playing in high school.

Not only did Skyler want to attend college, but she also knew she wanted to be a collegiate athlete, and Kevin knew he wanted to be an engineer. He said:

> In the beginning, I wanted to be an engineer. So, I knew college would have to be in my route.

On the other hand, Michael had a different experience in high school. His experience helped to shape his dreams and how he approached them. He shared the following during the interview:

> I attended a predominantly black school before going to college. There are some moments in my life where I could have been more motivated for school. It was more like I was going with the flow. When it came to schooling, it came easy to me, and I realized that at a young age. So, whenever I was doing school assignments, extracurricular activities, or anything like that, it felt like I was going with the flow.

We see Michael not applying himself to his fullest potential and Wallace wanting to attend college because of his family circumstances. In his own words, Wallace states:

> I didn't have any idea of what I wanted to do. I wanted to help people and communicate in some form or fashion. Then, in my junior and senior years, I had the opportunity to be a part of the radio-TV broadcasting program. So, I started doing some on-air shifts. I did a newscast. But when it came graduation time, I applied for the multicultural scholarship and was fortunate enough to get it. I needed to go to school because I wanted to do that. I'm going to need to get a secondary education. I felt like I was intelligent. I'd always been told that I was going to do well and go far. But I realized quickly when it was college time that I couldn't attend University. That's going to cost me $30,000 a year. I can't stay on campus. I can't buy those meal plans. I couldn't afford it.

> My mom couldn't either. She could help me a little, but that was undoubtedly a concern financially. Moving forward was the opportunity to get a good education for a price I could pay. So, I chose early on. If I was going to postsecondary education, I did not want to go into debt, which is unique because, you know, I don't know that there are a lot of students that are like,

yes, I want to go into debt. Let's do this, but my goal was to go in, and if I wasn't going to come

out making hundreds of thousands of dollars. Then, I didn't want to be in debt.

When asked about his aspirations, Z responded by saying:

In high school, I was an introvert. I was like, college will be a fresh start for me. So, I would meet

many people, and it's goanna, like, Get me out of the box a little bit. On the other hand, you

should go to college. It would be best if you got a degree.

All participants admitted to the school and offered the multicultural scholarship were grateful. They

came from different environments with varied lived experiences. Their aspirational capital emerged at

different points in their younger years.

Family Support. All participants received encouragement and support from at least one parent

during their high school years. In every case, they mentioned their number-one supporter was their

mom. Some even receive support from their extended family members, while others do not have any

relationships with their extended family. However, it was evident the family unit was essential to all

participants. But their experience with family members all looked different. The following is an excerpt

from Alyssa's interview where she highlights her family support:

My paternal grandparents really motivated me. Strictly for the education part because they

fought in the Civil Rights Movement. So, they were huge on education. They were huge on, like,

this is who you need to be like. You need to be on your best behavior because there are many

white people out here who will see you, and then they'll be like, oh, okay, like, maybe black

people aren't so bad, and I can't contribute to negative stereotypes. Sometimes, I do slip up.

Her grandparents' experiences helped to shape how she showed up on the campus. They wanted her to

know how White people would perceive her if she did not live up to her paternal grandparents'

expectations and that she was representing their family name. Anna Smith, on the other hand, struggled

with some mental health issues. She said:

> I was pretty depressed. So, I had to work through some depression. My parents helped me by
>
> applying for scholarships and stuff for college, which helped me because that was one of my
>
> goals. So yeah, I'd say that mainly it was like depression. And the pandemic. Those were hard.
>
> That was the stuff that we had to get through.

Notice that Anna Smith said, "We had to get through," meaning she was not alone, and her parents

were there to support her. When speaking about her family and how they helped her, Kourtney shared:

> Many people motivated me and encouraged me. I feel we are family. You know my church
>
> family, my surrounding family, my mom, for sure. What she would do or say would constantly
>
> give me words of encouragement, remind me of who I am, and remind me of what I know that
>
> God can do for me, and continue to keep on pushing, as bad as I don't want to do it. Continue to
>
> keep on pushing.

Kourtney included her biological mom and extended family. Her experience included a village, and so

did Mickey's experience. She was very precise and strategic:

> Specifically, my mom, dad, stepmom, stepdad, and grandparents were very influential in my
>
> decisions. I asked my parents like. What are my strengths? What would I be good at?

Skyler did not have two sets of parents; she had one set of parents. In the interview, she explained:

> My mom and dad would always show me, in a grand scheme of things, people similar to me,
>
> that made it like President Barack Obama, that kind of thing where I had a role model to look up
>
> to that showed that I don't have to be constrained to what stereotypes hold us to? They tend to
>
> keep us in a small box where we can only be with others similar to us and not grow in ways that

minorities can; they tend to hold us in a box where we can't expand into other elements of our

careers or other aspects of our sports athletics, such as playing college sports.

Skyler is short in stature, and her parents provided examples of people of similar height who excelled in

the sport she was interested in and former President Obama, whom she could self-identify with.

Examples helped to reassure her that she could accomplish anything. Kevin's experience was different,

and he shared the following:

> My grandpa, specifically, kept the faith in everything, and my mom was. She has a business
>
> administration degree with a concentration in human resources. More opportunities, as well as
>
> making my grandpa proud with a degree. So, they continuously gave me words of affirmation
>
> and caring for me. I had it very well.

Michael was quick to note:

> Like my parents, they saw something at me and told me to try. Try harder to be the best
>
> possible student I could be. And with that motivation, they just told me that. Then, they just left
>
> me to figure out what that means. And so, once I actually started thinking about it. And, of
>
> course, we'd like some encouraging words. Every once in a while.

Michael credits his parents with seeing something he did not see in him. It was Wallace who expounded

on the role both he and his mother played in his pre-college experience:

> My mom played a significant role in that, right? I wanted to support her at some point and
>
> support myself, and I could do that. I started working young. I was 15. So, she always wanted me
>
> to be successful because she felt like sometimes she wasn't. And you know I try to change that
>
> narrative and let her know that. Hey? You're successful, and you know you did a great job raising
>
> me, and that's what everybody tells her. The strength came from, you know, wanting to do well
>
> for my mom but also wanting to do well for myself. I've always lived by the philosophy that I

wanted to work to live, not live to work, and captivate life, you know, and have the opportunity

to make a difference and make a change. Just be a good person. So, the strength came from

seeing the broken people around me.

My mom was always very consistent, you know, telling me that she wants me to have a good

education, and she wants me to get a good job and have the opportunity to have a good quality

of life. She didn't want me to live paycheck to paycheck. She didn't want me to struggle with

what she may have done in the past. She just wanted better than what you know. Her early life

was for me, and that's very selfless, and that in and of itself is a motivator. But we're both glass

have empty people, which I'm working on. But I've kind of, you know, tried to tell her as well,

like, hey, you did a great job; there was, you know, the deck was completely stacked against

you, and you rose above that, and you had the opportunity to succeed, so don't downplay that.

You know you had. You did. You had terrible circumstances, but you persevered. You did what

you needed to do.

We saw Wallace's mother supporting him, and he was pouring into his mother. Z, however, came with

uncertainty.

It wasn't a demand; it was a consideration like you should. You should at least try it. Like, my

family's always been supportive.

The familial capital the participants acquired provided them with the knowledge to assist them in

matriculating to college. Some came with more familial capital than others.

   Friends and Mentors. All participants had friends in high school. Some had more than others. It

is important to note how they interacted and the value they placed on the friendship. Only some people

mentioned that they had a mentor in high school. The mentors from high school influenced whether or

not a student considered attending a university or the career path they chose. Alyssa was reserved when she shared the following:

> My friends were pretty good. I only really hung out with a few friends outside of school. I had a select few friends that I would hang out with because my mom would have to call the parents and make sure that I could come over, and then she had to meet the parents, and then she had to inspect the house. My mom's actions were a lot, and I thought it embarrassing as a kid.

Anna Smith, on the other hand, was excited when she stated:

> I had a lot of friends. I was very active in school, the theater, the choir, and every extracurricular I could think of, but I had many friends. We all had most of the same extracurriculars together, and they helped me through hard times, like with the classes. Educational-wise, my friends were there for me cause we would help each other study and stuff, but we were going through normal high school drama.

We see Anna Smith connecting with everyone and anyone. She was socially connected. Having friends was vital to her. Although Kourtney did not elaborate on how many friends she had in high school, she was eager to share the following:

> It was before college; with my friends, everything was good. Everyone was getting along. Everybody was on the right track. Everybody had plans to go to college and to do something with their lives. Everybody had plans outside of just going to work every day.

Mickey, on the other hand, valued friendship regardless of who it came from:

> I've always had a smaller group of friends, but they were like best friends, so I didn't have a massive group of friends, but I once had a small group that was close to me. So we did sports together. We went to do stuff on the weekends. We just spent our free time together. But mainly a small group of friends for me. That was, I was close with. I played both volleyball and

tennis in high school and then cheered for the beginning of my first year in high school. So, oh!

And I did track my junior year, too. So, one of my goals was to go to school, get an education,

and make a life for myself.

I also valued what teachers told me in high school, like, oh, you're good at this. You should look

into this, taking in different information from those I trusted. I had a lot of supporters, and they

all, in their own way, said, you need to do what you're passionate about.

Skyler made it a point to talk about the diversity of her high school:

Before college, I attended a high school, one of the most diverse high schools in my hometown.

We had the highest rate of diversity in our district. They helped me get through a lot in high

school during those, you know, transformative years. My friends were just a group of four that

would hang out all the time we played. We played sports together. We were in classes together.

We're in the National Honor Society together. We were in biology, all that stuff.

When asked about his friends in high school, here is what Kevin had to say:

Many of my high school friends were competitive but kept their grades right. They ensured that

I kept migrating right when we competed in math to see who got the best score.

Kevin and his friends held one another accountable to achieve their goals. While Michael needed his

village, here is what Michael had to say:

When it came to schooling, I was in predominantly black schools just like half of my life,

surrounded by mostly black people. And so that's what I grew up with, and I was comfortable

with that.

With some mentors, they're like, hey, look, I like, we get that you feel this way. We understand

that you think school comes easy, but you need to work harder.

We see Michael's village as his comfort zone. Wallace had a small circle of friends as he shared his experience in high school. During the interview, Wallace had this to say:

> Yeah, I had a couple of friends, really good buddies in high school. So, we hung out all the time and did a lot. We would always joke around. We'd hang out outside of school; we would, you know, play tennis, play some baseball overall. Good guys that, we all hung out together. And, you know, did fantasy football and a whole bunch of other competitions and stuff together. I see these friends around me and acquaintances who aren't doing well. And you look at their path. And it's like, okay, they didn't focus on school. They didn't focus on starting something and not finishing it. You know they might be job hopping, or they might be struggling to make ends meet.
>
> So, I grew up in a predominantly white elementary school and a primarily white high school. Very, very, very few cultural experiences involved African Americans, the culture you know I am.

Z had very little to say about his friends. However, he did share the following:

> I only see my friends at school. I really didn't hang out with them outside of school.

All participants had friends in high school. They represented their social capital, whether they saw them as peers or acquaintances.

Research Question Two

How do internal and external relationships affect current and former Black students' degree completion in a multicultural scholarship program at a midwestern public PWI?

My Voice. Once students arrived on campus, parental support looked different. Students quickly realized they had to begin making decisions. Their judgments began to impact their level of success. Most embraced this newfound freedom, while others did not, as they struggled to accept their ownness

of making decisions and reevaluating their aspirations. Alyssa matriculated to college as a biology major, hoping to become a medical doctor. However, when she arrived, she shared the following:

> I knew I wanted to do something college-related, but I needed to be in the right field because I was a biology major. I wanted to be a doctor to impress my dad, and then I realized that I hated STEM classes. It was like every day after class, I would call my mom just sobbing, and I was like, I hate it here. I hate these classes. Then she said, "Okay, you must find something you like. And like I am, I don't think I've ever been so happy to be in school. School is sometimes very draining. But I wouldn't have survived my biology track this far, mainly because I wasn't invested in it for myself. My dad has more like a monetary goal. So, he wants more money. But my mom wants to help people more. As of right now, that's what I'm struggling with because I want money, but I also want to go into the sports psychology field. It's a new and upcoming field. So, I will be able to help people, but once more people invest in it, I will bring home the big bucks.

On the other hand, Anna Smith stayed with her major but stopped out. She shared the following in the interview:

> I was a theatre major. Theatre majors are social and outgoing, and I definitely could be if I wanted to be. But I worked on background stuff. I worked in lighting. It was my specialty so it could have been more sociable.

Kourtney, however, discovered what her true passion was not and was not hesitant to reveal her discovery:

> At first, I was enrolled at USI. My major was nursing. I had a passion for that since I was caring for my grandmother before entering college. I was in my major, nursing, and I took an anatomy class that I had previously taken. I took two previous anatomy classes in high school to get

college credits, but it was sped up once I got to college. Also, there were so many people within

there that part of that class needed help. My major is now individualized studies.

But when Mickey arrived on campus, she immediately knew her passion by stating the following:

Early in my first year, I changed my major to dental hygiene. And then, a few weeks later, I was

considering doing nursing. I'm a sophomore this year and currently a pre-dental hygiene

student.

With enthusiasm, Kevin was quick to say:

I no longer want to be an engineer. I want to separate myself from others. Being a competitor

has also made me want to strive to be better. I want to own a car dealership. I hadn't realized

that most of them didn't have degrees at all. And that's the main thing that I want to get into.

Most people in that field don't have degrees. I would separate myself because I would have a

degree. I'd be a step ahead and then go on to higher education. I'm trying to get my MBA. That

would separate me even more.

Skyler graduated from the university and has returned as a graduate student taking online courses.

However, she did not elaborate much outside of saying that she graduated from the same university

where she is seeking her master's degree. However, Michael said the following:

I was getting a degree in psychology, just like at a predominantly white school, where white

women mainly dominate. So, just like being a man in the classroom, I stood out, but I was

sometimes the only Black person or a couple of Black people in the school. I stand out in that I'm

a graduate student getting my masters in social work now.

Wallace found his voice and articulated this during the interview:

I transitioned to communication, loved it, loved the classes, loved learning, and still matched it

with my psychology as my minor. Then again, I had more people than I can count on my fingers

to say that that's a worthless major. And you know, I continue to say, hey, look, communication is what I want to do. There's nothing else that I want to do aside from communicating. There are specific avenues within that major, but I wanted to keep it general, and that's what I did. It served me well, but that was the most significant moment I was ready to drop out. It didn't have anything to do with professors didn't have anything to do with specific people. Just that, you know, the biggest struggle was making sure that my major was worth my time. That's a hurtful thing to say. You know that your worth plus major differs from the one you should be pursuing.

But Z has always known what he wanted to do and is still pursuing his aspirations. Once he found his voice, it could not be changed. He elaborated by saying that:

I know I could do it. I'm an artist. The thought of not finishing made me not finish because I just thought that being an artist made me feel like I could work and make money. I work my way up, save money, and invest everything into my artwork. But if I were in college, it would put me behind; I don't know. I thought about coming back later. But it's just like college is my second thought for now. I stopped the second semester into my second year. So, it's like two years in some to finish. At the end of the day, I know I don't have to do it if I don't like to do it. In a way, I still have my opinion on whether I should or shouldn't do it or whether I want to continue with sports or education. I would be a full-time artist. It is something I like to do. I can elaborate on the fact that I work a 9 to 5. I'm working for someone else. So, that's why I wouldn't say I like it. But if I'm a full-time artist, I'm not only working for myself, but my time is valued, and it's more important that I work for myself than someone else.

Family Affirmations. All participants mentioned positive statements from parents and extended family members in college. These words of encouragement helped them stay on track as they strived to achieve their goals. Alyssa was quick to say:

Everybody on my dad's side has been in the military, so they were like, go, go, everything is ABC.

You don't get to go like A, take a trip to C, and then return to B. So, there is that. So, there's

always been a lot of structure. My dad and I used to butt heads a lot. So, I used to challenge that

structure. So, we didn't have the best relationship. I primarily like getting most of my nurture

from my dad. My mom was there. I still got a lot from my dad, but I didn't accept it because we

were always fighting. My mom's side is more like it's all girls over there. So, it's more maternal,

like all, like every emotion, is welcomed over here. But I grew up more with my paternal side of

the family. So, I'm not a very emotional person.

With Anna's concern about the distance away from her family, she sadly spoke the following:

Since I was far away from my family, it was very different. But we had to communicate a lot over

the phone because I wasn't always physically there to spend time with them. They still let me

know that I was doing a good job.

Kourtney was not concerned since she was from the local community. With confidence, she uttered the

following:

My family reassured me. Reassuring me that I always had help, letting me know I wasn't alone.

One major lesson I have learned from family is that you're always family at the end of the day.

Never go against each other. Always stick together.

Mickey noticed very little difference in her family support. She shared the following in the interview:

My family is just as supportive as they were when I was in high school. It's definitely tough to do

from a distance. I am two hours away from home. My mom, stepdad, and grandparents on my

mom's side have learned to support me from a distance. My dad was actually stationed in

Kentucky, so he was closer at the beginning of my college and more supportive. Previously,

when I was in high school, He was in California. So, when I moved to college, it was easier for

him to be more supportive and involved because he was just four hours away instead of a flight

away. So, my family has continued to support me. It's definitely evolved and looks different than

physically being there. But emotionally, being there via social media or calling, I then make the

most of the time whenever I am at home. So, it definitely looks different. But they're still just as

supportive as they were when I was in high school.

Skyler was dependent on the family support and briefly shared this:

My parents and my friends were huge. They got me through that because I had to rely on them

so much since I had no other extended family to support me.

Kevin did not notice any break in receiving the support he needed from his family. He shared the

following statement:

I'm mostly on my mom's side. That's the side. I'm around the most. I'm also the oldest

grandchild. So I got all the extra support from them continuously, giving me words of affirmation

and caring for me. Support or love and care because I was the only one they had to worry about

at one point. I have it very well when it comes to that. They also reminded me who I am and

whose child I am, God.

In the interview, Michael, in his down-to-earth manner, voiced the following:

I had constant support while I was in college from my family. I was far from them, but it never

felt too far away. They would tell me things I should be doing or things I should seek out, just

like encouraging me. Both of my parents went through college. If they could do it, then I could

do it. So, they always gave me small encouragement to keep me going. Then also, my younger

sister was preparing to go to college, but you know, I would talk to her all the time, and we

would always go back and forth. Whenever I speak to her, it's like a moment to de-stress from

college. Eventually, she got into college, bouncing ideas off each other on how we should handle

things in college. So, it was just constant support when it came to my family.

Wallace shared in his soft-spoken voice:

It has been just me and my mom. Then, towards the tail end, she did start dating someone. She

was supportive 100 percent. Everybody supported me, but there was still a slight; oh, will he be

successful after college? Like, what is he going to do after college with a communication degree?

And the question is always, what will you do with that? And it's like, I'm not sure yet. And then

that leads down a rabbit hole that's like, well, maybe he is not, gonna you know finish, or he's

not going to do a good job doing what he's doing. So that's what I would say.

But it was Z who did not stutter when he declared:

I'm mainly close to my mom and my brother cause I've lived with them, and we have a very

close relationship other than my extended family. It was pretty good. I just kept in contact. I

didn't live at home. I lived on campus so they would check in on me every once in a while. I

wasn't too far from my family, so I returned here. They were supportive of everything I had to

do. Then, if I had some stuff going on back at college, they wouldn't hesitate to come see me.

Friends and Mentors. Friends and mentors continue to play a critical role in the participants'

lives as they navigate the labyrinth of higher education. In most cases, the high school friends were no

longer their friends. They no longer had the same interests. But to survive, they built new relationships.

When it came to mentors, everyone mentioned the role the multicultural team played in their support

system. Alyssa emphasized her friendships in college:

All of them shaped who I was. Some of them showed me who I didn't want to be. And some of

them inspire me today. One of my really good friends is up at Purdue; she's a biology major and

has taken biology classes every summer. She's a biology and chemistry double major. She's

currently taking 18 credits and working a full-time job. So, she inspires me when I think I can't keep going. I don't think she's ever had a B yet. But yeah, that's how she influenced me. Then some of my friends like my best friend. I love her to death; however, she and I have two different paths in life. I'm in college. She's attending night school but has a 2-year-old, and I know I could not survive being a teen mom. So, I have the utmost respect for her. However, seeing her go through that just forced me to, I don't know, it sounds terrible that I like to be more selfish and take my time for what I want.

Anna Smith was a student for two years, and here is what she had to say:

Sometimes, you just got to vent. You gotta get it out, and that makes you feel better. So, I had two very close friends that I would see. They were my support system up in college. My suitemate, we both had our own rooms, but she was like my long-lost soul mate. Like, I swear, we needed each other. She helped me through a lot, and whenever I was stressed out, it was like she always knew what to say. She's a very, very good human being. I wouldn't have gotten through school and academics without her. I'm going to be in her wedding. I'm hoping that we're forever like lifelong friends.

Kourtney quickly realized who was team Kourtney:

You see who has your best interests at heart. When you get older, you grow up with friends watching. Your friends like to change directions. Everybody's interests are different.

Mickey recognized that having new friends was okay. She stated the following:

So, my friends have changed since coming to college. I do not see those whom I called my best friends in high school, and I do not see them as much. When we went to college, we realized we did not have as much in common. Besides, my roommate is my best friend from high school, and our friendship has only strengthened. Nevertheless, I have met like-minded people in

college, not only in my major but in some organizations I am in, and I have just realized that I have more in common with them as I grow into an adult with those people. So, my friendships have changed, but for the better. I knew my roommate before coming here. We went to high school together.

Growing up, Skyler was not close to her extended family. It was she and her parents. However, as a student at the university, Skyler's friends became family:

My roommates were my teammates. They will be like my best friends going forward, and they helped me get through. They were there for me. We were always there for each other. They are more family to me than actual cousins. My friends, being so different from me, was a big lesson in general, especially with my teammates. We come from many different places and have lived very different lives, and there are things that I assumed about people in the South that were completely untrue. So, they opened my eyes to things I would have only gotten to experience if I got to know them. For instance, like someone who might stereotypically not be like me. However, rather than automatically assuming they will be unfriendly and mean to me. Give them a chance; they are some of the nicest people I have met. They are very cordial and very friendly. Before college, I would never have attempted to get to know them. My friends helped me understand and realize that I do not have to be scared of people, a person who looks like a stereotypical racist. She follows up with:

Well, we lived together for four years. They were the first ones I would go to when I was stressed out and needed someone to talk to and decompress with. We would go and do everything together. We had a tradition of getting ice cream from the ice cream shop near our house. We would look forward to NFL Sundays in the fall. One of them is getting married next year, and we will be standing at the wedding, and they will be in mine eventually.

With religion being a major part of Kevin's life, it was no coincidence that he would bond with his roommate. Here is what he shared in the interview:

> My roommate is very into his faith, and he has helped me grow in my faith. He made and kept my head straight now that I was not under my parents' roof. I am allowed to do my own thing and meet different people.

While some may have struggled with making new friends, that was not the case with Michael:

> It was easy to make friends being in a scholarship cohort. The skills we learned through the multicultural academic scholarship, both being like a leader and reaching out to people and just networking with people, made being here in college very easy. It was easier for me to reach out to people. Athletics also helped. I paired with another cohort of people that, you know, I had to be around and interact with constantly. So that made finding friends easy. I get that USI is like a PWI. However, I still found the friends I truly liked, like being around and creating, like my family of friends here, throughout these four years.

Wallace elaborated by sharing the following:

> My friends know that college is essential. They, too, are enrolled in college. My main two friends fell off after high school. One of my buddies did and still communicates with the other. But everybody was supportive, talking about homework assignments and sharing stories. I met so many people in college as well. However, I did meet people throughout the process, too, who became terrific friends. We worked through college together, and they were very instrumental and supportive, and we hung out outside of classes. I did not have a ton of friends because we were in classes.

One of Z's goals was to make new friends, and here is what he had to say:

I only kept a little in contact with friends from high school, but I met many in college, and they were supported, too. I had a good relationship with them as well. We did many things on campus; we were very active on campus. So, it kept us busy and kept us entertained.

Navigating a PWI. The experience of attending a university was different from high school. Students had to navigate through a much larger institution. Of course, COVID-19 played a significant role in negotiating the space. Their search for a way to connect with others who looked like them and had common goals became challenging. A few of the participants had experiences they had never had in their life. For instance, take Alyssa. She was very forthcoming in sharing some of her experiences:

Being a Black or an African American student is a strength and a challenge. It is a strength because I am not one to write people off maybe a week and a half into the school year. I walked into my roommate's room, and she was singing a song, and she said the N-word, and I was like, okay, I do not think that this is the best place for me, just because it is such a, I do not know, predominantly White community, and there is a lot of small towns. So that was an issue for me. Many microaggressions have allowed me to strengthen myself, like, I do not know, because I have let it just roll off my shoulders. I do not have the time or the energy to educate somebody on why you cannot say this. This incident happened my first year and not most of my sophomore year; I stopped it. However, sometimes it was just like talking to a brick wall, and I was like, okay, well, I cannot change what you think, but I think it has made me a more well-rounded person. Because, like one of my teammates, we were practicing before a game, and I ran in because I was done. Then she said, stay right there, we are going to play monkey in the middle. Do not say that because it was her and another White girl playing catch, and I was obviously in the middle, and she was like, I am so sorry, like I did not mean to say things like that.

Last year, there was a girl on my team that I played with when I was 14 or 15, and then right

after I turned 16, she called me the N-word. I told the coaches about it. They still brought her

here. So that was weird. Then, at our first tournament last year, they assigned us to the same

room, and I did not understand why they would room us together because it was bad blood. We

did not like each other. So, I called my parents. My parents got on the coaches. They were

passive and aggressive to me because they said I was overreacting. This experience happened a

while ago. She has matured. I was like, we were both 16, and now she is 18, so it has only been

two years. My parents reported it to the president. I do not know what they said about the

coaches, but I know they told the president about the situation, and she and I had a sit-down

conversation. We, the president and the athletic director, settled our differences.

A female administrator in the Multicultural Center helped me get acclimated to college. She also

kept me in the loop because she knew that I was upset about not being able to go to BSU

meetings. She has shaped my identity and helped me embrace myself as a strong Black woman

because she does not take anything from anyone. Nevertheless, she is also very respectful. So, I

know all the athletic staff, and they all know me. I am thankful for all the networking because it

is good to have a whole village behind me, looking out for me. However, it is also good, like

when I graduate for letters of recommendation, and just like knowing that I had the support and

did not have to go through all this alone.

Anna Smith, who attended the university, had this to say:

I am good at adapting. I'm a big observer. I can read the room like it is one of those things. Once

you are there, you pick up on it. I do not know. Everybody has their own set pace, you know. If

that makes sense, it is just one of those things you grasp once you are thrown into it.

Mickey had a different outlook:

It is a strength, being like being a person of color here in the university. as far as an example. I came from a predominantly Caucasian high school. So, I always felt like, in a sense, I stood out, and I felt different, but I was never treated any differently. It was just a noticeable thing around you, but my mom, who is white, has always encouraged me to formulate how I do things based on what the majority looks like. I should just be myself. How I grew up has helped me form my opinion that it is when you come from a place where few look like you. It is almost a strength to connect with those who are like you.

Furthermore, I came to college with a much more diverse campus than I was used to in high school. Meeting people within my multicultural scholarship cohort allowed you to connect on something you might not have if you were not the color you were. As a scholar, it opens the door in a way, too, connecting with people who look like you. I formulated that one because of where I came from. And then, when I came to the university and joined a cohort, and how the people looked like me, it strengthened me.

Skyler shared the following in her interview:

Seeing the president have so much confidence when addressing an entire class of students, and you had other students of all races that admired him, listened to him, and never questioned anything he said based on his race, was inspiring. That also made me confident in believing what I said, and I may have felt more confident because of it. There are times when people have made comments that I took offense to, but I was able to feel confident enough in myself. People were referring to playing Lift Every Voice at sporting events like volleyball. The volleyball team decided to do that for every game, which is fantastic. However, a girl said, oh, they are just going to change that to the National Anthem, and they will probably make it a booty twerking song and stuff like that. Furthermore, I was like, that is not cool. Moreover, I felt confident

enough that I, you know, could stand my ground and tell her like, hey, that is not right! Why

would you say that? That is not true! There is stuff going on in the world that needs to be

changed. First, the history of Lift Every Voice is about something other than dancing. It was

initially written as a poem before any of this stuff had ever happened. I do not know; I just felt

that I had enough of a backbone to stand my ground against someone who was, you know, a

teammate. My mom is the definition of a strong, independent black woman. She will not back

down. It is not in a wrong way like she does; she will fight for what is right, and when there is

something that needs to be addressed, she will address it. Furthermore, that is the way they

taught me to grow up. I will not take anything that will try to devalue me because I am worth

more than that.

Kevin was brief in his interview, saying:

I was in MCC, and having Collegiate Men of Distinction with others who may look like me and

hearing from them and their experiences helped. Most of them were older than me and had

been on campus for at least a year to 3 years longer than I had. Those conversations that we had

within and amongst us men were necessary.

Michael reported the following:

You are meeting people who are going through similar situations. Thus, having that community,

that circle that understands what you are going through, helped me get through those hard

times. Thus, when it came to those academic struggles or anything like that, having that circle

and support really helped, like my experience with the multicultural center and some of its

programs. I started to figure out what these services were or who I should connect with to

succeed in college. I took some of the experiences I learned from the multicultural center and its

programs and brought them to some of my communities. That helped me to get through college as well. So, that helped me grow not only as a person but also to help others grow.

Wallace commented:

I am the only person that is African American in my family. I struggled to find things to talk about; I also struggled to relate. I needed to familiarize myself with a lot of the different cultural pieces. Hair care was a huge thing that was funny at the time, but I was also hurting inside because, you know, I did not know what a wave cap was or what a "durag" was, or these different pieces that you know we are part of, and every culture uses those pieces. However, it is predominantly African Americans who utilize them many times. And I wanted to, you know, get waves. It was big for me, and I did not know the process.

I was asking, and some people were kind enough to tell me. And then other people laughed at me. So, it was a balance, and that was the most challenging thing right now: trying to fit in and learn when I did not have those cultural experiences. So, I did not have the exposure to that. I needed clarification on what that looked like. I was surprised to find out what their struggle was. I knew what my struggle was, and we often could not relate on that level because my struggle looked a lot different than theirs. I feel like that at times. I was looked at, as you know, as somebody who did not have any struggles because I was with a White family, and I had the opportunity to go to school and had food on the table and all of that, but we were going through our struggles as well. So having one parent, a single-parent household, is a struggle in and of itself. Having no, you know, father figure at all. Nevertheless, yeah, that is where I am at on that.

Z commented by saying:

I did have some classes where I was the only African American. So, I saw a difference between those classes and my going back to multicultural events when we had events. There is a difference between the two atmospheres. It was not more challenging, but it was different. The Multicultural Center helped me out because I would disagree with people in my classes. I did not come from the same background as the people I was in class when it came to the predominantly white classes. However, multicultural events felt like a home field because I was around people like me. I have been around the majority of my life and have come from similar backgrounds.

Feelings. Black students' lived experiences have many meanings as they struggle to achieve academic excellence. These barriers can include a lack of equitable treatment, microaggressions, and relatable knowledge inside and outside the classroom. In some instances, students feel a sense of invalidation. The injustices experienced by Black students can lead to them feeling uncomfortable in spaces and challenges in building relationships that can hinder their academic success. Here is what Alyssa had to say about her experiences as a Black student on a PWI campus:

In my first year, the seniors went out with everyone still in town. They were drinking in public, and they all had misdemeanors. One girl gave her fake ID to the cops. The coaches swept it under the rug and said, yeah, you guys will not get punished. Just do not do it again. So, that was an injustice because, like one, that was not a good example to show to us when we were freshmen. They were not suspended and did not have to miss any games. They did not even have to do any sprints-nothing. Another injustice I felt was that the same girl who gave her fake ID to the cops goes to one practice a week, but she still starts because she is a coach's favorite. Are there people better than her, 100%? However, that is just like a basic, borderline injustice, and I have talked to my dad about this. However, my coaches, especially the assistant coach, she sticks with all the short blondes because she is a short blonde.

Anybody who is not a short blonde is a threat to her because she is not used to them. I was

agitated, especially about drinking in public, because, as an athletic coach, she did not want to

make them learn their lesson, so some still went out. They still have fake IDs. They still go out to

the bars as minors, so that could have been a thing that was easily prevented. Now, they are on

a path where they can get a felony. If I had done that, I would have gotten in trouble, not only

with my parents but with the athletic staff, like with the multicultural scholarship, everything.

They would not have protected me as much, so I am mad.

In Anna Smith's two years, she did not have a personal experience to share, but in the interviews, she

shared something she heard about:

The only time I remember something happening on campus was when a student with Tourette's

was removed from campus, and it was a whole ordeal. Some students started a petition to get

him back on campus, and the whole thing was that he would yell derogatory things when

walking around campus. It was a very confusing situation. Just because, I mean, nobody wants

derogatory terms yelled out at them. However, at the same time, if you have a condition that

makes you say things you do not mean, and times you do not want to say them. It is like who is

right and who is wrong, and I do not know. I am trying to remember exactly how the university

handled it.

On the other hand, Kourtney was vocal about her perspective:

Being Black is a challenge because people look at us differently. After all, we have different skin

tones. You see a black person; you think they have a lousy credit score. They got baby momma

and baby daddy drama. They are not married to their significant other but have kids. You have

these stereotypes about Black people and stereotypes about other races, including White

people. So, it's a challenge for Black people to even be Black, just for those simple things

because of the stereotypes put out into the world to be used against Black people to White

people. You look at them; they have stereotypes and instantly think they have a great credit

score. They are married. They have a two or more-income home. They have multiple cars,

different things like that.

Being Black can also be a strength because we had to go through everything just to be here

today. Everybody knows that we went through 400-plus years of oppression. They beat us. They

use us, and we are standing today, still fighting for our race. There have been multiple events

that will follow up with my previous statement. For instance. the George Floyd case. He is not

the only person that this has happened to. There have been other people, such as Sandra Bland,

Trayvon Martin. and many others. Let us say, for example, that police brutality is one of the

main challenges we have faced within the past years as Black.

Skyler was not afraid of sharing her feelings and began with:

The amount of Confederate flags I saw driving up to campus was disturbing. I have never seen

one really other than on the back of a bumper sticker every now and then. But I mean, there

were certain houses like I knew, okay, like this part of the drive. There will be multiple

Confederate flags and something I was not used to. The first couple of times, I was scared. On

my visit and stuff, before I even decided to come to this university, I was scared then and during

the first couple of semesters of my first year. However, then, later on, I became angry at one

point. So, I went from scared to angry to just like they did not understand. Sometimes I feel like

many people with that symbol see it as representing the US. Alternatively, I often hear that as

an answer, and I do not understand that, considering the Union, they won anyway. The

Confederacy lost. I figure they do not understand anything about it. They were not taught what

it is like. They only see images and portrayals of what Black people are and never have that

experience and knowledge of getting to know someone and why that flag can be hurtful.

The most times I was ever uncomfortable in a situation or something like that was when we

were traveling as a team or playing a team that was just out in the middle of nowhere. I was

nervous about being out there, but having my team and coach behind me helped. She would

not take that. I know. Once, I was on third base, and some comment was made in the dugout,

and it was clearly directed toward me. I do not know what the comment was, but the way Coach

handled it, she was ready to fight for me. So, having that support system also made me feel

good and safe.

There was another time when me and my teammates were walking out of a restaurant just

getting food, and then someone was giving me a look. I had like four teammates. I was looking

back at them. I said, okay, guys, it is okay. It is okay. They were ready to, you know, post up on

them. Because you know, we are a team. We are, you know, we are all friends. I am not one to

pick a fight. But I will definitely defend myself. So, in these situations, sometimes it is best if I

keep moving forward and do not necessarily bring any attention to it. Sometimes I do not even

notice. Then there were times when I would say, I appreciate it, guys, let us not get in a fight.

And many times, it is one of those things where it is not necessarily worth intervening and

letting them go their way, and I will go my way.

Michael elaborated with this:

One day, some people or a group drove by, and they were just like, Oh, do you even go here? I

turned around and just brushed it off. I was like, whatever, like, you guys are just weird. I started

to realize you could get that a lot at a PWI, and it made me feel for other people who may have

gone through something similar or even worse than me. So, of course, it left me upset because I

did not expect that coming to a university. I thought everybody would be open or mature enough not to do anything like that. However, After a while, I just said OKAY, those people are weird. I will not let that affect how I see other people who may not be, you know, my race or my color. And so, it got me to speak out more against that discrimination. I focused on informing people more about people of color and some of the things we go through to help them understand that we can all come together just because we are all human. So, we are different colors. We have different backgrounds, cultures, and everything that makes us unique. But at the end of the day, we are all people and should be treated the same in that regard.

As a tutor, Wallace observed two instances where students with a disability experienced what he called an injustice:

> I would say that there are two instances, both involving the same principle, of a professor not allowing additional time on an exam for a student who had a learning disability and had that cleared through the disability office. There was given the aura of like you need to be done in 50 minutes. No exceptions. They like to, you know, remain confidential and get that extra time. Just some disability guidelines not being met certainly frustrated me as a tutor. Everything got resolved, and they took measures into their own hands. They were able to get things resolved with the disability office. As a student working as a tutor, I certainly had considered and thought maybe I needed to escalate this to the disability office or the college dean.

> Regarding injustice, I had a professor that just was not good. He was the worst professor I have ever had in my four-year career. Unfortunately, this individual was the department chair, so there was nowhere to go. I feel like there were multiple injustices in that class, including the disability piece. That was one where the individual needed more time, but that one got

resolved. However, there were many things that, just like you know, were small but impactful to my career.

Z was very vocal about his experience by sharing the following during the interviews:

Many people use the Confederate flag based on where they are from and stand by that flag. However, for me, as a person of color, that flag was meant to keep segregation going and seclude everyone else like we are not human beings. So, every time I see that flag, I think of nothing but bad things. It makes me feel like you are the type of person to seclude me from everybody just based on my skin color. So, I did see a few of those in certain people's presentations, which made me know the type of person they are, just based on that flag. So presentations like in class or seeing it in people's apartments or what both made me feel different and filling secluded from everybody else

There is a big situation that happened on campus. It was me and another friend of mine, and he was a person of color. Furthermore, we sat at a table, and they called us the n-word. That person cannot just do that. The person I was eating with had just finished telling me the story of a guy with a stuttering issue, and he said something in the class that was offensive. It was the n-word. And so, I was really offended by that, and I was like, I know you have a stuttering problem, but I know someone had to teach you that to say that because I know people have said it to us personally.

I cannot say much about that because I knew some people knew about this person. They knew they had to be taught something like that to say it. So, it happened more than once. We were also at Bible study on Wednesdays, and it was predominantly White people in there, and it was not even quiet, like calling me that he was screaming, so I felt awkward, and it was wrong. It was wrong in general, and I felt like something had to happen where I did not have to be around that

or have that happen to me again. So, there is a big case on it, and I know they handle it. But many people felt disrespected because they thought it was just the fact of him having a stuttering problem. So he should not be on campus when, in reality, it was because of the situations of him calling people like me and people of color the n-word, which is not a respectful thing to do. I guess I was just born different. I did not know if I was in the wrong; I guess I just felt too friendly, in a way, because I felt terrible. After all, he does have a condition.

Then, at the same time, I felt very disrespected. I had mixed emotions, but I handled it well. I did not talk to anybody about it per se, and I did not report it. By the time the third occurrence happened, I knew I should have reported it, but I had other people also tell me that they had reported it. They felt the same way I felt: it was degrading. I acted well. It could have gone left. Furthermore, I could have been disrespectful or did something that probably would not have been reasonable, but instead, I handled it well and just turned away from the situation. I should have talked to someone in a higher position about the situation, but I felt like, at the time, it was just me. There have been times when I wanted to get physical with people. However, I do not know; I just saw this person for who he was, and I did not want my education on the line. Then it would not be good for me. There are things I could have done better.

Research Question Three

What are current and former Black students in a multicultural scholarship program perceptions of the role of relationships in their academic success?

Inclusive Environment. Having friends and acquaintances on campus became more critical in college. These relationships proved invaluable as participants learned how to navigate the system. However, they quickly realized that connecting with faculty, administrators, and staff was critical to their academic success. These students came with the expectation of seeing more students who looked like

them and university employees who looked like them. These individuals would serve as the Black

students' connectors to the university. Alyssa was more than willing to share the following:

> I met a female administrator through my interviews from the multicultural scholarship program.
>
> She was always there for, like, our pre-week stuff. So, I just talked to her because I did not know
>
> anybody else. She reminded me of my aunt. She just felt like home. Then I met an administrator
>
> in the athletics department through my dad because he came here for some work for an athletic
>
> association, and we were having lunch before he met with the athletic director and the female
>
> administrator. They are all supportive, like even the higher-ups. Like the athletic director, he still
>
> checks in on me, and so does the president. It is great that there is such a well-liked, connected
>
> community here. As a university president, you do not have to reach out to students. You do not
>
> have to do anything except be the university president. So, I like that. He is there for all the
>
> students, especially the minority ones because I was expecting to come down here and have this
>
> like old dying White president who did not care about anything except football. He was mad
>
> that we did not have a football program. I only found out who our president was when I did not
>
> know. I did not know we had a Black president for a while.

Anna Smith emotionally shared the following:

> I often use a staff member in the Multicultural Center as a resource. I used my lighting tech
>
> director because my focus was on theater. He was equal and fair to everybody and treated
>
> everybody the same. I felt like he was always there and willing to answer my questions. It is like I
>
> was not a burden to him whenever I tried to learn. There was also a staff member in the
>
> multicultural Center because I met them whenever I interviewed for the multicultural
>
> scholarship.

Furthermore, they had me in class, and I am sure I was bugging them constantly. They both

helped me, academically and emotionally, to get through the tough times with myself.

Whenever I spoke with the staff member in the multicultural Center, it was more about family

things, just internal struggles that I was dealing with personally. They both treated me very

respectfully, and I recommend anybody to reach out to the staff member in the multicultural

Center if a student needs help within the university.

Kourtney was eager to share her experiences since returning to the university:

Kourtney named four employees at the university who helped me by encouraging and

motivating me. Also, I want to know that I always have the resources and the help needed to get

through college if I needed the resources. Two of the four employees worked in the

multicultural Center. The other two employees included a faculty member and an academic

advisor (not Kourtney's assigned advisor). There should be more Black advisors for the number

of Black kids attending a PWI to be more comfortable with someone genuine. Some people may

see the genuineness that she brings to the table and her love for her job, which may inspire

others to want to do their job and have a passion for it.

The Multicultural Center staff helped me in many ways. They helped me by encouraging and

motivating me to know that I always have the resources and the help needed to get through

college. I knew that they would have them, or if not, they could quite quickly find out some

information that could help you in any way to help shape you. I was treated well. I was treated

like I was cared about and overall true with respect, and not just like I did not know anything,

like I was incompetent. I encourage others to see these people. I have, since knowing some

incoming seniors who just became first-year students.

The multicultural scholarship had cohorts. Once I started in my cohort, I had a mentor from the previous cohort. That helped me because I could go to older, more experienced college students who could help me with different resources, such as where to go if I needed extra tutoring, or they could help me if I needed to help within a class. They help me get around school most of the time. In the beginning, they walked me around campus, showing me where each class was; if I had my class schedule already on me, they would show me where this class in this class was located.

Kourtney responded by saying:

Four employees at the university helped me by encouraging me and motivating me. Also, I always have the resources and the help needed to get through college if I need the resources. Two of the four employees worked in the multicultural Center. The other two employees included a faculty member and an academic advisor (not Kourtney's assigned advisor). I feel like there should be more black advisors for the number of Black kids attending a PWI to be more comfortable. Someone genuine. Some people may see the genuineness that she brings to the table and her love for her job, which may inspire others to want to do their job and have a passion for it.

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Mickey had something different to share about her experience:

My advisor and the Multicultural Center have been the two groups of people that I have gone to for help. I have relied on my advisor a lot. She has gotten close enough to me to know me more so she can see my personality and help me decide between two majors. Early in my first year, I changed my major to dental hygiene. However, no doubt, anyone in the Multicultural Center is in there regarding resources, answering a question or finding out about programs that are going on. I am a scholar of the multicultural scholarship. I have even been able to share the information with my roommates and other friends. I was introduced to the multicultural staff as a scholar in the multicultural scholarship program. I have learned a lot, and I had many resources. So, everyone in the MCC is just very accessible. They are personable. So they have just given me a sense of trust that I know they are people I can go to, no matter the situation. I built personal relationships with the staff because I participated in pre-week meetings and in class. I was given those connections because I was a scholar.

Skyler reported:

I contacted two staff members in the Multicultural Center, my coach, and a person in my primary field of study. I was close with my physics professor because I struggled a lot, so he helped me and was always available and always willing to help. From the beginning, my coach

was a resource with all my questions at USI. I did not go to the Multicultural Center when there

was a problem. However, I just wanted someone to talk to or get updates. Everyone in there is

very good at listening and also very good at just being excited for people. It was always nice to

have a place to go to, and just like, I did something good.

I would use my coach as a resource all the time. I saw her every day for four years. Sometimes

again, I would go talk to them just for fun, or sometimes I would talk to them when something

was going on, and sometimes like I asked them for help concerning like job applications, you

know, back when I was starting out or grad school applications and stuff like that.

Kevin offered his perspective on his experience:

I only had a few questions. I got most of them answered through pre-week by all of the

representatives of the offices that came in to talk to the scholars. Questions that I had when it

came to my academics: my advisor could answer everything that I needed. I used my advisor a

lot when it came to helping me get through certain classes because I was not sure if I would. She

helped me set up my schedule. I used the writers' lab a lot. I did not go in, but I emailed them. I

used them a lot during my second semester because I had a 300-level class online, and I just

wanted to ensure I was doing it right. I could not imagine being in 300 and not passing. I was too

scared. I use my professors as my tutors. I have run a few questions by some people on the MCC

staff and even students who are in there quite often. The people in MCC, of course, were very

helpful as I have been coming, seeing them for a while now.

Michael sums up his experience with:

I relied heavily on my mentors throughout my undergrad years. As I said, I met the Multicultural

Center staff through the multicultural scholarship program. There were three people in the

Center. They are the main people that I relied on throughout my undergrad because not only

did they know me from the multicultural scholarship. However, they also knew and saw the

potential of what I could be and put me in positions where I could grow. I am very grateful for

what they have done for me in terms of pushing me to succeed. They got me out of my comfort

zone and got me to seek out what I wanted in life. That helped me see who I could be if I just

put in the work. I remember, especially in my undergrad years, there would be some instances

where they would sign me up for some opportunities. They wanted me to get out of my comfort

zone and be comfortable in the uncomfortable so I could grow. My experience was amazing; I

would not have had it any other way. I will always recommend people to go to them because I

already know that they have the best interests of people at heart.

Another participant, Z, had this to share:

I had many meetings with a particular staff member within the Multicultural Center. I met him

through there. I kept in contact with him. My mom knew exactly how to keep in contact with

him and everybody in the Multicultural Center. I was in there at least twice every two weeks. I

found out about them through my multicultural scholarship. Based on my experience, they had

a lot of patience, and a lot of time was invested in me. The man in the Center was a perfect

person that anybody could go to because he heard me out and barely knew me. So why would it

be any different for the next person? I recommend that staff member to somebody else.

Chapter Summary

Chapter four offered findings from the qualitative study to understand the role relationships

played in the lived experiences of Black current and former students in a multicultural scholarship

program. Figure 2 displays major relationships participants developed. The researcher's findings in the

study noted common themes and patterns related to the role relationships played in the lived

experiences of Black students on a PWI campus. Eight key themes emerged from an analysis of the

interview data using a deductive approach of INvivo coding. This method allowed the researcher to use interviews to elevate the participants' voices.

Figure 2

Participants Relationships
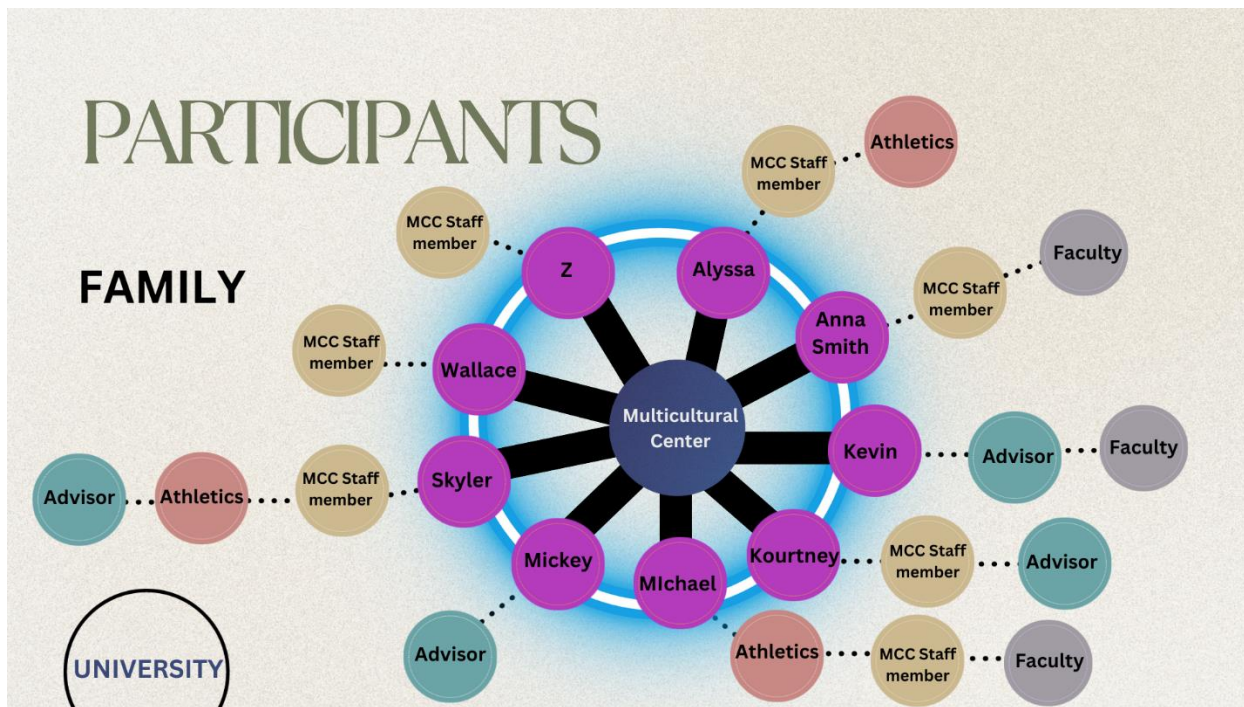
Chapter 5: Conclusions

Discussion

   I interviewed nine current and former students who self-identified as Black or African American and participated in a multicultural scholarship program. The program currently has seven cohorts. I reached out to participants in cohorts 1-6. They represented those who completed at least one year in the program. I aimed to answer three research questions.

Question 1: What are the lived experiences of Black current and former students who receive a multicultural scholarship program while attending a midwestern public PWI?

Question 2: How do internal and external relationships affect current and former Black students' degree completion in a multicultural scholarship program at a midwestern public PWI?

Question 3: What are current and former Black students in a multicultural scholarship program perceptions of the role of relationships in their academic success?

   Critical Race Theory served as the macro theory for this research. Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth model served as the micro theory. Consistent with Yosso's CCW framework, I was interested in how relationships functioned as a social and cultural capital source for Black or African American students attending a PWI. I paid close attention to their relationships during high school and college. During this research, eight significant themes emerged from the interviews with the participants. They were: 1) hopes and dreams, 2) family support, 3) friends and mentors, 4) my voice, 5) family affirmations, 6) navigating a PWI, 7) feelings, 8) inclusive environment. The relationships between these themes and the forms of community cultural wealth are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4

Themes in data and their connection to community cultural wealth

Major Themes	Major forms of capital represented in the data
Hopes and dreams	Aspirational capital
Family support	Familial capital
Friends and mentors	Social capital
My voice	Linguistic capital
Family affirmations	Navigational capital
Navigating a PWI	Navigational capital
Feelings	Resistance capital
Inclusive Environment	Social capital

The following information supplements the findings in chapter four.

Hopes and Dreams

During the interviews, participants shared their hopes and dreams. Most knew college was in the plans. Their reasons varied. Alyssa, Michael, and Skyler had plans to be collegiate athletes. Kevin, Kourtney, Mickey, and Wallace wanted to make their families proud of them. Anna Smith, an extrovert, and Z, an introvert, wanted to meet new friends. Anna Smith stated she had many friends and wanted to make more new friends. She was very friendly and involved in everything she could be a member of. On the other hand, for Z, higher education was only in his plans once his mother and high school officials encouraged him to try it. Z did not have many friends and wanted to change that.

Family Support

Participants emphasized the importance of their relationships with their families while attending high school, as a student attending a midwestern public PWI, and after they graduated or were no longer undergraduate students. These relationships provided the foundation they needed to achieve their aspirational goals. Six of the nine participants came from a single-parent household when they enrolled in the university, two from a two-parent home, and one from a family where biological parents never married but married other people. All participants knew they wanted to attend college, whether, through parental encouragement or nudging, they knew it was inevitable.

Friends and Mentors

Those relationships were crucial in participants' decisions regarding friends and mentors. Some participants indicated that they and their friends had conversations about attending a college or university after graduating high school. In contrast, others relied on their mentor's wisdom to guide them. Once they arrived on campus, the beginning of new relationships started with the members of their cohort. Those students became their new circle of friends. The sophomore students became their mentors along with the staff of the multicultural center. Some found it challenging to make new friends on their own and always came back to the multicultural center for support.

My Voice

Attending a university proved to be a different world. Participants were accustomed to someone telling them what to do and when to do it. It was here they began to realize they had a voice. They were able to make decisions without permission. The two most significant decisions they made were their major and career path. For example, initially, Alyssa selected her major and career path through pressure from her father. She did not want to disappoint him and go against his wishes for fear of getting in trouble. She always wanted to please him even though they would butt heads. All students

found their voice and began to make decisions they felt would make them happy, as opposed to living

out the dreams of their family.

Family Affirmations

The way family members supported students changed when participants attended the

university. Two significant things had an impact on how family members were able to help their

students: distance and COVID. Some started during COVID-19, and some finished during COVID. With

COVID came more emotional stress because building relationships was a challenge for students taking

classes in a virtual space, whether at home or on campus.

Therefore, students leaned more on their existing relationships for support. That support came

in the way of positive family affirmations. For most students, it was their mom who came to the rescue.

Z spoke of his mother and brother a lot. They checked on him and reminded him that he could do it. On

the other hand, based on what was shared in the interviews, Mickey mentioned the most positive

affirmations from her family.

Navigating a PWI

When thinking about their experience and what stood out the most, all participants mentioned

the multicultural scholarship program Pre-week as being instrumental in their ability to connect with

students, employees, and offices across campus. They believed it was the platform for them to begin to

build relationships. They also mentioned the staff members of the Multicultural Center as being

instrumental in their ability to navigate through systems and processes at the university since the center

was responsible for the scholarship program. Participants said they were the first people they met and

continued to return to them for support because they trusted them. Claude Steele states that for many

Black students, the degree of racial trust they feel in their campus life, rather than a few ticks on a

standardized test, maybe the key to their success (Perry et at., 2003). The center served as their home base.

Feelings

Several became emotional when speaking of their experiences as a student and began to wonder if it was the right place for them. They were very graphic when describing situations that impacted them as a student. Those situations included seeing the Confederate flag in students' rooms and classrooms and commuting to campus. Some spoke of their interactions with faculty, coaches, and academic advisors. They felt their voice was unheard and they were not valued as individuals.

Inclusive Environment

Many participants arrived on campus expecting to see more students and employees who looked like them or could relate to them culturally. It could be they needed to understand what a PWI was. It is interesting to note that before arrival, they did not know the university's president was African American until they attended the new student convocation. Seeing him at convocation speaking to people who did not look like them gave some participants the reassurance they needed that this university was for them. However, others observed and questioned why they only found one Black academic advisor on campus. One participant, in particular, stated that this was a struggle for them. This student stopped and returned and adopted the one Black academic advisor as their advisor. They did this because they wanted to talk to people they felt had similar experiences. Lived experiences played a vital role in whether or not a participant formed a relationship. It is important to note that this person was not their assigned academic advisor.

Implications

As participants of a multicultural academic program shared their lived experiences at PWI, it was evident to me that relationships played a critical role in their success. Through scholarship resources,

they could live out their aspirations of achieving a college degree. However, it came with barriers and challenges as they struggled to connect with the university community. For most, their circle of friends and mentors were limited to those who could relate to them as an individual or understood their plight. For example, Kourtney, who "stopped out" and returned, chose not to seek advice from her assigned academic advisor and sought assistance from an academic advisor who looked like her and could relate to her experiences. She questioned why the institution had only one Black academic advisor and wanted to know if anyone noticed that Black students were there to get an education, too.

On the other hand, Z came to campus wanting to start a new chapter in his life, which included establishing new friends and mentors. However, he needed help with connecting to the campus. He became frustrated in the classroom and the residence halls when the confederate flag was prevalent in class with student presentations and his living space. He understood the flag's symbolism and questioned if he was welcomed on campus. Alyssa felt discriminated against and struggled with those mentors who could not self-identify with her struggles. What gave her solace was seeing the president, who is Black, stand in front of a group of new students during convocation. Hearing and seeing him gave her the strength to use her voice to deal with her struggles. She told herself if he can do it, so can I.

Using the lens of CRT and Yosso's CCW model allowed me to explore the relationships, experiences, and isolation of these students. No matter how hard they tried to be independent and face the ills of society, they always found comfort in staying connected with the staff in the multicultural center. This was a place where they saw people who looked like them. This was a place where they felt like their voices were heard, even if it wasn't what they wanted to hear. This was a place where they could connect with at least one person who understood the barriers and challenges they were facing. This "hub" was a place where mutual trust and respect existed. This is where they could stay grounded in their culture and know they were valued. For instance, Wallace was the only Black in his family and

felt like he missed out on the ability to embrace his heritage. He saw the multicultural center as a place where he could learn about the heritage he had been deprived of.

Had it not been for the multicultural academic scholarship, the funds that came with it, the multicultural center, and the staff, one would question if these scholars would survive. Contrary to what most believe, the centers on PWI campuses cannot and should not be the only place young Black scholars feel valued and can establish meaningful relationships. It is the responsibility of all members of the community to embrace these young Black scholars and provide them with a holistic education.

Regarding academic freedom in the classroom, faculty members must set boundaries for themselves and the students. Faculty members must be clear and transparent with expectations in the classroom. All students should feel and know they are valued and respected in the classroom. Students should be able to hear and see themselves in the material taught. Faculty should feel comfortable having conversations with all students, not just some. Courageous discussions should take place within the colleges to see who needs to be added to the table. There should be meaningful opportunities for these students to connect with their colleges.

Administrators must play a significant role in connecting with Black students as they struggle to connect with their university. The participants revealed in their one-on-one interviews that the campus differed from what they expected. Many wanted to leave. Knowing that Black students struggle to connect through relationships provides opportunities for administrators to be intentional with their programming and initiatives. They must diversify their offerings and include these students in the decision-making process.

This discussion is mute if we continue to have elected and appointed officials supporting and passing legislation such as Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President and Fellows of Harvard College, 600 U.S. (2003) and the Florida HB7 Individual Freedom Act (Stop Woke Act). Where is the "fair" and

"fair" for whom? Black people continue to be stripped of their opportunity to remain in the classroom (as student scholars and educators), connect with their culture (through books, literature, and scholars), and have all rights and privileges as a citizen of the U.S. The research shows that education opens the door to opportunities. The door may be closing, but it is not locked. Have those in power become so dissatisfied that they must resort to manipulation? If so, it is more important than ever to keep Critical Race Theory alive and grab the baton from Alan Freeman, Patricia Williams, Derrick Bell, Mari Matsuda, Kimberle Crenshaw, Charles Lawrence II, Richard Delgado, and Cheryl Harris and continue to challenge the implicit and explicit structures and practices of our society, by starting with higher education.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future researchers could deepen the understanding of the role relationships play in the experiences of Black or African American students in a multicultural scholarship program by examining their lived experiences at an HBCU. This study could be the foundation of a comparative study that examines how the experiences differ between a PWI and an HBCU. Additionally, future studies could involve all first-generation college students, all male or all females, in a multicultural academic scholarship program. Also, comparing students from a single-parent household and a two-parent family could prove beneficial.

These qualitative studies could be the starting point for mixed method studies examining how relationships are started, what constitutes a relationship between others, and what role relationships play in the success of Black or African-American students in a multicultural scholarship program. Researchers could also explore the types of relationships a student forms and why or why not. These same questions could be asked of scholarship programs designed just for Black or African-American students.

Understanding the lived experiences of Black and African American students in a multicultural academic scholarship program would assist universities in creating a community where authentic relationships are established to develop a strong sense of community where every student knows they belong. More research could also be devoted to better understanding the role of multicultural scholarship programs with a pre-week influence on the academic success of Black and African-American students.

Conclusion

Relationships are central to Black student success at PWIs. It is evident in this research that these students who self-identified as Black or African American valued and were committed to their education. Through their lived experiences, they brought the cultural capital needed to succeed. However, they initially struggled to connect with the campus and navigate the educational system embedded with whiteness as they searched for those who could relate to their identities and struggles. As they shared their experiences, it was evident that, at times, it was challenging to focus on their academic success. These scholars relied heavily on the multicultural center staff to assist them with strategies to navigate through a system not designed for them to succeed. Their existence in a multicultural scholarship program on a PWI campus presents constraints in forming relationships. Their lived experience provides opportunities for faculty, administrators, and staff to reshape higher education and alleviate barriers that create unnecessary struggles for those students who self-identify as Black or African American. This research also eliminated the voices of African-American students to provide the impetus for elected officials to be bold in their actions to create resources and opportunities that will continue to provide access to higher education for all students, not just some.

Institutions must be as legislative pieces are passed. If not cultural centers, funding, scholarships, hiring practices will be removed and Blacks students once again will be denied the education they rightful deserve as tax paying citizens of the U.S.

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