

The Pennsylvania State University

Graduate School

College of Education

IN FULL COLOR:

UNDERSTANDING THE MEANING AND IMPORTANCE OF CULTURE TO
COLLEGE STUDENTS OF COLOR THROUGH CULTURAL SELF PORTRAITURE

A Thesis in

Educational Theory and Policy

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirement
for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

August 2007

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Abstract

The purpose of this research study was to explore how students of color at predominantly white institutions define and articulate their culture. Additionally the study was concerned with understanding why their culture and cultural engagement is important to them. Of particular interest is how students perceive the impact of cultural experiences on their cultural growth/cultural efficacy development.

The goals of the study are: (1) To contribute to the development of a greater understanding regarding the meanings college students make of culture. (2) To inform the purposes and outcomes for cultural practice (co-curricular programs that focus on race, culture, or ethnicity) at the university level by providing a student-centered starting point from which programs can be conceptualized; and (3) To determine how culture impacts the personal development of students of color as perceived by the students themselves.

Qualitative methods were utilized in this study. The study was methodologically driven by the traditions of phenomenology and portraiture. Data collection included two components. In the first phase, two group interviews of nine students (18 total) were conducted at two large public institutions. The interviews provided a starting point for students to explore their thoughts about culture and to discuss cultural engagement in college. The second component involved students in writing cultural self portraits. The portraits were personally narrated written reflections sharing students' life stories, ideas about culture, opinions of culture in college, and thoughts on the importance of culture. Students

were provided a basic guide with questions to answer in the self portrait, but were generally offered freedom of choice and creativity regarding what to include, how to structure their portrait, and the length of the document.

The study was conceptually guided by combining research on ethnic identity development and critical race theory with the theory of actionable space. Ethnic identity theories informed the understanding of the process by which individuals gain an ethnic sense of self and the various issues confronting students of color as they become more ethnically aware. Actionable Space is also a continual process theory. The theory was used to understand the various *types* of personal practices and activities that help individuals to develop an understanding of and appreciation for their culture. Critical Race theory influenced the use of narrative in the study and illustrated how narrative can provide opportunities to hear the authentic and personal voice of those studied.

The data revealed that to college students of color, culture included more functional life tools than ritualistic practices. To the students in this study, culture was defined as a toolkit that included family bonds, life survival strategies, the practical and social functions of art and religion, a value for education, and a sense of legacy. Students indicated that culture was indeed important to them for both institutional and personal reasons. Cultural engagement was expected in college to help them adjust and to feel connected to campus. But more importantly, they saw it as a necessary venue through which they could come to better know and understand themselves. Culture was revealed as an important

protector against all of life's challenges including family struggle, community failure, educational isolation, and racial pain.

The very personal and intimate views of culture shared in this study offer cultural practitioners in any field a better understanding of how contemporary young people may approach and understand culture. This is particularly relevant for those professionals that develop cultural programs and initiatives aimed at this population. These programs must be framed by viewing culture through the same lens of understanding as the current student population. Therefore, the study offers a contemporary view of culture in communities of color. The study also provides new information on how and why culture is important to college students. This research contributes to the existing base of knowledge on the benefits of cultural diversity within higher education.

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Dedication

What is most special about my educational journey and dedication to cultural appreciation, is that both were motivated by the imaginative talents of my ancestors--storytellers whose creativity saw neither pen nor paper and whose wonderful cultural talents never entered the doors of a bookstore or the halls of the academy. Instead, they fed generations of young children in our family. My grandfather was a wonderful storyteller and poet, traveling to churches around the state of South Carolina to share his talent of oratory. His daughter, my mother, inherited this literary creativity, writing poems and telling her children and grandchildren the most imaginative stories of family legacy. My mother has always desired to write and to publish. It is because of this that my professional work embodies the spirit of Alice Walker's great insight in her legendary text, "In Search of Our Mother's Gardens." Walker discusses how the immense artistic and literary talents of many black women were oppressed through the years by relegating them to servant and maid status. According to Walker, many of these women chose as their canvas the only mediums they had available to them--gardens, quilts, and clothes. This dissertation, and everything that I have done in my work as a cultural practitioner, is more than research and professional production. I have found my mother's garden. My family was a modest one, unable to leave financial inheritance. But what my ancestors have passed down through the years is an inherited creativity that I am so pleased to share with the world. Through this work I re-member all of those that made me. Thank you for both your brilliance and your tenacity for survival. Through me you are free.

PROLOGUE

A little over ten years ago, as a young African American college woman, I began what was to become a significant cultural journey. College came to serve as an extension of a life filled with cultural growth and learning. It was almost impossible to imagine life without the rituals, activities, and values that had come to frame my existence from a very young age. But, what was different about my cultural experiences in college was that, for the first time, they were coupled with deep intellectual engagement. Not only was I exposed to cultural information, but I was being asked to write about it, reflect on it, and recreate it for my college peers. Like many current college students of color, the college experience became an innate part of my personal story—one chapter in my journey of cultural growth that served to shape and influence the person that I was to become.

My family is made of three generations of people shaped by the era in which they lived: Colored, Negro, and African American. And we all continue to live in our own world. My grandmother continues to live in a colored past—though at almost 90, she has survived to see 2007. Her beliefs are the same, her house remains the same, and even her meals resist today's fast food dining. Similarly, my mother still holds onto beliefs born in a negro past of racial inferiority that shows whenever her voice changes as she talks to a white person or in many cases even an educated black one. From the desire to work diligently for her equality that she and my father share, to her level of uncomfortable feelings in the presence of a white person, she still believes that she must change or make an effort to be good enough. I have never lived the life of a colored girl nor a negro one,

but because my mother and grandmother still hold on to those times, I have always been exposed to the culture of a colored or negro yesterday.

At age four, I started going to my Grandmother's house. Her house was my six-hour entrance into a colored world. In the morning, Grandma's kitchen was filled with the peppery scents of fried liver pudding and grits. In her neighborhood, we did not play with any white children, in fact, we never saw children of other races. So, my cousin Pedro and I went to see our black playmates who lived down the street. When our friends couldn't come outside, we went to the fields or in the old tool shed or sometimes we would dare to go mess with the dirty, screaming chickens. Then we made our way back to Grandma's house to eat dinner with the family. It was hard to guess how many people would come to dinner everyday. Many days my Aunt Susan, Aunt Elsie, or Uncle Jerome would join us. We ate a large dinner—fried chicken or stewed chicken, mashed potatoes, fried onions, June peas and gravy to pour over it all. Whatever was served, there was always plenty of it piled onto those heavy white plates with big blue flowers. Afterwards, we always sat and talked in the dimly lit back room or out on the screened-in porch. I don't remember what they talked about, all I know is that they had good times and it always ended in a prayer meeting. Those early morning breakfasts, play time with the old farming tools, large dinners, hearty laughter and conversation, and strong religious practices provided my first insight into "colored" culture. It provided the foundation upon which I could confidently build my life.

Just as my colored faith serves as the frame of my confidence, my "Negro" determination supported my motivation to succeed. Being Negro meant working hard. My father has worked three jobs for over 30 years. Many days he would go to work at

4 p.m. and not stop working until 7 a.m. the next morning. As I reflect on my life, I realize that I work so relentlessly to do well at everything because of the professional model my father provided. How can I not work hard when my father has worked three times as hard so that I can have such opportunities? The major difference between my parent's education and my own is that I have always been told that I was superior while my parents were constantly told that they were inferior. For as long as I can remember, I have been labeled "academically advanced" and thrown like a dark pebble, into crystal clear waters. When I was in kindergarten, I took reading and writing classes with the first and second grade. After a few months, the school suggested that I skip kindergarten and first grade altogether. Skipping a grade in school was probably my first achievement. From there I went on to academically advanced classes, high aptitude scores, and all A's every nine weeks. My parents were always encouraging me. Their pride was apparent as they sat in the open house nights side by side with the white parents whom they had never been allowed to look at or talk to 25 years earlier. They were finally equal. As a young black child, I understood very early the meaning of my achievements. When I won the spelling bee or the reading contest, scored in the 99th percentile on a BSAP or a CTBS test, made the principal's list or A honor roll, or attended a leadership convention in Hilton Head, Long Beach, or Denver, I knew that I was spelling, testing, studying and achieving for my Negro parents who had not had that chance.

There are some things about the past that I will never understand. I cannot imagine taking a bath in a tin tub in the middle of the floor as my mother did growing up. Nor can I imagine living without my own television as my grandmother. While both my mother and grandmother grew up in houses where only gospel music was allowed, I have

always been allowed to play the music of my choice. Hip hop music would never have been allowed in Grandma's house and yet it frames much of my self identity. In a lot of ways, many of my cultural peers are now above living the humble lives of our grandparents. We are removed from the days of outhouses and entertainment via radio stories and family talent shows. Many have forgotten the importance of spending time with each other and the simple joys that come from activities like story telling. Many uneducated black grandmothers and grandfathers taught us to tell a good story on a porch or a stoop. They served as the catalyst for great writers like James Weldon Johnson, Toni Morrison, and Henry Louis Gates.

Colored traditions have followed me throughout my life. In God, colored people found the acceptance that they were not given by the world. Though I am now much more spiritual than religious, I still experience this strong faith in my grandmother's 15-minute grace at every family food gathering or whenever I visit her house and I am not allowed to leave without her bringing out the small brown bottle of anointment oil and painting a greasy cross on my forehead. When it comes to religion, democracy does not exist in my family's home. The strong whispers of "Amen" and "Yes Jesus," "Thank you Lord" and "Hallelujah" have always arisen from the circle which my family forms as they pray. In my parents' home, we must pray together before going on trips, taking exams, and applying for jobs. Prayer is also required to remember friends and family that are in need of help. Every time I drive out of my mothers yard, I see her standing in the kitchen window waving her right hand in the air as she asks the Lord to watch over me.

Although I can't relate to many of my parent's expressions and beliefs and I question the politics of organized religion, I cannot help but appreciate all of these things.

I wouldn't feel right saying "Hush yo mout" or laughing those big healthy laughs that have filled my house. But, my mother probably wouldn't feel comfortable holding these things in. I can feel the passion in those laughs and I can understand those expressions, however, my education stifles my laughter and stops my use of slang. But those laughs and conversations make me feel at home. When I am home and I hear my mother and her friends talking and laughing as loud as loud gets, I know that this is where I belong. Even today, when I come to work in the university cultural center, and I hear my students laughing and talking hard and loud, I remember home. All of the things that made my grandmother colored and my mother Negro make me African American. And one of the most important gifts my mother brought from her Negro past was a satisfaction with our culture. To her, our culture is not lacking—it is more than enough. In fact, it is all we really need. She has taught me that being African American is not a title; it is not merely what you are called, but what you are. Whether the accepted term in society is Colored, Negro, or African-American, one should feel comfort and pride in the African culture and history that this includes. Because of my mother's Negro beliefs, I am strongly committed to making a diligent effort to learn those things about myself that have been denied in my education. How can a people that have no connection to their past, that cannot trace their point of origin, feel stable in a society that labels them with a new name every decade? The quintessential question of a young African American is "Who am I?" I have traveled to African countries, and have been treated and felt like a foreigner, more American than African. The question "Who am I" for the African American is a hard one—in many ways, we are misfits in both of the societies that we claim in our name (African and American). Learning my family's history changed me in some way. The

more one clearly visualizes the struggles not just of the race, but of their own mothers and grandmothers, the more she can find her place in continuing that struggle. I have through the years absorbed books, and learned about the historical, political, and socioeconomic events that affect populations of people throughout the world. I think the family rituals of watching *Eyes on the Prize*, *Roots*, and Black History Month PBS specials as a child motivated this in some way. I have, in my career, picked up in learning about my culture where my family's storytelling left off. And I know that I am where I am right now because I believe in my mother's idea that something was lost in desegregation—something that you can't get from any white restaurant or store and something with which many white educational institutions continue to struggle. It is a spirit, a pride, and a drive that can only be given through cultural heritage. And giving this gift to my community through education is what I have vowed to do with my life. As my community's daughter, my sense of cultural responsibility is strong. It resonates in all that I have become and in all that I do. It flows through every form of expression including my poetry...

Today I opened my eyes to face the reality...that the needy
Weren't some distant image
A black and white snap shot,
A 30 second media spot
They are my community....some are in my own family
I don't need to search to find the poor, they come through my back door
For every family gathering...
Serving for me isn't always about helping someone else...
My family needs help...my cousins need some self
motivation—economic elevation—judicial representation...
I need to take my education and feed the foundation
Of my little block...I need to push so hard my ideas stir and rock
The soul of the neighborhood...
I need to transform it and make suburbanites wish they could
Live the same...
Make my students reexamine their professional aims

It's not okay to search for a success that looks like anything opposite of from
whence you came...
Being so pressed to get away that you'll change
Address, phone and name... to get on the first plane...
The hell out of the hood
If we don't care about our own block, please tell me who should?
Who should work harder than me? Who should be the constant gardener but me?
Planting the seeds of change...pulling the weeds of pain
Giving it light and water
through cash flow, education and improved bricks and mortar...
Assuming my role as the community's daughter...

I am armed with the choices and the confidence that make me African American because I carry inside of myself the colored pride and the Negro will that is the *essence* of my culture. I approached interaction with the students in this study with a commitment to the value that understanding students' whole selves (not just their academic identity) has on educational practice. I see students as community sons and daughters, with histories, families, legacies, and cultures that have shaped the men and women that they have become. I place a strong value on the role that college can play in continuing to shape their cultural development. But, I see this role as being most beneficial when it is guided not by arbitrary and distant definitions of culture, but rather by the personal and insider perspective of the students. I respect the personal nature of culture—that each person has a story to tell. And this cultural story is offered to me as a gift to receive, enjoy, examine, admire, and reflect upon.

CHAPTER 1

PURPOSE & OVERVIEW OF STUDY

“There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.” Maya Angelou

Much like my story, other cultural stories need to be told and student voices need to be heard. Creating venues that allow for full and honest story sharing might provide important opportunities to understand what culture means to college students of color and why campus cultural engagement continues to be important to college students. From the screams of protest for the creation of cultural opportunities in the 1960's to the contemporary demands for greater professional practice, culture as a broad concept continues to be an important form of inherited legacy, identity formation, and civic capacity building for college students of color (Patton, 2006; Smiley, 2006; Karenga, 1998). Marable (2005) provides an explanation through his focus on “living history”:

Most White Americans, for example, do have a somewhat vague awareness of what the American Civil War was, but no detailed, personal understanding about slavery, abolitionism, and why the conflict came about. Because my great-grandmother, Morris Marable, was sold on an auction block in West Point, Georgia, at the age of nine in 1854, I have consequently acquired a very different relationship to those distant events one hundred and fifty years ago. When we feel personally connected with events from the past, they help to shape our actions today...historical amnesia blocks the construction of potentially successful social movements. (p.43)

Thus, cultural centeredness and exposure can contribute to the growth needed for college students to become whole and productive persons. Through this study, I examined culture in the college experience focusing on how students of color understand and define both their culture and its importance as a result of their lived experiences,

personal histories, and cultural engagement. This paper is primarily driven by Swidler's (1986) analysis of culture as a "tool kit of symbols, stories, rituals, and world views, which people may use in varying configurations to solve different kinds of problems" and to construct strategies of action that comprise the lived experience (p.1). By providing a deep understanding of the cultural experiences of college students of color, I seek to contribute to the growing body of research that focuses on diversity and cultural transformation on college campuses.

Through specifically focusing on the concept of cultural efficacy, or the sense of agency and regard that one feels towards their culture, this study will provide a better understanding of how students experience, interpret, and articulate their culture. These insights on culture from a student perspective may provide significant insight on the various ways in which campus diversity policies should be implemented in the form of cultural programming and services—from a point of understanding culture as it is voiced by students themselves. More specifically, this study can help to provide answers for why these experiences are so important to students of color. The justification for this study centers around two issues: (1) An academic cultural knowledge deficit among students of color that may make the perception of culture among students differ from how it is articulated in cultural research and literature. Whereas in cultural scholarship, culture is clearly defined, students may not have a distinct definition of what constitutes culture. Instead through drawing a broader portrait of their family, community, and personal history a portrait of their culture can be created to inform administrators of what is culturally meaningful to students of color. The lack of formal academic learning on their cultural histories in the past may also influence the importance of cultural engagement in

the college experience for students of color. (2) The limited inquiry on standards of practice for cultural programming and cultural efficacy makes a study of this nature necessary and important.

The Cultural Knowledge Deficit

Understanding issues of cultural efficacy are important for many reasons, but largely because of the persisting cultural education deficit. Historically, one of the proposed outcomes of increased cultural education was the growth of cultural efficacy among students of color. In this study, I consider cultural efficacy to be a demonstrated level of cultural capacity or agency [positive feelings about one's culture; strong understanding of the components, values, and structures of one's culture; confidence in one's culture to contribute to the world]. This was seen as an important outcome in the past, though it is not mentioned as frequently in contemporary studies.

When examining the benefits of multiculturalism and diversity through a lens of cultural efficacy, the greatest benefits would not lie in changed campus climates and increased retention, but in changed self concepts and increased cultural confidence among students of color. To use the African American student experience as an example, understanding historical legacies of cultural deprivation help to make clear why cultural engagement is highly demanded on a contemporary college campus. The displacement of millions of enslaved Africans outside of Africa created what is known as the African Diaspora. During this era and the years that followed, not only were Africans separated from the continent of Africa, but also due to the Middle Passage and the systems of slavery particularly in America, they became partly detached from African ethnicity and culture. This became a much greater reality after the abolition of the slave trade and as

American enslavers began to breed American born generations of enslaved African Americans (Johnson & Smith, 1998). According to Jones, et al (1992):

Black Americans are the only Americans who lack an ethnic experience. They know, of course, they are descendants of Africans, but they do not know whether their ancestors were Ewe, Fulani, Ibo, or another African ethnic group. All other Americans of color, and most White Americans, know something of their ethnic ancestry. Articulated in a different way, there are no Asian Americans, Latinos, or Native Americans. There are Chinese Americans, Korean Americans, Puerto Ricans, Chicanos, Narragansett, Shawnee, and Apache...All other Americans of color, had, and continue to have, an ethnic as well as a racial experience; only blacks have just a racial experience (p. 91).

The idea that students of color may lack adequate knowledge, understanding, and positive regard for their culture is not new. It has been an issue argued by scholars since the turn of the century and a driving force for the argument for greater multicultural education (Takaki, 1994). One of the foremost scholars on the subject, particularly regarding African American education, was Carter G. Woodson, who originally wrote "The Mis-education of the Negro" in the early 1900's. Woodson's (1977) scholarship placed a firm focus on how African American students are educated and the impact of the cultural perspectives through which education of any kind takes place. Woodson (1977) asserted that the Negro, at that time, lacked the faculties of critical thought about her culture as well as the agency to create positive change within her cultural community because of the culturally oppressive lens through which she was educated. bell hooks offered a present day analysis of the same issue of cultural efficacy. According to hooks (2001), in order for African Americans to truly develop agency for positive, loving and progressive cultural development, the act of decolonizing one's mind must occur. In other

words, people of color must recognize, understand, and work to counter act the forms of cultural and racial oppression that Woodson acknowledged years ago. As hooks (2001) states, “ The practice of self love is difficult for everyone in society...but it is even more difficult for black folks, as we must constantly resist the negative perceptions of blackness we are encouraged to embrace by the dominant culture” (p. 71). Both historic scholar Woodson and contemporary scholar hooks, establish a strong value for culturally dedicated venues for education and growth. Their comments on negative stereotyping can apply to many underrepresented ethnic groups, particularly regarding the need to have culturally affirming educational environments. In fact, hooks (2001) offers a critical reflection on the system of segregation arguing that though educational segregation was legally unacceptable, it did have some culturally beneficial structures for young students of color:

Segregation meant that in our black spaces, the institutions which governed our communities—church, school, social club—black folks could fully claim the subjectivity denied us by the larger white world. It was even possible for some clever individuals to live and prosper without encountering the white power structure. As in the case of those escaped slaves (Maroons, renegades) who became insurgent resisters creating their own oppositional freedom culture in hidden locations, powerful individuals in our all-black communities were able to offer us libratory ways to think about blackness (p.73)

This argument is particularly salient when seeking to understand how the educational deficit of history has impacted the student’s expectation of education to serve not only as an academic opportunity, but also as a means for cultural engagement and development. Allen (1997) suggests that there is a conflicting dichotomy within the field of education.

There is a base of existing knowledge that grossly distorts and romanticizes the history of people's origins and accomplishments and then, at the same time, the black experience is ignored or patronized. The effect is to deny the silenced person's identity and to create disjunction between the values and beliefs about the nature of knowledge, its transmission, assessment and constitution" (Allen 1997, p. 184).

Due to often limited K-12 education on culturally diverse populations, many under-represented cultural communities both in the past and present have entered college with very little knowledge of the history, composition, and architecture of their culture (Robinson, 2001). Co-curricular cultural programs and initiatives may then serve as important opportunities to help students navigate their encounter with a new cultural environment as well as receive deeper learning and growth opportunities that are personally and individually meaningful. Therefore, cultural programs at all levels of education may serve to do more than just provide information for education's sake or increase persistence levels, but more importantly may serve to reconnect cultural ties that were disconnected hundreds of years ago.

This sense of ongoing and growing cultural efficacy can be understood by considering it to be a cultural flame ignited years ago in indigenous lands by our ancestors. Our acts of cultural engagement serve as elements to keep the flame going and growing [wood, charcoal, bark in the form of ritual, story, tradition]. And the fire—the culture itself—is the source that warms the chilliest of climates and energizes generations of people of color to live, survive, and thrive. The viability for cultural education and personal development programs to contribute to the needed growth in cultural efficacy

among students of color offers practitioners an important opportunity to gain more information and establish more intentional cultural practice.

Limited Inquiry and Standards of Cultural Practice

For many college students of color, college is a critical developmental and experiential period both academically and culturally (Jenkins, 2003; Turner, 1994; Laden, 1999). As a new environment and experience, college presents students with a strong opportunity to encounter new ideas, people, and challenges. As a developmental period, college offers opportunities for students to learn new information not only about foreign concepts, beliefs, and cultures but also about themselves.

With the significant changes that have occurred in the structural diversity on college campuses across the country, the expectation to provide such meaningful growth opportunities for students of color has increased. The make up of the college campus and the changing paradigm of student service that has followed this ethnic and racial change makes cultural practice a new critical competency within higher education (Pope, et al. 2004). However, the particular work of those that most frequently practice and implement cultural programs on campus—university cultural centers and multicultural affairs departments has not been as deeply researched as the work of those that teach culture within the classroom or that recruit and admit more culturally diverse students. Only recently has a body of research on university cultural centers begun to develop (Patton 2006; Patton 2004; Hefner 2002). This lack of research is a critical void because many student affairs professionals that work within multicultural affairs and university cultural centers also have significant professional expectations as cultural/diversity practitioners. Cultural practitioners can be viewed as architects of culture—they are able

to understand and map out the design of a particular culture and recreate some of those cultural experiences through campus programs and events (Jenkins & Walton, 2007). They conceptualize and execute cultural programming. Thus, cultural practitioners play a critical role in the multicultural transformation of universities.

However, many of the web based resources, research clearinghouses, and campus based initiatives that have been developed for educators have overwhelmingly focused on faculty and the specific challenges that confront the academy—transforming the curriculum, creating inclusive classrooms, sharing effective pedagogical strategies (Diversityweb.org; Humphreys, 1998; Lopez, 1993; Friedman et al 2000). A failure to examine educational transformation among those who practice multicultural education in the co-curricular (student affairs administrators and departments) may give the impression that cultural diversity outside of the classroom does not require the same deep, intentional, and studied thought that is required within the curriculum. Strong multicultural education environments are ones that emphasize and place priority on change both inside and outside of the classroom (Diversity web.org).

Cultural diversity and students of color. Much of the research on how students of color personally benefit from campus multiculturalism focuses primarily on their perceptions of campus climate, academic achievement, levels of persistence, and broad engagement with the campus (Harper, 2005; Allen, 1997; Astin, 1982; Ancis, et al 2000; Helm, et al 1998; Rendón, 1994). Though positive perceptions of climate, persistence, and academic success are important outcomes of increased cultural opportunities, they

are most likely not the only outcomes. They may not even be the most important to the student.

A recent study on the impact of interaction diversity experiences on college student development (white students and students of color), showed diversity interactions to have a generally positive impact for all students and the greatest impact for students of color in the vocational and intellectual development areas (Hu & Kuh, 2003). The overall outcome of the study showed that diversity interactions benefited white students slightly more than students of color across all outcome areas. The researchers attributed this to the possibility that students of color, due to their general cultural under-representation throughout their lifetime, are more accustomed to interacting with others outside of their racial or ethnic group (Hu & Kuh, 2003). Thus, diversity interactions in college might be less of a *new* experience for these students.

Though interacting *across* diverse populations may be generally positive but less transformative for students of color, the impact of participating in intense *intra-cultural* learning and personal development programs (as opposed to diversity exchanges with their peers) may have significantly stronger cultural development outcomes for students of color. College students bring aspects of the cultural seeds planted by family, community, and experience with them to college and also grow new cultural branches through learning and engagement while in college. Opportunities to deeply understand the complexities and diversity of experiences within one's culture may help students to better understand themselves. To provide this deep learning requires a strong grasp of culture and ethnicity on the part of the institution and within the co-curricular experience in which these cultural programs are housed. Many departments and centers that focus on

culture were born out of student demand and have been groomed by professionals responding to recent trends in the field to pay more attention to multicultural education and diversity. Response to this demand for greater multicultural service should include establishing a clear understanding of culture and its importance in the college experience.

A small but growing body of recent research on Black Cultural Centers shows that the programs and services of university cultural centers play a central role in the cultural development of students of color (Patton 2006). According to Patton (2006), students identify several key benefits of participating in co-curricular cultural programs and interacting with a university cultural center including enhanced leadership development, greater understanding of their cultural community, increased levels of positive racial identity, and greater historical pride. Patton's (2006) study illustrates that cultural programs and services do more than provide coping, adjustment, and retention mechanisms for students of color but also deeply impact the understanding of the student's cultural self. These types of programs and experiences within cultural centers are very different from general social and academic interactions across race as they focus culture as a learning and developmental experience that can happen individually or with others. Because of the various experiences and personal histories that many students of color bring with them to college, the positive development of a cultural orientation may be critical to the healthy intellectual and personal development of students of color. Continuing to develop studies of this nature will help to establish a more complete picture of the full benefits of cultural diversity experiences on college campuses.

Examining students of color through a different lens. In this study, I seek to shift the focus from examining how students of color benefit from diversity interactions with others and how these interactions change their perceptions of the institution. Instead, I will examine how students of color describe their culture and why culture might be important to them. Before educational practitioners can effectively provide cultural opportunities to college students, they must first have a firm understanding of what culture might be for and mean to students of color. As a researcher, I approach the issue of culture from a very personal place. This study will allow me to not only discover and understand the cultural perceptions of college students, but will also help to further illuminate my cultural identity and experiences. Grounded in the narrative tradition of storytelling, this study synthesizes themes from interviews and personal stories in the form of cultural self portraits. These self portraits are personal narratives of culture focused on cultural development prior to college and cultural engagement while in college. Included in the study is also my cultural story as brackets in the data analysis and in full as a prologue to both include and account for my cultural ideologies, histories, and experiences that influence my engagement in the research.

The personal nature of this work can best be understood by reflecting on the critical work of the grandmother of African American folklore and storytelling, Zora Neale Hurston. Hurston serves as a strong historic example of a researcher who, through the work, was able to come to terms with her role as a writer, a community daughter, and a cultural group member. Her time listening to, reflecting on, and writing about others' cultural stories helped her to better understand and appreciate her culture. And even more meaningful, as a young African American female researcher she, like me, saw

college as being the start of her critical understanding of her culture. “[My culture] was fitting me like a tight chemise. I couldn’t see it for wearing it. It was only when I was off in college, away from my native surroundings, that I could see myself like somebody else and stand off and look at my garment (Gates, 1990).” In this regard, cultural self understanding can be particularly meaningful when cultural communities are physically distant but opportunities for cultural education engagement are many and varied, as is the case in college. College can then provide the venue through which one’s culture can be more critically understood and appreciated.

This study provides meaningful information to help educators better understand the very personal and diverse nature of culture. Through this research, I seek to understand all of the students’ cultural experiences, past and present, and to illustrate how they come together to shape a student’s cultural story. Baxter Magolda’s (1992) principles on student involvement in research and program assessment support the intimate involvement of student voice in this study. These principles call for educators to validate students as knowers and to situate learning in the students lived experience. Both of these involve the researcher or educator in relinquishing formal notions of power and inviting the students to inform practice through sharing their life experiences and meaning making (Baxter Magolda, 1992). In a personal letter to his daughters, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (1995), one of the foremost scholars on black culture and history, illustrates the power of telling these cultural stories and the impact that they have on a person’s cultural development in a letter to his daughters.

I enjoy the unselfconscious moments of a shared cultural intimacy, whatever form they take, when no one else is watching, when no white people are around. Like

Joe Louis's fights, which my father still talks about as part of the fixed repertoire of stories that texture our lives. You've seen his eyes shining as he describes how Louis hit Max Schmeling so many times and so hard, and some reporter asked him, after the fight: "Joe, what would you have done if that last punch hadn't knocked Schmeling out?" And how ole Joe responded, without missing a beat: "I'da run around him to see what was holdin' him up!" Even so, I rebel at the notion that I can't be part of other groups, that I can't construct identities through elective affinity, that race must be the most important thing about me. Is that what I want on my gravestone: Here lies an African American? So I'm divided. I want to be black, to know black, to luxuriate in whatever I might be calling blackness at any particular time-but to do so in order to come out the other side, to experience a humanity that is neither colorless nor reducible to color. Bach and James Brown. Sushi and fried catfish. Part of me admires those people who can say with a straight face that they have transcended any attachment to a particular community or group... but I always want to run around behind them to see what holds them up (ix).

Indeed, what may "hold them up" is the strong sense of cultural efficacy that allows them to travel to and through other cultures without feeling a lack of value, jealousy, or defeat. It may be the very attachments to cultural heritage that some seek to move beyond that actually provides them with the tools necessary to keep going and growing. As bell hooks (2001) points out, if cultural pride can help black Americans come out of an intense period of racial apartheid with a strong sense of cultural self, then undoubtedly it may be one of the many keys to establishing healthy multi-racial and multi-cultural educational experiences in a society that continues to struggle at all levels with issues of school desegregation.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the primary research questions: “What are the essential structures of culture for college students of color? How are cultural experiences meaningful to students of color?” To fully gain the information needed to answer this question, three questions that are more specific were explored.

1. How do students understand their culture? What do they understand their culture to be? This question focuses on meaning making and the factors that influence student understanding of their culture before and during college. The question gets at the essence of understanding what culture means to students and what comprises their cultural experience.
2. What benefits do students perceive of cultural development?
3. What experiences and practices do students feel influence their cultural development? Specifically, the question determines the perceived impact of cultural experiences, practices, and formal programs on the development of student cultural efficacy as demonstrated through increased reflection, dialogue, or action within their culture.

Dissertation Outline

In the literature review that follows, I will explore definitions of the concept of culture to establish a context for how culture will be conceptualized in this paper. Additionally, this extensive discussion on the concept of culture will provide a basic understanding of cultural practice (implementing cultural programs, initiatives, and experiences). Next, I will provide a broad review of cultural diversity practice and research in higher education. This will be followed by the history of cultural centers on

college campuses and the college student's role in establishing centers of culture to impact their college experience. The purpose of providing this background is to better understand the history of seeking out culture by college students and to provide an overview of one of the primary cultural resources found on a college campus. This will be followed by a brief review of the conceptual work that will be used to structure the analysis of my study. The methodology plan will then be shared. Finally, the key findings and data analysis will be presented. The dissertation will close with a summary and implications of the findings to cultural practice. Cited references and relevant documents, including my cultural self portrait, are provided in the appendix.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

“I remember the very day I became colored.” Zora Neale Hurston

The concept of culture has been researched throughout several disciplines including sociology, anthropology, ethnic studies, and education. Within the field of education, cultural research has focused on several issues including multicultural education as inclusive education, the impact of cultural diversity on the adjustment, retention, and achievement of students of color, the affects of cultural diversity on white students, and the social benefits of educating students to live in a diverse world. A growing body of literature is now emerging that focuses on the impact of black cultural centers—particularly the impact that such cultural resources has on students of color. Past studies have called for a specific focus on students of color and the benefits they gain from cultural engagement in college (Springer, et al 1996).

In this chapter, a review of relevant literature will be provided. Included will be a review of differing perspectives on the concept of culture to provide a context for understanding culture and its importance to students of color. This is followed by a review of the broader concept of cultural heritage research. A discussion on issues of cultural diversity in higher education and an account of the history of cultural centers on college campuses are also provided. Additionally the theories that underpin the study will be shared and discussed.

Culture: What is it and why is it important?

Defining culture is difficult as debates have occurred throughout several disciplines on the issue. In the last twenty years, definitions of culture have evolved to

viewing culture as the symbolic vehicles of meaning and experience such as beliefs, ritual practices, artistic expression, traditions, and ceremonies (Swidler, 1986). These critical experiences and interpretations of meaning influences the actions, world-views, approach to life, and values of cultural group members.

According to Swidler (1986), culture's influence on actions can be seen not as specific and definitive prescriptions of how people should act, but rather as a tool kit of skills, habits, and approaches by which people build strategies of action and move through everyday life. Additionally, Mullins (in Hills-Collins, 1986) definition of culture, as a constantly evolving phenomenon, is central to approaching the study of culture in the contemporary college experience and is incorporated into how culture is defined for this study.

[Culture is] the symbols and values that create the ideological frame of reference through which people attempt to deal with the circumstances in which they find themselves. Culture...is not composed of static, discrete traits moved from one locale to another. It is constantly changing and transformed, as new forms are created out of old ones. Thus, culture...does not arise out of nothing: it is created and modified by material conditions (p.522)

Thus, the culture of today's college student of color has been shaped by past cultural experiences as well as the contemporary circumstances that change traditions, practices, and the ways in which symbols and artifacts are utilized in daily life. Culture has larger social influences as well as components that are specific to the individual. Therefore, how culture is described, valued, and interpreted may greatly differ among students. Regardless of how difficult it is to prescribe from one individual to the next, culture is one of the characteristics that make people who and what they are.

The traditional approach to growing cultural competence among students has focused on increasing their understanding of multiple cultures and specifically cultural difference (diversityweb.org; <http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/initial.html>). Through this study, I seek to contribute an additional lens to this view of cultural competence beyond an “understanding of other” perspective and to see it as also including a personal ability to align actions and cultural values in order to adequately function in any given environment. In other words, one of the most important measures of cultural competence for students of color might be the ability to understand the cultural self. Thus, cultural education’s benefits may be both internal (personal development and self-efficacy) and external (institutional adjustment and achievement). And both of these may be equally relevant outcomes to seek through cultural programs in college. Therefore, a program that seeks to solely develop student cultural understanding of self might be deemed as valuable without having to have achievement, retention, and multicultural goals attached to it.

In the next part of this section, I will share a review of the various perspectives of culture as a social concept. This is followed by a discussion on the intersections and distinctions between culture, race, and ethnicity. The section concludes with an overview of multiculturalism and how it has been approached within the field of education.

A review of various perspectives on culture. Culture as defined earlier is a set or toolkit of socially and historically constructed patterns passed between generations in the form of values, behaviors, rituals, symbols, and ideologies (Finkelstein, et al 1998; Swidler, 1986) Culture can often be observed in two forms. Objective culture includes the artifacts expressed in a visual form that communicate a group’s political and

economic systems, collective history, artistic expressions, literature, and special days (Bennett, et al., 2004). Examples of objective culture include food, fashion, festivals, and folklore. Subjective culture involves patterns of behavior as well as learned and shared beliefs and values (Bennett, et al., 2004). Examples of subjective culture include nationality, regional traditions, religious beliefs, ethnic values, and organizations.

To offer a broad understanding of the concept, Brodley's (1994) overview of the major cultural perspectives is shared below. These perspectives organize how culture is defined by the way in which the concept is approached through either a historical, behavioral, normative, functional, or structural lens. Dependent upon which lens is used the concept of culture may have a different focus.

Figure 1: Cultural Perspectives

Historical:	Culture is social heritage, or tradition, that is passed on to future generations
Behavioral:	Culture is shared, learned human behavior, a way of life
Normative:	Culture is ideals, values, or rules for living
Functional:	Culture is the way humans solve problems of adapting to the environment or living together
Structural:	Culture consists of patterned and interrelated symbols and artifacts

(http://www.wsu.edu/gened/learn-modules/top_culture/culture-definitions/bodley-text.html)

Baghir-Zada (1999) defines culture as “a learned system of meaning and behavior that is passed from one generation to the next and all of the customs, values, and traditions that are learned from one’s environment” (p. 1). Culture serves as an influence that unifies values, customs, habits, rituals, systems of explanation and evaluation, social rules of behavior, perceptions of human nature, interpersonal relationships, symbols, artifacts, and historical developments (Baghir-Zada, 1999). Another relevant definition of culture was

provided by Maulana Karenga (1998) and focused on under-represented cultures. Karenga's (1998) definition includes seven major areas that serve to construct a broad culture. These seven areas include history, spirituality and ethics, social organization, economic organization, political organization, creative production and ethos. Karenga approaches cultural education with the perspective of the person of color in mind. Thus, his identification of history as a key component of culture is based on the idea that history has shaped culture and that learning history is necessary to learn or inherit culture. Most of Karenga's components of culture are similar to definitions shared earlier. However, he offers an addition through the concept of ethos that may be particularly relevant for persons of color. He defines ethos as "a people's self understanding as well as its self presentation in the world through its thought and practice in the other six areas of culture" (Karenga 2004, p.4). Ethos is the *agency* component of culture (synonymous with cultural efficacy). According to Karenga (2004), culture involves not only structures and practices but also a responsibility for the individual to know, understand, and share the most important aspects of the culture. He argues that this responsibility is particularly great for communities of color because the act of knowing, understanding and sharing has been prohibited in the past among underrepresented racial and ethnic groups.

Culture, Race, & Ethnicity. According to Helms and Talleyrand (1997), racial identity is now viewed as a social construct referring to "a sense of group or collective identity based on one's perception that he or she shares a common heritage with a particular group" (p.3). Racial identity development is an important aspect of the development of a person of color, however, it vary rarely escapes the tendency to frame identity based on categorizations of skin color and how individuals experience or interpret

life based on these racial experiences (Chavez & Guido-Dibrito, 1999). Racial identity has been seen as “a surface level manifestation based on what we look like yet has deep implications in how we are treated (Chavez & Guido-Dibrito, 1999, p.40). Ethnic identity, has also been socially constructed and involves one’s identification with a smaller group of a larger society who share common origin and aspects of a sub-culture (Chavez & Guido-Dibrito, 1999). Baghir-Zada’s definition of ethnic groups is a group defined by shared geographical, racial, and cultural roots, socio-history, and a sense of group identity (1999). Therefore, ethnicity concerns a defined subculture (African American, West Indian, etc) that may be a part of a broader racial group (i.e. Black). Guanipa-Ho and Guanipa (1998) explain that “ethnic identity is an identity that develops from within, instead of an image that is imposed by society stereotypes. However, it is important to say that the stereotypes that large society places on ethnic groups can be a great contribution to the...sense of pride or shame about their own ethnicity (p.3).”

To bring together all of these concepts, it is important to distinguish between race, ethnicity, and culture. These terms are sometimes used interchangeably though they hold very different meanings. My study is not focusing on racial identity development but rather the development of cultural efficacy. To review, culture is an overarching concept that includes behaviors, symbols, traditions, and values. Culture can include the influence of race and ethnicity upon the shaping of what constitutes a cultural experience or a cultural history. However, culture can be created and shaped without the presence of a racial identity. To offer an example, a child raised with absolutely no interactions with the outside world (never leave the home, no exposure to media, entertainment or literature, etc) will not perceive race unless it is taught to them. But this child can still perceive her culture

through the values, rituals, and traditions established in the home. Race is a socially constructed classification based on real or perceived physical differences that often influences how people are received (Wijeyesinghe, 2001; Ancis, et al, 2000; Chavez & Guido-Dibrito, 1999). Ethnicity is more closely tied to one's shared cultural and historical experiences based on a similar geographical orientation. Therefore, it can easily be seen how these three concepts can influence one another as groups might often be clustered geographically and racially and thus the broader culture derives itself from the two prior concepts. Cultural education has historically involved the study of all of these concepts in some form.

Chavez and Guido-DiBrito (1999), note that ethnic group messages have a major impact on one's ethnic identification. Positive ethnic group messages encourage greater identification with that ethnic group, while negative messages encourage an individual to feel shame or a lack of attachment to their own ethnic identity (Chavez & Guido-DiBrito, 1999, p. 41). If the messages that one receives, positive or negative have a major impact on ethnic identification, then the experiences and exposure to educational information that affirms and legitimizes cultural presence, may have tremendous effects on student cultural development.

In sharing the purpose of a course, the syllabus of an African American studies course at Rochester University (2000) included a statement by Simone Debeauvoir "One is not born white, but becomes white. One is not born a Latina, one is not born Norwegian, Arab-American, Afro-Caribbean, but becomes that" (www.courses.rochester.edu p. 1). The meaning of ethnicity is developed from the social structures in which students live during their development. And the conceptual frameworks acquired by a student, from a variety of

collective resources, provide a “lens” for understanding who they are. In this sense, cultural engagement opportunities may facilitate the process whereby a student continues to fully become African American, Puerto Rican, Haitian, etc.

Multiculturalism and Education. Tied to the overall concept of culture is the concept of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism is defined as anything of or relating to a social or educational theory that encourages interest in many cultures within a society rather than in only a mainstream culture (<http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/initial.html>). A bit different, the term intra-cultural is anything of, relating to, involving, or representing the various components *within* a culture (<http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/initial.html>). Therefore, cultural education can take any one of these forms—it can focus on multiple cultures or explore the various aspects of one culture.

According to Finkelstein et al. (1998) the study of culture has been approached from four basic perspectives: area studies, international studies, cross-cultural studies, and multicultural education. Area studies has approached cultural education from a linguistic point of view, viewing cultural learning as inextricably tied to language skill development and cultural understanding as an inevitable outcome of language learning. International studies has taken a global focus on cultural learning and tends to focus specifically on the acquisition of factual knowledge regarding nations and regions. Cross cultural studies has focused on the psychological and personal adjustment dimensions that are critical for living or studying abroad. Adaptation skills are particularly important in this area of study. Finally, a recent focus on multicultural education has partnered the study of culture with what has become a socially and equity driven cause that advocates for a commitment to

cultural diversity (Finkelstein et al, 1998).

The Multicultural Pavillion (1998), a website that provides information on diversity defines multicultural education as a progressive approach for transforming education that holistically critiques and addresses current shortcomings, failings, and discriminatory practices in education (<http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/initial.html>). Grounded in a commitment to social justice, multicultural education is educational practice that places learning environments such as schools, colleges and universities in a critical role—as a venue through which social change can be created (www.edchange.org/multicultural/initial.html).

Intended outcomes of such forms of multicultural education within student affairs are to “foster pride in minority cultures, help minority students develop new insights into their culture, reduce prejudice and stereotyping, and promote intercultural understanding” (Ogbu 1992, p. 6). Essentially, student affairs practitioners implement the work of building equitable forms of cultural capital on their campuses.

Influenced by the notions of physical capital (physical objects), human capital (individual properties), and social capital (social networks and norms), the term cultural capital represents cultural beliefs, values, rituals, norms, and experiences that both equip and include people in the life of a society or environment (Bowles, 2006; Macleod, 1995). In this regard, cultural capital represents both cultural inclusion outcomes (feeling a part of the community) as well as cultural growth outcomes (providing the knowledge, development and efficacy necessary to fully participate in the environment). In many ways, the structures, rituals, symbols, and traditions of a college campus represent cultural capital for some (Perry & Ting 2002). Disparities in educational structures for and services to underrepresented students have long been an issue on college campuses

around the country. Perry & Ting (2002), in their examination of the disparities of service within the student affairs division at a large predominantly white institution, argued that the historical vestiges within the institution that often privileged, educated, and celebrated majority cultures were a key factor in contributing to long lasting service disparities. According to Perry & Ting (2002), “The historical narratives of how oppression becomes institutionalized reveal characters, settings, and resources that ossify power along lines of culture, race, gender and ethnicity (p.5). Furthermore, such historical legacies can impact the campus climate and create an institutional culture of exclusion (Hurtado 1998). Thus, the expectation for universities to increase the diversity and effectiveness of cultural offerings to appeal to under-represented students is an expectation to equalize cultural capital and to enhance cultural practice throughout the university.

O’Neill’s (1999) study on the educational experiences of students in relation to interpersonal, social, and spatial factors, found this to be true among the African American student respondents. One student shared that his educational experiences before college influenced his desire to learn more about African Americans in college:

Ms. Simms encouraged me to understand my potential, but my subjects never taught me anything about being Black. Social studies usually had about a paragraph on slavery and they always talked about how it was a legal practice. I was shocked when I got to college and learned the real historical experiences of my people. I think that school tries to instill American patriotism and integration (p.2).

Another student in this study gave voice to the detrimental affects of not having black history education on her identity development:

I went to the same school from the time I was three until I entered college. I was the only black student and all I learned about being black came from our textbooks. I guess you could say I have learned mostly to be white than black. This caused me problems because I don't feel accepted by other blacks. This has made it hard to shape my identity as an African American female (p.3).

This study revealed that curriculum content and broad cultural engagement within education play a vital role in the construction of student identity. Validating student identity and providing students with a stronger sense of self is most closely aligned with the concept of "engaged pedagogy." Engaged pedagogy is a teaching practice where everyone's presence is recognized and valued (hooks, 1994). This can also be applied to co-curricular experiences where under-represented cultures are also equally recognized. Concepts like multicultural education and engaged pedagogy are important to influence change and advancement in education practice. But, one of the major criticisms of multicultural education in particular is that multicultural education theories and programs are not usually based on actual studies of *under-represented cultures*. They instead focus on the experience of being an *under represented student* (Ogbu, 1992). The typical practice to concentrate on the student-school interaction and not the student interaction with her culture may limit real cultural innovation in educational settings as suggestions may be based on cultural assumptions.

Centered in the cultural experience of people of color, Yosso (2005) shares six forms of cultural capital that provide a representative voice for the cultural inheritance that is often deemed valuable by the cultural group regardless of their value to the larger society. These include (1) Aspirational capital or the ability to achieve hopes and dreams; (2) Linguistic Capital or multiple language skills; (3) Familial capital or family history and

memory; (4) Social Capital or support systems in the form of friendship and community networks; (5) Navigational Capital or the skill to navigate through various institutions; and (6) Resistant Capital or the skills developed through behavior that works in opposition to oppression. In light of these factors, Yosso (2005) describes community cultural wealth as the total inheritance of the skills present in these six forms of cultural capital. To understand the rich cultural heritage with which students enter any educational environment is to truly understand the benefits and personal impact of culture. As Ogbu (1992) notes, even researchers that belong to under-represented groups should not feel that they have the professional license to couple research that illustrates cultural dissonance in the classroom with their personal beliefs on what cultural practices need to occur to relieve this problem. Transformative practice should be guided by an actual understanding of what culture is to students and how these cultural structures can be fully included to establish a healthy educational environment and to better prepare students to interact with the world.

*Cultural Diversity in Higher Education:
Achievement, Retention, and Cultural Engagement*

In this section, I will begin by discussing the attrition and adjustment disparities in higher education that have influenced a heavy concentration on these issues within the literature. Pre-college and collegiate factors that affect the participation and retention of students of color are overviewed. This is followed by a brief background on how ethnic histories and experiences also impact college retention among students of color. A discussion on the difference between a focus on retention/achievement and cultural engagement/development follows. This discussion offers a context for understanding

how the focus of this study situates diversity and cultural practice within the same house as retention and achievement, but in a different and more personal room. Finally, I end this section with a short history that shares the story of how centers of culture came to campus in the 1960's. This history is constructed by looking both within and outside of the campus to understand the motivation for students to create cultural centers on their campuses.

Consistent attrition and adjustment challenges have driven the research concentration on minority student achievement and retention in the last twenty years. The urgency of getting students to college and keeping them in school is definitely a priority. In many ways, it has been a much more pressing issue than understanding the multiple complexities of student cultures and ethnicities. Because the discussion on retention and adjustment provided the impetus to establish more cultural resources and opportunities on campus, the factors that influence persistence, satisfaction, and achievement are discussed below. This study argues for a both/and approach to cultural practice as opposed to making a choice to focus either on retention or personal development.

The 1960's marked a major effort to change the racial composition of American higher education institutions. However, the numerical change in the presence of students of color on predominately white college campuses has been met with challenges to serve students once they matriculate. According to Person and Christensen (1996), the relationship between students of color and predominately white institutions has historically been adversarial. Public white southern institutions did not allow black student enrollment until after World War I. When students were enrolled in the 1930's it was to segregated living and learning environments. In the 1960's, it was student protest

regarding curriculum and institutional service offerings that birthed many ethnic studies programs and departments. Though the enrollment of black students and other students of color at predominately white institutions increased in the decades following the 1960's, students most often struggled with their experience in the academy.

Not only do students of color continue to remain generally underrepresented at all levels of higher education, but their involvement in white collegiate institutions has also maintained a consistent level of dissatisfaction (Persen & Christensen 1996). In 1994, the graduation rate for black students was 32 percent compared to 56 percent for their white counterparts (Townsend, 1994). In 1990, the attrition rates of students that persisted in college for at least four years was 50 percent for African Americans and 38 percent for white students (Robinson, 1990). These numbers are representative of a trend present throughout the various dimensions of higher education, (public, private, community colleges) in which minority students have lower graduation, persistence, and academic achievement rates but higher rates of attrition (Szelenyi, 2001).

Rendón (1994) broadens the focus to provide a snapshot of the situation confronting poor and minority children at large. She describes them as the most underserved population in America, noting that they are the most likely to come from the poorest families, have inadequate healthcare, be more susceptible to community violence, attend the least funded schools, have the least trained professionals as teachers, and be provided the worst educational resources. This is the situation confronting many students throughout their educational career. It is the life state in which they enter higher education and the reality that they confront each time they go home during a school break. Allen (1985) adds factors that occur within the college experience, noting that

black students (and latino students) experience poor psychosocial adjustment, are less likely than their white counterparts to enroll in advance degree programs, and have lower post-graduation occupational attainment and earnings. Higher education professionals like Dr. Clinita Ford, director of the National Conference on Retention assert that under-represented students are “dropping out like flies” (Townsend, p. 85). At state supported, predominately white schools this seems to be true. In a 1992-1993 report conducted by the Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, some public institutions were reported as having minority student retention rates as low as 11 percent (Indiana University) with only one school out of 26 listed, having what was the highest retention rate of 72 percent (University of Virginia).

According to Tinto (1993), three broad areas contribute to the problem of student attrition: pre-college educational preparation, social background, and an atmosphere of racism and discrimination (Towsend, 1994). Pounds (1987), adds economic and political issues to the list and Persen and Christensen (1996) argue that the campus climate, the personal characteristics of the student, and the influence of the peer group on individual behavior have an impact on student persistence.

Pre-college factors. College success begins by first getting students of color on campus. Unfortunately, college participation continues to be an area where much work still needs to be done. As noted earlier, students of color remain under-represented throughout higher education. And when the focus becomes even more specific, by zooming in on subgroups such as black men, the situation is alarming. Harper (2006) notes, that in 28 years, no progress has been made. In his 2006 national study of black male educational achievement, he shares that the percent of African American men

among all college students in 1976 was 4.3% and in 2004, this participation rate remained the same (Harper, 2006). Because enrollment is the initial challenge, looking outside of the campus environment at pre-college factors provides important insight.

Rendón (1994) offers several pre-college factors that may influence the participation of students of color in higher education. Personal issues such as self doubt, first generation status, peer pressure, and cultural barriers speak to the critical challenges that students face with negotiating family cultural expectations, community loyalty, the idea of college as a mystical experience, institutional distrust, and psychosocial fears. Educational issues such as poor preparation for college and lack of academic goals and clarity strongly influence initial academic performance and ultimate academic success. Finally, social issues, such as the socio-economic status determines the ability to both access college and to remain there (Rendon, 1994).

In Allen and Wilson's (1987) study of familial and extra-familial influences on the educational attainment of Black youth, familial encouragement and influence is a pre-collegiate factor that weighs heavily on student success in college, particularly in regards to educational self-esteem (Allen & Wilson, 1987). The role that the family can play in contributing to student retention should not be overlooked. Student self-efficacy has been noted as a major personal characteristic necessary for student success (Stage & Hossler, 2000). Self-efficacy pertains to the level of agency or belief in personal power and ability to engage in actions that contribute to success. The family might play a vital role in developing a sense of agency within a student prior to college entrance. If the family helps to shape student beliefs and aspirations, then it may serve as the most important factor in developing self-efficacy.

In addition to self-efficacy, several other variables are related to student personal characteristics that offer insight into how students of color fare in college. Attitude and motivation have both been listed as major contributors to student success. For some students, motivation and goals determined their success in college regardless of high school performance (Nettles, Thoeny, & Gosman 1986). The personal characteristics of attitude and motivation fall under what Tinto labeled pre-entry attributes. When coupled with family background, skills, and past educational experiences, these attributes serve to establish the formulation of a student's initial set of goals and commitments (Tinto 1993). Goals pertain to the details regarding educational outcomes desired by the student and commitments are the degrees to which students are wedded to achieving these goals (Tinto 1993). This indicates that ensuring students feel a sense of power to achieve undetermined goals is not enough. At entry, it is important that students have developed a sense of their goals and a commitment, not just an ability, to achieve them.

Collegiate factors. Rendón (1994) also lists the institutional factors that influence student participation once a student enters. These factors include the structure (or cultural capitol) of the university, a negative campus climate in terms of race, transfer shock, poor bridge programs, inadequate counseling and advising, and rising costs of admissions. The multiple factors outlined in her work illustrate that addressing student of color participation in college is a complex issue that requires a multi-dimensional approach focusing on both the student and the institution. Institutional structure variables concern the policies, image, and values of the university. According to Smedley, Myers and Harrell (1993), the K-16 system is structured in a way that encourages "minority student

failure, inter-group conflicts, racist policies and practices, and culturally insensitive curricula (p.73).”

Loo and Rolison (1986) call for institutions with predominately white populations to re-examine their images and purposes. Moving away from a designation as an “Ivory Tower” is the first step, as it establishes continued institutional racism in its color focused symbolism (Loo and Rolison, 1986). Therefore, the issue of structure deals with the changes, not in the student, but in the institution that are necessary to promote student retention and balance the cultural capitol on campus. Issues such as curriculum transformation, restructuring of the faculty tenure process to place greater value on student engagement, rewriting mission statements, re-conceptualizing public relations images, and reallocating resources to provide campus specific retention research and program implementation, are important considerations towards this goal.

Minority student dissatisfaction with their campus cultural life has a negative impact on their academic achievement, as students spend a considerable amount of time creating their own social opportunities to make up for the social deficiencies in the university co-curricular services (Petersen & Christensen, 1996). Social integration and personal development often take the form of residential experiences, social peer interaction, student organizational involvement, and informal faculty/staff relationships (Stage and Hossler, 2000).

Both practitioners and researchers have noted the vital role that faculty and staff play in retaining students of color, particularly at white institutions with limited numbers of professors of color (Townsend, 1994). Issues regarding racial dynamics in the classroom, stereotypical cultural beliefs of faculty, limited numbers of faculty of color, and a general

lack of interest among faculty in minority student retention affect the faculty/student relationship on predominately white campuses. Thus, cultural networks are in many ways critical to student of color adjustment to college. When examining black student culture and retention at a predominately white liberal arts institution, Person and Christensen (1996) found that less than 50 percent of the black students surveyed felt comfortable with faculty members. Several institutions of higher learning are taking note of the faculty issue and developing programs to address directly faculty's role in black student retention. The University of South Carolina coined a freshman year experience course that has been replicated throughout the country. As part of this course, students are offered strategies on how to interact with faculty including maintaining control of conversations, presenting oneself, and developing positive faculty networks (Townsend, 1994).

The University Virginia takes an approach directed specifically at faculty. Each semester, the university offers several faculty sessions during midterms and finals for students of color in which faculty facilitate out of the classroom academic survival workshops (Townsend, 1994) These programs illustrate the need for greater interaction with faculty among students. According to Rick Turner, former Dean of African American Affairs at UVA, this will most practically occur through institutional initiatives and programs:

We have to perform outreach programs. We can't wait for faculty to engage students on their own in any organized way. We have to be realistic enough to know we are not going to have that active interaction at a high level in a school of this size (Townsend 1994).

In addition to facilitating enhanced interaction between students and faculty, colleges and universities providing an adequate population of faculty and staff of color is also important. In Loo and Rolison's (1986) almost classic study on alienation of ethnic minority students at a predominately white, they found that minority students felt more comfortable participating in classes led by faculty of color. Additionally, when students were asked to identify the racial background of their campus mentors, 93 percent of white students listed their mentors as white while 45 percent of minority students had mentors that were ethnic minorities (Loo and Rolison, 1986). The level of comfort reported with faculty and staff of color implies that students assume these professionals will possess a level of cultural and racial understanding that is important to them. This becomes yet another way in which students illustrate the importance of culture in their college experience.

Racism and campus climate can also have severely negative effects on student of color satisfaction in college. Though research has shown that minority students generally develop coping strategies and may have become accustomed to discrimination through their lived experience, the impact of a racially intolerant campus environment still greatly affects student satisfaction and perceptions of college (Baird, 2000). Smedley, Myers and Harrell (1993) note that the psychological stresses of college are heightened as students navigate negative expectations of White peers and faculty, a perceived special status as an affirmative action benefactor, and overall questions of their authenticity as a scholar.

In a 1995 survey of the racial climate at Indiana State University (www.indstate.edu/oirt/clim2/home.html), researchers found that African Americans

perceived a much more hostile environment than their white counterparts. Over 7 percent of African American respondents reported having been physically threatened and 20 percent had received racially driven phone or mail threats. Over 50 percent reported that they had been insulted or called racial names and over 60 percent had witnessed racially insensitive propaganda on the campus. Almost half of African American students had been intellectually insulted over the course of the year. Finally, over 40 percent of African American students reported being treated negatively by a student peer due to race, embarrassed by a classmate due to race, and treated hostility by faculty in the classroom due to race (www.indstate.edu/oirt/clim2/home.html). This data prompted ISU to label their campus climate as “chilly.”

Similar findings were reported in Loo and Rolison’s (1986) research on alienation, showing a significant difference in campus climate perceptions among black and white students. Their study found that 63 percent of white student respondents perceived the university as supportive while only 28 percent of minority students espoused this belief (Loo and Rolison, 1986). Additionally, students in this study felt that outside of the university cultural center, the university lacked supportive safe spaces for minorities (Loo and Rolison, 1986).

William Tierney (2000) suggests that institutions of higher learning acknowledge the influence of history and society on the structures and environments of colleges. As issues of racism have historically permeated American society and the American education system, these historical vestiges “frame” the current structures and contexts of campus environments. In his research, Baird (2000) quotes Watson and Kuh on the issue of campus environment:

The college environment has a significant influence on virtually all outcome domains, from personal to cognitive. Activities and relationships with faculty, administrators, and students greatly influenced Black students' gains at HBCU's, which suggests that historically Black institutions provide Black students with a developmentally powerful educational environment. For example, a college marked by supportive relationships among peers, faculty, and administrators is almost as influential as student development for all students. An environment that emphasizes development of academic, scholarly, and intellectual qualities appears to be the most influential factor in minority student educational gains. (p.73)

Achieving the ideals of this statement may not be possible in such severely negative campus environments where even faculty report being least comfortable around African Americans (111.indstate.edu/oirt/clim2/home.html). As Dr. Pamela Arrington, Director of the National Retention Project, asserts, "In an alienated, stressful environment, you can not concentrate on doing your best" (Townsend, 1994, p.20).

Cultural community engagement is a student specific factor. This broadly includes cultural identity engagement, socio-cultural interaction, faculty and staff cultural networks, and family and home community involvement. Critical to cultural adjustment are opportunities to interact with cultural peers. Though students of color may come from different backgrounds, they often unite based on their race, which becomes a significant factor in the development of their relationships (Petersen and Christensen, 1996). Due to the racism experienced on campus, feelings of isolation, and the under-representation of students of color on predominately white campuses, students of color often seek out one another. This seeking out is most often engaged by joining cultural student groups to develop peer support networks and participation in institutionally sponsored cultural initiatives (Petersen and Christensen, 1996). At the University of South Carolina, the

idea of critical mass is a major concept: “That means the institution has a sufficient number of minority students to maximize meaningful social interaction with each other” (Townsend 1994 p.85).

Opportunities for students to engage social, extra curricular and professional development opportunities are critical to student persistence. Students who frequently participate in culturally specific student organizations are more likely to report a satisfaction with the campus social environment (Allen, 1985). Allen (1985) suggests that the personal development experienced by these student through their involvement with these organizations, leads to a greater involvement in “general” social life on campus. This suggests that extra-curricular involvement, particularly culturally specific activities, provide a bridge for students of color to develop a sense of comfort and confidence to engage the majority campus environment. Tinto (1993) notes that the formation of social bonds that integrate the student into the college’s various social communities are critical both to persistence in college and to the development of general social and intellectual identities. When opportunities for personal development, including professional exploration, leadership development, and social integration, do not occur, the process of institutional commitment may be retarded. Social integration has been noted as an influencing factor on student satisfaction. Helms et al (1998) explains:

There is considerable evidence that campus climate has a great deal to do with the success or failure of students in higher education. Astin (1993) and Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) demonstrated the value of involvement in campus for students and the importance of programs to encourage that involvement. Sedlacek (1996) has shown the importance of community for what he called “nontraditional students,” those from racial or cultural groups other than white, middle-class, young and heterosexual (p.111).

Tierney (2000) suggests that successful retention programs acknowledge the particular backgrounds and identities of students. “Low-income minority youth, be they Native American students from an Indian reservation, inner city black adolescents who grow up in a housing project, Mexican immigrants who live in a barrio, or any number of other individuals who see themselves as part of a group that considers postsecondary campuses as alien territory, need to have teachers, tasks, and pedagogies that affirm who they are.” This is the area in which understanding cultural and ethnic difference becomes important. Creating blanket cultural programs to meet the retention and adjustment needs of students based on race, may fall short given significant cultural and ethnic differences. Ancis et al (2000) stress that understanding the particular differences of African American, Asian American, Latino/a and White college students should influence how cultural programs are developed. Differences in ethnic history and culture become critical when approaching the depth and breadth of cultural programming.

I will once again use the African Diaspora as an example. Students primarily referred to as “Black” come from a variety of culturally distinct backgrounds all factoring into some unique cultural issues for students. The research on the black student experience has primarily focused on African American student issues, primarily using the historical experience of African Americans as a context. It is important to note, however, that within the black student population are also first or second generation African and West Indian immigrants, who bring with them a stronger connection outside of the United States and a strong identification with their ethnicity rather than their racial group (Waters, 1999). Though many second generation immigrants become subject to the racial designation of “Black American” by white American society and often suffer under

the same discriminating educational systems as African Americans, their familial and cultural histories are different from African Americans, which creates a cultural division.

West Indians share a historical period of slavery with African Americans. However, after liberation the civil laws and systems in the West Indies were not as repressive as the Jim Crow laws in America. (Johnson & Smith, 1998). In most islands of the West Indies, black people were an overwhelming majority, causing white power brokers to permit them to be educated and to learn skilled trades as educators, civil servants, shopkeepers, and farmers. During this same period, black Americans were living under an oppressive society which denied adequate education and relegated them to domestic laborers. This post-slavery difference in society had a significant impact on cultural orientation as the first major set of West Indians began to immigrate into the United States. From the early nineteenth century to 1924 a large group of Jamaicans and Barbadians began working on the building of the Panama Canal and then continued on into the United States. They began to send “Panama Money” to their relatives in the West Indies to pay for their passage to America.

In the 1960’s, a second wave of immigrants flooded the United States. This group came primarily from the professional class in their home countries and sought to take advantage of the economic opportunity of America. The difference in education, self identity, and professional capacity influenced the ways in which West Indian immigrants were initially received by white Americans. Their language accents and professional skills made them distinguishable from African Americans, and therefore designated as the “better blacks” (Model, 1995; Waters, 1999) Therefore, white Americans were more willing to hire immigrant blacks over native born blacks. The effect of this preferential

treatment in America coupled with a different post-slavery experience in the West Indies, sometimes caused an inability for West Indians to understand the oppression of African Americans, and to often adopt a belief in the racial stereotypes regarding the culture and work ethic of black Americans (Model, 1995; Waters 1999).

However, research has shown that second- and third-generation West Indians have become subject to the same oppressive obstacles as African Americans. The children of immigrants that have been born in America are being educated in the same poor school systems, living in the same crime infested neighborhoods, have lost their West Indian accents, and are largely identified by society as “Black” and not West Indian (Model, 1995; Waters 1999).

The children of African Immigrants are experiencing similar realities of being identified as African American. The overall number of Africans that immigrated to America under voluntary measures has relatively been small. During a period of 170 years (1820 to 1993), only 418,000 Africans came to live in America. In 1990, African born American residents were at 364,000 (www.raven.umd.edu). Similar to their West Indian counterparts, the demographics of African immigrants is substantially different from African Americans. For the most part, they come to America “highly educated, urbanized, and have one of the highest per capita incomes of any immigrant group” (www.raven.umd.edu, p.1)

Among the African family, a major issue has been passing on cultural heritage to their children and ensuring that they do not become “Americanized.” Communities have created weekend schools, camps, and clubs for their children to be immersed in their African culture. But like second generation West Indians, it becomes harder to

distinguish them from African American young adults as they adopt the American lifestyle. But what is of most concern to both communities of immigrants (African and West Indian) is that the children of these immigrants groups will become grouped with American blacks, who represent the American underclass. For many voluntary immigrants, being identified as “African American” is not positive. This group is one of the most oppressed groups in American society. African Americans have been plagued by limited opportunity in America and are subjected to negative racial stereotypes. For both African and West Indian immigrant parents this is the antithesis of the myth of success embedded in the desire to immigrate into the country (Waters, 1999). People do not move their family to another country, in some cases on the other side of the globe, to become a part of the underclass and oppressed.

Research on African American students also suggests that African Americans need greater opportunities to engage their culture, to strengthen their knowledge on their cultural and racial history, and to learn about their global connection to the Diaspora. According to Persen and Christensen’s (1996) study on black student culture and retention, 90 percent of respondents felt that the university needed to create a cultural community on campus that provides curricular and co-curricular programs to address their cultural and social interests and their ethnic and racial identity.

In a text about successful community-based organizations McLaughlin notes that the ‘localness assumes strong ties to the community so that programs can shape and be shaped by their context’ (p.221). Therefore, prior notions of successful college matriculation being marked by complete disconnection from community and family may

need to be reconsidered. Rendón's (1993) personal reflection on her experience as a student illustrates this point:

However, my own story illustrates that academic success can be attained without total disconnection, although many educators either do not want to accept this or fail to recognize this. Like Rodriguez, when I started to attend college, I found myself living between two worlds, leaving old friends behind and changing my identity. For me, going to college was not very "normal." It represented a break from family traditions. I was the first in my family to attend college, as my parents had only gone to the second and third grade.

This is the downside of going to college that both Rodriguez and I experienced. But unlike Rodriguez, I have learned that the past constitutes a large part of my identity, that I need not give up my language or culture in order to succeed in American education, and that past experiences constitute a rich resource that I bring to the academic culture. What I have learned outside the academy is equally, and often more important than what I have learned in college classrooms (p.4).

The family and community serve as the two greatest connections to a student's culture and history. They offer another population of human and cultural resources that can be used to compliment the college experience. Therefore, finding opportunities to engage parents and to connect external cultural communities and experiences to college life is critical.

Retention and achievement versus cultural engagement and development.

Undoubtedly, cultural engagement and development is critical to the healthy adjustment and retention of students of color. However, institutional factors such as retention may not be the only worthwhile outcomes of cultural engagement. Cultural engagement may yield both personal and institutional outcomes. However, the personal benefits (related to

becoming a whole person rather than becoming a successful student) have not been deeply explored. It is difficult to measure academic achievement and cultural growth with the same stick because students may articulate similar achievement goals and values (desiring a college education, seeking a professional job) but may still differ in how they act or react to achieve these goals (Swidler, 1986). This is where the influence of culture as a toolkit enters. Swidler (1986) gives the following example:

If one asked a [impoverished] youth why he did not take steps to pursue a middle-class path to success, the answer might well be not “I don’t want that life,” but instead “Who, me?” One can hardly pursue success in a world where the accepted skills, style, and informal know-how are unfamiliar. One [finds it easier to] look for a line of action for which one already has the cultural equipment (p. 275)

Growing intra-cultural efficacy concerns expanding a students understanding of the cultural equipment that they have already inherited and how this equipment can assist them in navigating their way through a variety of new experiences and generally benefit them in life—whether on or off a college campus. Cultural competence then becomes being able to identify all of the tools in the cultural tool kit and how useful each of these skills are in helping them to build a healthy life, to devise strategies for social interaction, and to fix problems of culture shock. Culture shock has been described as the disease that people feel with their ability to affectively understand, interpret, and navigate their way through new cultural environments (Swidler, 1986). It is more than an inability to adopt or co-opt behavior, but rather the lack of confidence that individuals feel in their ability to analyze or read the environment and evaluate their performance. This may explain why the traditional response to illuminating culture shock through cultural assimilation is not overwhelmingly successful. If success is measured by achievement, self concept, psychological health, and cultural efficacy, assimilation would work in opposition to this

definition of success by encouraging students to discard and devalue their culture to acquire a new cultural tool kit. Cultural efficacy, on the other hand, leverages the cultural skills and habits that students already possess in a way that might allow them to understand how these skills can be used (not discarded) to help them acquire new skills in new cultural environments.

The institutional impact of cultural diversity. My study focuses on the importance of culture to the individual, in this case the student. However, the impact of cultural diversity to the broader institution is also important to discuss as it provides a context to understand why research on culture is important to the field of higher education. In the last 10 years, the field of higher education has expanded its commitment to equalize the campus as a diverse community culture. And when compared to the past, the structure of many college campuses has, in fact, become more culturally diverse despite the persisting under-representation of students of color. According to the American College Personnel Association, 28% of U.S. undergraduates are students of color and 75 % of students have at least one non-traditional characteristic such as being a parent, working while in school, or starting college at a later age (www.myacpa.org). Rendón (1993) describes the changes that took place within higher education in the 1990's as unimaginable. Women became the college majority, adult students over the age of 25 grew in representation, a large population of first generation college students arose, students from low socio-economic backgrounds increasingly saw college as an option, new groups of immigrants-particularly from non-documented families began to enter college, and non-racial students whose under-representation was characterized by their sexual identities or ability levels began to demand for adequate institutional response to their needs (Rendón, 1993).

Given these major demographic changes on the college campus, Kuh (2001) suggests re-examining the traditional view of college “fit” being determined by the alignment of student culture and values with institutional culture and values. The reality of the broad cultural diversity that exists on a large public university campus makes it virtually impossible to establish a campus community with similar values, cultures, and expectations much less create community engagement experiences that reinforce monolithic community values (Kuh, 2001).

Milem and Hakuta (2000) have examined this change by organizing how diversity is considered into two different categories: structural diversity (numerical representation of diverse populations) and interaction diversity (activities and opportunities for social exchange). On a broad level, recent research has proven the institutional and societal benefit of growing structural diversity (Milem & Hakuta, 2000; Hurtado 1996; Hurtado et al. 1998). However, Milem (2006) argues for increased focus on the interactions that take place as a result of this structural change. Essentially, the work of managing diversity is not complete until success has been measured both in the campus cultural *composition* as well as the cultural *experiences* of the students. Chang (1999) found that when an institution increases the number of students of color without addressing the involvement, engagement, and other effects of such a structural change, the outcomes might be negative. The institution then should consider the reach of cultural diversity and how deeply it will be engrained in the fabric of the campus. The goal of creating a campus climate consisting of rich and meaningful cultural, ethnic, racial, intellectual and social experiences may not be achieved if practitioners do not fully understand the essence of what culture and cultural engagement means to college students (Hurtado 1996).

The body of research that has focused on both of these elements of cultural diversity has shown that all students generally benefit from cultural diversity on campus, and particularly from cultural diversity interactions (Hu & Kuh 2003; Bowen & Bok 1998). Comparisons of the experiences of black students and white students have traditionally focused on satisfaction with the campus climate, impressions of the institution, and environment. White students who have diverse experiences while in college report greater post collegiate interactions across cultures (Bowen & Bok, 1998). Students of color who actively engage the overall university experience as undergraduates have greater perceptions of the institution and boast greater persistence levels (Bowen & Bok, 1998). In their study on attitudes towards campus diversity, Springer et al. (1996) related the effects of cultural awareness workshops on white students and noted the particular significance of such experiences in developing favorable attitudes towards diversity and improving the campus climate.

Caring for the cultural critical mass. Altbach (1991) suggests that the racial climate on campus reflects not only the immediate campus community but also society at large.

If the best educated community in the United States--institutions of higher learning--has racial problems, then there is a cause for considerable worry about the rest of society. And if better educated individuals, of whatever race, harbor racial prejudices which they occasionally express in random outbursts of racism, there are deep-seated problems both on campus and in society. (p.7)

If better strides towards an appreciation of cultural diversity cannot happen on the college campus, then optimism is low that positive gains can be achieved within the larger society. An examination of student impressions and satisfaction with college in America showed that students of color have a significantly different experience than their

white cohorts. Students of color report higher negative incidents of race, less support, a greater feeling of isolation, differences in the opportunity and need for peer relations, and more negative social interactions that interfere with their experience (Nettles, Thoeny, & Goesman 1986). White students exhibited greater involvement than in organized politics, career interest clubs, dating and social life, science activities, instrumental music, individual sports, and recreational activities, while black students in particular were more involved in community service or social welfare programs than whites (Loo and Rolison, 1986). It seems that white students have been more involved in organized extra-curricular college activities that center on campus and students of color have focused their involvement on activities geared towards the outside community. Thus, it is not surprising that white students would feel more culturally connected to the campus than students of color.

In illustrating how students of color are often left out, the issue of student alienation on majority white campuses is important. Loo and Rolison (1986) identified two major reasons why a majority of both students of color and white students felt that students of color faced more socio-cultural difficulties in college. The first involves cultural dominance of white, middle class values. They suggest that this dominance pressures students of color to acquire white, middle class values and to reject their own (Loo and Rolison, 1986).

The second reason deals with ethnic isolation as a result of being a small population on campus. Though dated, Loo and Rolison's (1986) study of student satisfaction provides insights that continue to be relevant today. In this study, students attested that the "culture shock" of college, though not directly related to academics,

encroached upon their academic performance. For some, adjusting to the college environment required too much time and energy, as it required adapting to a new socioeconomic class and cultural setting (Loo & Rolison, 1986). Students may not take advantage of the predominantly white organizations or services offered on campus as they may need experiences that are culturally affirming due to these feelings of isolation. This echoes Swidler's (1986) comments on students not engaging in experiences for which they do not have the cultural equipment. If we follow this line of reasoning students' responses to why they don't engage the larger campus may not be "I don't want to" but rather "who me?"

Particularly for those students who come from communities and past educational experiences that had minimal exposure to white culture, coming to a predominately white institution can produce such a culture shock. More importantly, when the major aspects of campus reflect only a white culture, students of color may begin to associate academic success and intellectual growth with whiteness—the face of success does not physically look like them (Loo and Rolison 1986). This type of experience may have significant implications on the healthy development of cultural efficacy among students of color. Rendón (1993) stresses the important difference between student involvement and student validation. She describes involvement as “how much time, energy, and effort students devote to the learning process (p.15).” Involvement is at the center of much of the research presented earlier—it drives student interaction with student organizations, faculty and staff, and peers. But, the passive nature of student involvement on the part of the institution makes it very different from intentional institutional efforts to grow personal and cultural efficacy among students. Rendón (1993) explains:

Involvement appears to have the following dimensions: First, it is something that students are expected to do on their own. Second, the role of the institution in fostering involvement is passive—it simply affords students the mechanisms, i.e. organizations, tutoring centers, extracurricular activities, etc. to get involved (p.16).

So although the institution often supports and advises student involvement opportunities, these opportunities most often take the form of the student governed, student created activities that have marked much of the co-curricular experience in higher education. And even those activities facilitated by the institution often do more to socially connect students, to occupy their time, or to provide a service rather than to transform their lives. The transformative experiences that students describe are much more personal and deeply engaging (Rendón, 1993). These experiences affirm the students personal, cultural, and academic selves. They validate the student as a whole person and a capable being. Thus, validation has the following characteristics: It is “an enabling, confirming, and supportive process (p.16).” It creates an environment in which students feel that the cultural experiences that they bring to college are recognized and acknowledged as important. It involves multiple communities in the validation process—family, friends, college faculty and staff. It is an ongoing process—one can never get enough validation. Therefore, validation is not a stage to reach or work through—it is a life-long experience. Therefore, it is relevant to all classification of students from first years to graduating seniors. And most importantly it is a vital aspect of student development (Rendón, 1993). So, initiatives that focus on

the building of cultural efficacy can serve as a critical form of student validation that contributes to self concept both during and after college.

Bowen and Bok (1998) examined the post collegiate consequences of the college experience for black students. Because the college experience is one of those life experiences that may serve to shape and change one's values, ideas, and personality, the experiences encountered during those four years are important ones. The belief is that colleges and universities are graduating confident, skilled, and educated professionals. Attending college should have a significant and positive influence on a student's life. In their examination of college admissions practices, Bowen and Bok (1998) gathered reflections and opinions of black college graduates (alumni of highly selective majority white institutions). One of the insights in this piece of literature was that a black college graduate may not feel a greater sense of racial equality after graduation than she did prior to coming to college. They called this the paradox of "succeeding more and enjoying it less" (Bowen & Bok, 1998). This suggests that the more black students achieve (gaining advanced degrees, higher job status), the more disheartening it becomes that they are still victim to exclusion, isolation, and discrimination. The higher you climb, the less you see people that look like yourself. The more you achieve professionally and make an attempt to do what you are told is necessary to gain social acceptance, the more it becomes clear that for people of color, regardless of how much you achieve or what actions you take, you will never be an equal partner in American society. The American dream is that once one reaches her professional, financial, and family goals, life will be enjoyable. However, many professionals of color, in this case black individuals found that they were still facing racial discrimination and prejudice regardless of how much they achieved

(Bowen & Bok, 1998). Apparently, culture shock seems to be a life experience that travels with people of color on their journey to “success.” Again, reflecting back on the Gates (1998) comment referenced earlier it is critical to determine how cultural efficacy can “hold them up” or as Rendón terms it “validate” students in college and throughout life.

Colleges and universities in the U.S. have attempted to address some of the differences of their under-represented ethnic populations through more liberal admissions policies that offer greater access to underrepresented students; early outreach and bridge programs to introduce high-school students to college; aggressive recruitment; targeted financial aid; academic support services; and the creation of multicultural or multi-ethnic student affairs departments. However, Richardson & Skinner (1990) suggest that though important, such programs tend to provide a strategy to cope or assimilate into a majority environment for minority students rather than a true integration of diversity into institutional practice. For example, liberal admissions standards are necessary, but students should not be admitted and left alone to cope. Helm et al (1998) also emphasize the importance of cultural co-curricular programs. “A key goal is to design diversity programs that will result in positive effects for students in different groups. It does seem that simply bringing students with different cultural backgrounds and experiences together and letting them work it out is unlikely to produce positive results (p.112).” Recent studies have illustrated that the focus on minority students should not end with access to college but should be expanded to concentrate on their lived cultural experience once they have entered (Milem, Hurtado, et al 1998). And future research should examine the effects of such experiences on students of color (Springer 1996).

Measuring up to student of color expectation.. When considering the issue of enhancing the collegiate experience of students of color, it is important to note that, “students of color evaluate diversity in terms of institutional commitments and actions” (Matlock 1997). For under-represented students, departments such as university cultural centers serve to provide structural balance to cultural inclusion and growth opportunities on the college campus (Patton, 2004). The first cultural centers on American university campuses began from African American student demand for greater forms of cultural inclusion, cultural service, and cultural education in the 1960’s. The cultural center at that time was often a small stand alone campus house or office suite that served as a cultural safe space dedicated to the learning and celebration of black history and culture (Patton, 2004). As the structural make-up of the student body continued to diversify, students of other ethnicities looked to the existing cultural resource on campus, the black cultural center, as the model for the type of resource that they also required. Thus, throughout the 1980’s and 1990’s cultural centers dedicated to Latino, Asian, Native American or multiple cultures, were born on campuses across the country. Though many cultural centers share similar birth stories of student protest, administrative negotiations, and an eventual creation of a cultural “home away from home,” today the actual services, outcomes, and structures of many cultural centers across the country differ. From starkly contrasting architectural structures, vastly different budgets, and programmatic and service outcomes that are unique to each campus, university cultural centers share very little standards of practice across the country (Hefner, 2001). These differences impact both how a cultural center looks and what it does on the campus. What cultural centers today do seem to share is a strong role in orienting students of color to campus,

encouraging their involvement in campus life, and establishing a sense of community for students of color (Patton 2004; Jones 2004). As Patton (2006) notes in her article focused on perceptions of black cultural centers, students perceive the cultural center to be the most central resource and representative for black culture on campus. What is most telling about her findings are the clear distinctions students make between various cultures and ethnicities and the benefit that they attributed to having resources that provide culturally authentic learning experiences.

Many students did not identify with being African American. Instead, they associated themselves with Haitian, Jamaican, Trinidadian, and other Caribbean cultures... The IBC was representative of all black students, not just African Americans. Therefore, it was viewed as the place for all peoples of the African Diaspora...(Patton, p.640)

Students in this study point to cultural differences in language, food, and histories and the role that the university cultural center played in providing opportunities to learn more about specific cultures. Additionally, they noted the role of the cultural center as a cultural symbol (Patton, 2006). Not only do cultural centers create cultural engagement opportunities, but the resource itself serves as an important cultural artifact and symbol of cultural capital for students of color (Patton, 2006). Studies on the effect of university sponsored international events and workshops on cultural difference have shown the general benefit of cultural programs in broadly encouraging students to be more accepting of cultural difference and more able to properly adjust to college (Jones, 2004; Klak & Martin 2003; Patton, 2004; Hord, 2005). However, there is not a significant literature base from which to draw a specific understanding of the personal and long-term benefits of cultural programs to students of color beyond retention, adjustment, and the

sense of campus inclusion that they provide. This is an important gap to fill given the initial student expectation of university cultural centers to do the work of equalizing cultural capital and filling the cultural education deficit that students of color face throughout their educational experience. To better understand the cultural expectations of college students, exploring the history of cultural venues in communities of color outside of college is important as this history influenced how cultural resources initially came to exist on college campuses.

How Centers of Culture Came to Campus

As noted earlier, the first cultural centers to populate the campus environment were black cultural centers in the 1970's. These cultural centers have, in many ways, served as the model for other ethnic centers (African, Latino, Native American, Asian). The very existence of black cultural centers motivated the duplication of the cultural center model across other cultures. Thus, the history of cultural centers at large begins with the establishment of black cultural centers. Understanding the long history of black cultural centers—how centers of culture originally came to campus and why such centers were important to African American students—helps to explain the role that cultural education plays in the lives of students of color. The social events of the time that led to the establishment of black cultural centers on university campuses were not isolated incidents, but were instead part of a long chain of historical events and social opposition to oppression.

In many social arenas, black participation is a relatively new phenomenon, particularly the arena of education. America has over a three hundred year history of higher education, yet not more than 139 years ago it was illegal for blacks of any age to

be taught to read. However, this never deterred African American desire to participate within educational arenas. Though for hundreds of years African Americans have had to navigate their way through an oppressive history in America, progressive black community members have always found ways to resist the internalization of oppression, particularly with regards to education. The creation of Negro schools during the post-slavery years was often a community commitment. In many cases black communities supported in spirit and in funds the creation of schools in their community whenever an educator was available. Booker T. Washington (in Boyd & Allen, 1995), in his legendary text, *Up From Slavery*, recounted how the community would engage in the practice of boarding round, that is each family in the neighborhood would agree to board the school teacher for a few weeks in order to keep an educated person in the community and the school open. The educator at that time was an integral part of the community and a member of the extended familial network that had been a part of the African American family structure since slavery began to disrupt and disconnect family bonds. Noted scholar and educator, W.E.B. Dubois (1903) shared his experiences as the community educator in the text, "The Souls of Black Folks." DuBois (1903) iterates the cultural connectivity between the educator, the pupil, and the community within Negro schools: "And yet there was among us a half awakened common consciousness, sprung from common hardship in poverty, poor land, and low wages; and above all the sight of the Veil that hung between US and Opportunity" (p.14). In other words, the teacher shared both the communities thirst for knowledge and social deprivation due to oppression. These were educational environments that understood the culture, history and experience of the students that they taught. hooks (2001) affirms the community value of the teacher

and culturally loving educational systems years after the start of Negro schools. This is a particularly important historical factor to understand as the small amount of contemporary research on black cultural centers affirms that the role of the black educator or administrator continues to be identified as a vital resource for black students (Patton, 2004).

Separate spaces also meant that racist biases in educational systems could be countered by wise black teachers. Those who attended all black schools in the years before the militant black power struggle, institutions named for important black leaders [Crispus Attucks, Booker T. Washington, George Washington Carver, et. al], were educated in a world where we were valued...our teachers added lessons in black history and culture...we had perfect role models...no one doubted our ability to learn (p. 78).

In the past, it was a whole race trying to go to school whether it be day or night schools, five or seventy-five year olds, all sought to attend school with the goal of being able to read the bible before they died. Education was viewed as the means for upward mobility and it was a community driven and culturally connected endeavor. Thus organizing educational and cultural resources within Black communities has occurred throughout history and has most often been a locally or community driven endeavor by the people and for the people (Washington in Boyd & Allen 1995).

During reconstruction and what is known as the Nadir period [most violent] of American history, African American communities responded to American racial backlash through the development of cultural clubs and associations. It was then that the African American community added to its community commitment to education a commitment to cultural uplift. Many of these organizations, clubs, and community association structures served as early models from which students would later draw when determining how to

react to their own racially volatile environments within college. The Freedman's Bureau, the National Association of Colored Women, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the National Council of Negro Women, countless black churches, and eventually black colleges such as Bethune-Cookman College were created for the purpose of organizing around the needs of the African American community and creating culturally driven structures to ensure that these needs were met (Hines & Thompson, 1999). These organizations in many respects served as cultural uplift structures as much as racial and political organizing venues. The National Association of Colored Women, for example, held as one of its goals the desire to counter the negative and stereotypical images of African American women and to engage in the enactment of their motto "Lifting as we climb" (Hines & Thompson, 1999). Thus, cultural organizations and centers within the African American community have historically held a purpose to both create a space of inclusion as well as a medium of cultural growth and uplift.

With the increase in community agency and the advent of both organizations and colleges within the black community, the civil rights movement that followed these changes provided a venue through which students could increasingly engage in community activism. Organizations such as the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee and The Black Panthers provided avenues through which young activists could offer both a voice and a hand to community change. Activism among black students was often driven by a resistance to white cultural conformity (Patton 2004). Organizations and activism focused on racial empowerment and the development of a strong sense of racial self help (Hines & Thompson, 1999). During this time of continued

political and racial organization, black communities also created structures and systems of cultural support and cultural engagement. These structures were created from the cultural values of the years mentioned previously in which black communities placed a strong value on education and cultural uplift. They were built on a framework established by the creation of Negro Schools and black clubs and organizations. This new generation then took its turn in developing community structures that embodied these long held and historically inherited cultural ideals. There are several examples of these cultural centers being constructed within the larger African American community. The YMI Cultural Center in Asheville North Carolina started as the Young Men's Institute. The recorded history of the YMI states that it was built by and for the young black men that were also responsible for building the Biltmore Estate (www.ymicc.org).

Very quickly, the YMI developed into the center of social, cultural, civic, commercial and religious life for local African-Americans. It offered a kindergarten and gymnasium, and even bathing facilities. Congregations without church buildings worshipped here and Sunday afternoon song services became popular. Between 1926 and 1966, the YMI housed the public library used by the city's black population. As well, there was a corner drugstore, a funeral parlor and the offices of Dr. James W. Bryan, one of Asheville's first African-American doctors (www.ymicc.org).

Similarly, what is presently known as the Thurgood Marshall Center for Service and Heritage in Washington, DC began as a YMCA building that was designed by W. Sidney Pittman, one of only a few African American architects of the time and the son-in-law of Booker T. Washington. The building has a 70 year history of having served as a local mecca for civil and social engagements for African Americans. The center provided space for leaders to meet and hosted a library, gym, and classrooms that were used to

teach culturally driven courses on leadership, civic engagement, and responsibility.

(<http://www.thurgoodmarshallcenter.org/history.html>)

Neighborhood cultural centers were a part of communities in many cities around the country from New York to Chicago to Philadelphia (Hines & Thompson, 1999). The model for constructing a culturally centered venue for social engagement and personal development was first created within the communities and neighborhoods in which students lived prior to coming to college. It was outside of the gates of campus and within a larger system of social oppression that African American children and young adults learned to create structures that were culturally their own. Cultural centers within the community, therefore, offered a cultural safe space for cultural development, remembrance, and engagement to contrast the cultural isolation within the larger society. These centers, as well as the Negro schools and clubs before them, illustrated that when larger society did not adequately serve or include the African American community, the community responded by creating structures of its own. All of these structures contributed to the act of decolonization for which hooks (2001) argues, “Learning to be positive, to affirm ourselves, is a way to cultivate self-love, to intervene on shaming that is racialized” (p. 74).

As collegiate access became more available for black students, historical community experiences outside of the college campus then served as the impetus for activism once students entered college. Author Bikara Kitwana (2002) notes that for the young African Americans who came into adulthood during the years of the civil rights movement, activism was a part of their national identity:

In a climate that screamed for change, youth movements across race, class, gender, and ethnicity were a part of the culture. Anti-war activism, the African

Independence explosion, political revolutions in Central America and Asia were all underway. In that time of national political movements and youth radicalism, fighting the power was a given... (p. 168)

This national culture of activism undoubtedly affected the expectations and approaches of black students as they began to enter college in record numbers (Patton 2004). Within higher education, students turned a critical eye and an activist voice towards the curriculum and the structures of the college campus. The desire for equality was not relegated only to issues of social justice outside of the gates of campus, but also included being afforded full citizenship status within all communities in which African Americans were housed including the college campus. Patton (2004) noted, “Black students’ demands for BCC’s [Black Cultural Centers] were inextricably intertwined with the yearning to see black culture manifested throughout the entire system of higher education. In essence, they wanted to see their culture recognized in academics (curriculum and faculty), social life (student activities, residential life), and administrative affairs (financial aid, admissions)” (p.3). As a result of the marriage between students’ internally focused critical evaluation of the college campus and their externally molded cultural orientation (which included both a locally contrived value for a community capital centered on culture and a nationally inspired inclination towards activism), African American students across the country began to demand the creation of African Studies Programs, an increase in black faculty and staff, and the creation of cultural centers and cultural student affairs departments. Since the original establishment of black cultural centers almost 40 years ago, hundreds of cultural centers, ethnic research centers, multicultural affairs departments, and multicultural academic support centers have been created on college campuses across the United States.

The websites of several university cultural centers were surveyed to determine what cultural programming *now* looks like on college campuses around the country. The goal was to get a sense of what cultural centers are doing as a reflection of how they conceive culture. The websites of 15 cultural centers were reviewed. Overwhelmingly, many offered similar formats in their programs and services. Cultural programming consistently took the shape of lectures, research colloquia, scholars-in residence, film festivals, book clubs, leadership retreats, minority student welcomes and graduations, poetry readings, and cultural performances featuring drumming and dancing troupes. Many centers listed programs such as “Cultural Days” and “Heritage Month Celebrations” but no detailed descriptions of what occurs during these programs were offered. Several other cultural centers also offered academic support to students in the form of time management and study skills workshops. Three centers also offered community/youth outreach programs as well as parent receptions at the beginning of the year and during the university’s Parent/Family Weekend. Forty years after the start of many cultural centers, not only have the number of centers grown but so has the level of programming offered. Though the quality of programs can not be assessed on a website, there definitely is a strong concentration by the institution on the quantity of programs offered. Of course large numbers of programs may not translate to deep impact. This brings to the surface other questions regarding whether or not these programs are being well received by students, if they are effectively serving students, and if they are congruent with how students view culture and what they appreciate about it.

The structural landscape of many universities has changed significantly. However, the issue of white-normed culture still holding priority at many predominantly

white institutions makes cultural practice a persisting issue (Stovall, 2005). There still remains the challenge of not only building cultural structures but also providing meaningful cultural experiences that help to grow a contemporary college student's understanding of her cultural self. Maulana Karenga's (2005) idea of culture being "central to our self-understanding and self-assertion in the world" continues to remain relevant, particularly when attempting to make an earnest effort to engage in deep and meaningful cultural practice on college campuses (p.21). In the 1960's student's posed the question of why aren't there equal cultural structures on campus. Today, the question has now changed to what are these structures culturally producing and how impactful are these experiences to college students of color? Molefi Asante (2005), in a chapter on black cultural centers, outlines five areas of responsibility that can be broadly applied to general cultural practice of any kind. Essentially, these areas of responsibility outline what cultural experiences in college should offer to students of color:

1. An intense interest in...cultural and psychological location, as shown in symbols, motifs, rituals, and signs.
2. A commitment to discovering the subject-place [of a student's culture] in any social, political, literary, or religious phenomenon with implications for questions of sex, gender, and class.
3. A defense of cultural elements as historically valid in the context of art, music, dance, education, science, and literature.
4. A celebration of centredness and agency [in one's culture]
5. An imperative from historical sources to revise the collective text [of one's culture] (p. 37)

These five areas reveal the need to offer means of cultural recreation or reproduction on campus through rituals, symbols, and traditions; to offer programs that explore critical intersections of culture and issues of personal development (gender, class, etc); and to reinforce and model feelings of positive regard for culture as a means to counter negative impressions that may have been previously learned. This then becomes the focus of contemporary cultural practice—to continue to further develop and refine cultural programs, services, and experiences and to integrate the values of student cultures into the experience of college life.

The research on culture and cultural practice in higher education offers relevant information on the experiences of college students of color. It also provides insight on the historic and contemporary importance of culture to the college experience. It is clear that studying this topic is complex as it requires an intellectual wrestling with the concept of culture to make it operational for practice; an understanding of the changing roles and expectations of university cultural experiences/resources; and a definitive approach to how cultural experiences can be defined and organized to ensure that the full cultural experience is examined. This review of literature also identified the important gaps and limited inquiry that persists, thus, making this study an important venture.

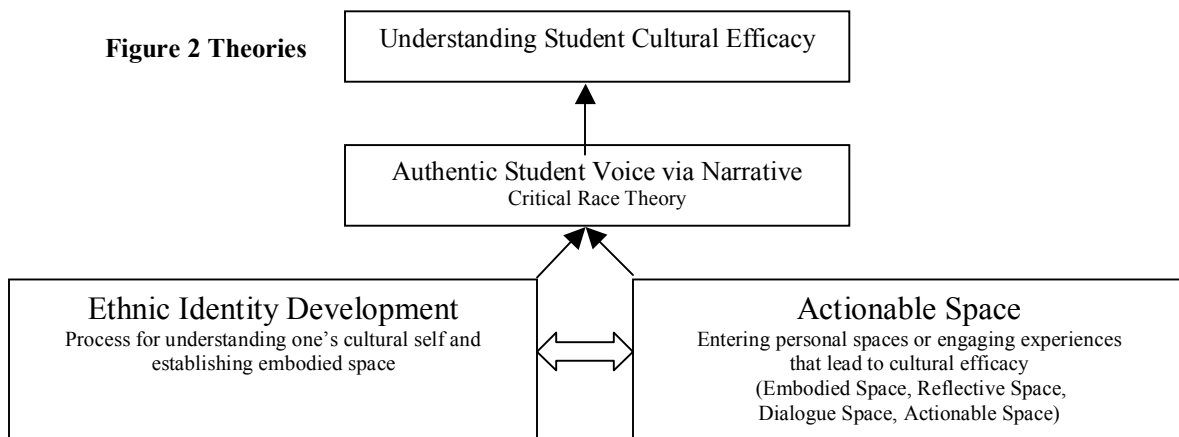
CHAPTER 3

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

*"Here in this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it. They don't love your eyes; they'd just as soon pick 'em out. No more do they love the skin on your back. Yonder they flay it. And O my people they do not love your hands. Those they only use, tie, bind, chop off and leave empty. Love your hands! Love them. Raise them up and kiss them. Touch others with them, pat them together, stroke them on your face 'cause they don't love that either. You got to love you! This is flesh that needs to be loved." from Toni Morrison, *Beloved**

Cultural Efficacy: Theories of Culture and Identity

Several theoretical frameworks influence the design of this study and drive its focus on understanding how students develop a strong sense of cultural agency and counter negative influences to their cultural development. Phinney's model of ethnic identity and Sharma-Brymer's (2006) theory of actionable space and human rights are adapted to issues of culture and used to better understand how a student's interactions within and outside of her culture might reveal information on her development of cultural efficacy. Critical Race Theory is used to help frame the importance of cultural engagement through the use of narratives. Figure 2 illustrates the relationship between these three theories in framing this study.



Ethnic Identity Development

Ethnic identity development concerns the personal development that takes place as a result of one's interactions with her family and cultural community. Most classic models are stage models that illustrate growth taking place in a linear fashion. More recent ethnic identity ideologies view development as a process that occurs throughout one's life (Chavez & Guido-Dibrito, 1999). Several ethnic identity models have been developed including white-ethnic identity (Katz, 1989) and Native American identity and world-view (Garret and Walking Stick Garret, 1994). Chavez & Guido-Dibrito's (1999) insight into the conflicting cultural and social influences on students of color set a context for understanding the role that identity plays in establishing cultural efficacy through co-curricular service to students of color.

For some especially visible and legally defined minority populations in the United States, racial and ethnic identity are manifested in very conscious ways. This manifestation is triggered most often by two conflicting social and cultural influences. First, deep conscious immersion into cultural traditions and values through religious, familial, neighborhood, and educational communities instills a positive sense of ethnic identity and confidence. Second, and in contrast, individuals most often filter ethnic identity through negative treatment and media messages received from others because of their race and ethnicity. These messages make it clear that people with minority status have a different ethnic makeup and one that is less than desirable within mainstream society (p.39).

The implications that these conflicts have on college learning is significant as students often find it difficult to negotiate learning environments that overtly or covertly (by lack of inclusiveness) underscore these negative messages (Chavez & Guido-Dibrito, 1999). The bicultural lives of students of color-living within the often oppressive dominant

society culture and the affirming ethnic community culture-make ethnic identity development an important aspect of their personal development (Torres, 2003). Phinney (1993) offers an ethnic identity model that has been deemed applicable to multiple ethnic groups. Broadly, this model identifies two major issues that most under-represented cultures must confront: (1) Negative stereotyping and low levels of self-concept influenced by the dominant culture and (2) The lack of appreciation for their cultural values and the dissonance often present in living a bi-cultural life. This model is a traditional stage model identifying three phases of ethnic development. The first stage, diffusion-foreclosure, involves a lack of engagement, interest, or exploration of one's ethnicity. Typically, in this stage, students may espouse a preference for the dominant group or may not demonstrate any real interest in issues of ethnicity. Individuals in this stage, may not express any sentiment towards their ethnicity—positive or negative. The essential characteristic of diffusion-foreclosure is that they have not begun to explore ethnicity in any meaningful way. In the moratorium stage, individuals, often motivated by an experience or situation, begin ethnic exploration. According to Phinney (1993), this stage is marked by active cultural learning and cultural engagement. The third stage involves the individual successfully reaching identity achievement. In this stage, the two major challenges mentioned earlier—establishing a positive ethnic orientation and appreciating one's cultural values—are resolved. This stage is marked by a confident sense of ethnic identity. This model is relevant to help account for critical differences in student responses. However, as Chavez and Guido-Dibrito (1998) point out, the model is missing a discussion on the value of immersion in one's culture. These authors argue that successfully negotiating these two challenges may largely depend on a solid grounding and meaningful

experience within one's culture. The model, instead, frames cultural immersion as a stage to be moved through, rather than a life-long practice that may have important and continued growth outcomes. They share their own experiences as an example of this:

Alicia, who is Hispano and Native American (Mestiza), was raised both connected to and in her ancestral home in northern New Mexico. The village of Taos is isolated enough that individuals from these ethnic groups hold most educational, governmental, and business positions in the community. In addition, time, relationships, and other daily aspects of culture are primarily normed on a combined Native American and Hispano culture. For Alicia, this meant that even with many childhood years spent away from Taos, cultural messages within her community were consistent in providing positive, cultural role modeling. Brief time periods in other states with their educational and neighborhood communities also provided more than enough negative treatment for an understanding of the low value placed by many in the United States on these two cultures. These forays also provided triggers in her consciousness of ethnic identity and personal sense of otherness (Chávez, 1998, p.44).

This example illustrates the utility of a deeply rooted cultural orientation as a means of countering the dominant cultural norms, negative opinions, and cultural values that oppress the cultural experiences of students of color. Therefore, it is through continuously engaging this stage of active cultural learning and experiences that one established a healthy cultural identity throughout life. This is particularly meaningful given the findings shared earlier that reveal the persistent struggle with race and ethnicity that people of color have throughout life. Ethnic identity development may not be "worked through" in college. But as Chavez and Guido-Dibrito (1998) point out, it may involve physically moving in and out of one's personal cultural center while always

being psychologically centered in that culture. Guanipa-Ho and Gaunipa (1998) offer an explanation:

Identity cannot be separated from the culture (s) which build and structure it. The identity of the individual develops and crystallizes across one's lifespan, beginning with a young child's awareness of significant others and an initial sense of self and extending to the older adults' summation, integration and evaluation of one's life accomplishments (p.2)

Torres (2003) also stresses the importance of understanding the differences in starting points that students possess. The environment and family are noted as important influences on a student's initial understanding of their ethnic identity and cultural orientation (Torres, 2003). Students that come from experiences where their ethnic group is a critical mass often do not see themselves as a minority or do not truly grasp the minority experience until they come to campus (Torres, 2003). Torres (2003) shares a student response that illustrates this:

Before, when I was at home, everybody knew I was Hispanic...Everybody knows I am Mexican, and it is just part of everyday life. Ninety percent of the students where I was going to school were of Hispanic background. Now I come and I have to say my name differently. Instead of saying [Spanish pronunciation], I say [Americanized pronunciation], because everybody is like, "What did you say?" You know...I have to educate people about who I am, where I am from, what the reality of my life is, in contrast to what they think the reality of my life is (p.5).

In this case, college can serve as that motivating event that moves them into the moratorium stage. It triggers a cultural seeking out for resources, peers, learning opportunities, and support networks that are focused on culture, race, or ethnicity. Torres' (2003) research on ethnic identity development identifies two critical elements

that mark change in ethnic orientation among students. Change in cultural dissonance relates to any change in the conflicts between a student's personal sense and understanding of her culture and the counter beliefs and expectations that others (inside or outside of the culture) hold. Cultural dissonance may involve retreating into or away from one's culture, creating personal prejudices about one's culture or the majority culture, feeling as if one must choose between family and college, or a recognition that one does not have a full understanding of her culture or ethnicity, which prompts a desire to learn more. Rather than viewing cultural dissonance as a stage that one confronts and then moves beyond, it is seen as something that will continue to evolve as students experiences evolve. A student's approach to cultural dissonance in the second year of college may significantly differ from her first year, and will probably also differ from the way she approaches dissonance in her senior year. Student experiences in college, interactions with peers, ongoing negotiations with family's understanding of college, and interactions with the majority culture will all influence this ongoing evolution. But, they may *always* encounter events, people, or circumstances that create dissonance. The second identity change marker deals with relationships with the environment. As students grow, their choices regarding peer friendships, student organization involvements, and staff interactions also change. Torres' (2003) work does not seem to privilege an orientation in either direction as marking significant growth. Growth is not solely marked by a student being able to have positive relationships with majority groups as seems to mark the resolution stage in many other models. Rather, this issue is marked by whatever change an individual student needs in order to establish a healthy life balance (Torres, 2003). So, for some

students who enter college with no sense of connection to their ethnicity or with a strong orientation towards majority cultural values, their change might involve a newly developed appreciation and curiosity about their culture which encourages them to join cultural organizations and seek out students that share their ethnicity. For other students that feel as though they are deeply rooted in their culture and have little experience with other cultures, the change might be marked by exploring majority peer experiences and venturing out beyond their culture.

Giving consideration to student ethnic identity development can help to inform the types of cultural programming needed. Understanding identity theory also provides an important reality check for practitioners. As Helms, et al (1998) note, being confronted with negativity from students may be a positive sign of ethnic growth. Therefore, these models serve as important radars for practitioners to trigger program creation or effective counseling strategies. They are also relevant to data collection in this study as they are one component of the personal orientation of student participants that influence their responses.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) was originally developed within legal studies but has since been adapted within educational environments to study the experience of under-represented racial groups. A component of Critical Race Theory that is particularly salient to this study is the concept of *cultural nationalism*. This belief was referenced earlier in Maulana Karenga's (2005) statement on the centrality of culture in developing self understanding. The importance of culture then makes creating cultural structures, experiences, and opportunities a necessary practice of cultural nationalism. Cultural

nationalism places an inherent value on self-created cultural structures that allow people of color to continue the tradition of raising, teaching, and empowering the cultural orientation of their youth. Barnes (1990) offers an important explanation of the importance and relevance of this theory:

Minority perspectives make explicit the need for fundamental change in the ways we think and construct knowledge...Exposing how minority cultural viewpoints differ from white cultural viewpoints requires a delineation of the complex set of social interactions through which minority consciousness has developed. Distinguishing the consciousness of racial minorities requires acknowledgement of the feelings and intangible modes of perception unique to those who have historically been socially, structurally, and intellectually marginalized in the United States (p.1864).

A critical component of acknowledging such feelings and modes of perception includes hearing the authentic stories of the cultural experience. As Delgado (1990) argues, people of color may speak from a very different experience. Thus, the concepts of authentic voice, story exchange, and naming one's own reality are essential to the critical race theorist (Delgado, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Tate (1997) lists four justifications for the use of story to understand the experience of people of color: (1) The social construction of reality (2) the potential of stories to change mind-sets (3) the community-building potential of stories; and (4) stories provide under-represented cultures a means of self preservation.

Marable (2005) shares how such story sharing has been central to the act of cultural protection engaged by many past leaders and intellectuals of color. He relates how public intellectuals like Malcolm X (through raw and uninhibited oral story sharing); James Weldon Johnson (through creative and artistic story sharing); and W.E.B. Dubois (through ethnographic story sharing) have contested dominant cultural narratives. Through the

authentic telling, and thus documenting, of their cultural histories these men validated the importance of the cultural experience.

Validating the cultural experience also requires refusing to view communities of color through a lens of deficiency. Critical Race Theory challenges educators to acknowledge the rich cultural heritage of students of color as valuable and important.

Looking through a CRT lens means critiquing deficit theorizing and data that may be limited by its omission of voices of People of Color. Indeed, one of the most prevalent forms of contemporary racism in US schools is 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 p.75)

Yosso (2005) goes on to share five tenets of CRT that should inform educational research and practice: (1) The central role of race and racism within society at large; (2) the challenge to dominant ideology; (3) the commitment to social justice; (4) the concentration on experiential knowledge or the real life experience; and (5) the academic boundary crossing perspective of the theory. CRT is concerned with naming the real experience of people of color in order to truly address issues of inequality. The theory recognizes that this experience does not live in one discipline but affects people in all aspects of their lives including issues of ethnicity, sociology, gender, politics, history, the arts, and education.

But CRT goes a step further to also critique some current forms of multicultural practice as “attempts to be everything to everyone [that] consequently become nothing for anyone, allowing the status quo to prevail” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 2). Ladson-Billings (1998) explains:

Current practical demonstrations of multicultural education in schools often reduce it to trivial examples and artifacts of cultures - eating ethnic or cultural foods, singing songs or dancing, reading folk tales, and other less scholarly pursuits of the fundamentally different conceptions of knowledge or quests for social justice. At the university level, much of the concern has been over curriculum inclusion...Somewhat different from multicultural education...multiculturalism came to be viewed as a political philosophy of ‘many cultures’ existing together in an atmosphere of respect and tolerance. Thus, outside of the classroom multiculturalism represented the attempts to bring both students and faculty from a variety of cultures into the school (or academy) environment...Less often discussed are the growing tensions that exist between and among various groups that gather under the umbrella of multiculturalism...the current multicultural paradigm is mired in liberal ideology that offers no radical change in the current order (pp. 61-62).

It is for this reason that Critical Race Theory influences the conceptual framework of this study--it places value on radical change in education that is influenced by a rich understanding (as opposed to a broad view) of the experiences of people of color.

Actionable Space

Cultural efficacy development, as an ongoing life long process, can be examined through the framework of actionable space. The theoretical construct of actionable space was originally used to understand issues of personal agency with regards to women victims of violence. However, the construct also provides a relevant lens through which to view the process of cultural learning and development can be viewed. Actionable space frames development within four types of personal “spaces”: Embodied, reflective, dialogue, and actionable space (Sharma-Brymer, 2005). Embodied and reflective space involve the individual and her personal locale with regards to an issue. Embodied space

refers to the past experiences that influence one's present orientation or understanding. Reflective space refers to the deep contemplation of these past experiences and present beliefs. These two forms of space include inward reflective behavior in which one's identity, values, history and culture influence her present orientation and thought processes. Dialogue space is the space, environment, or experience in which one safely gives voice to her reflections and to the critical evaluation of the world. Finally, actionable space represents the interactions of all previously mentioned dimensions that result in an asserted stance or action towards justice, personal agency or in this case cultural efficacy (Sharma-Brymer, 2005).

Space is the most powerful experience in [students'] everyday lived world, having both actual and metaphorical existence. This actual and metaphorical space entails an expression of agency in the everyday lived experience, the assumed and the actual characteristic of an educated woman's life...The term 'Actionable' draws on the meaning of ability to act towards an effect, which also denotes a change in an existing condition. Integrating the two separate words of action and able and the various meanings associated with them together the term puts forth a meaning of a condition having enough power to do something...the term Actionable Space provides a ground for the description of a space in which [students of color] are in a condition, a position, having enough power to do something. They have the power to act towards a change in their private and public domains of life (Sharma-Brymer, 2006, p.18).

This construct provides a valuable lens through which to view cultural engagement. Actionable space refers to both an actual physical space (cultural centers, cultural programs, cultural offices/departments) and a metaphorical space (personal comfort, curiosity, reflection, and interest in one's culture). Therefore, actionable space resides both on the campus through its structure, programs, and services as cultural

learning opportunities and within the psyche of students through their ethnic identity orientation. This space refers to the ideological sense of personal or cultural agency—being comfortable enough to reflect on, dialogue about, or engage in your culture. Viewed through this theoretical framework, multicultural education should establish healthy, affirming, and safe physical or mental arenas in which one can effectively explore issues of culture. This framework will be utilized to assess the overall cultural efficacy outcomes as perceived by students and as evidenced by students inward reflection their own cultural values and beliefs, outward dialogue regarding issues of culture, and cultural action as demonstrated by an interest in continued cultural learning, cultural participation, or in creating cultural experiences on their campus. To adapt this framework to the study of cultural efficacy, student responses were coded according to whether they seemed to indicate the presence of embodied, reflective, dialogue, and actionable space.

Conceptual Process for Organizing the Campus Cultural Experience

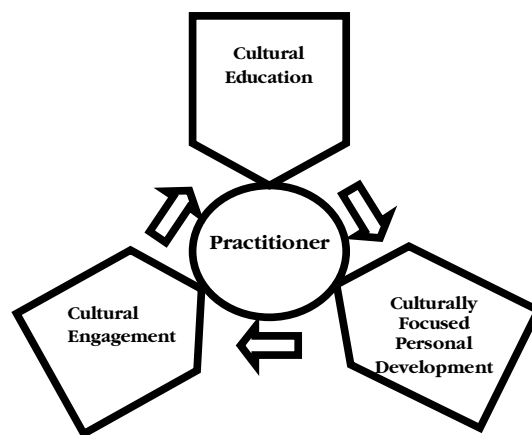
The Tri-Sector Cultural Practitioner's Model (TCP) has recently been offered as a framework to drive cultural practice outside of the classroom. The three areas of practice highlighted in the model provide a frame to guide organizing the campus cultural opportunities or “spaces” for cultural engagement. In this study, I used the model in the group interviews to categorize types of campus programs. These categories were presented to students in order to understand their perceptions of the importance of each type of cultural program. In selecting to use the model, I considered the possibility of students grouping all types of cultural programs together and generally commenting

without deeply dissecting each type of program for its impact, role, and importance. This critical grouping of programs allowed me to establish a focused and thoughtful conversation on each type of cultural experience.

The model is primarily derived from actual practice but also utilizes national research on diversity in higher education, college student development, and cultural studies to create a practical guide that cultural departments can use to help structure their program offerings (Jenkins & Walton 2005; Jenkins & Walton 2006). The model is described as:

A multi-layered approach to creating institutional programming that focuses on challenging students to explore and to develop the multiple facets of their culture and in turn understand how their culture impacts their personal and professional character. The model identifies three sectors that may be critical in the holistic development of the student of color. These sectors include the Cultural Education Sector [focusing on cultural learning and scholarship], the Cultural Student Development Sector [focusing on cultural leadership, civic engagement, and the intersections of gender & ethnicity], and the Cultural Engagement Sector [focusing on the celebration, participation, and artistic expression of culture] (Jenkins & Walton 2006, p.2).

Figure 3 TCP Model



The TCP Model illustrates that administrators and co-curricular practitioners are central in implementing such programs on campus and ensuring that students gain exposure to all three sectors throughout their collegiate life. As a programmatic framework, the TCP Model organizes cultural interaction around three critical spheres of co-curricular programs: Cultural education, cultural engagement, and cultural development. In practice, cultural education programs are scholarly and academic initiatives that integrate interdisciplinary study and learning into creative co-curricular programming venues. Approaching cultural diversity from an academic point of context, these programs provide the entire campus community with opportunities to engage in scholarship and interactive cultural learning outside of the classroom (Jenkins & Walton, 2005). Cultural education programs include such initiatives as research brown bags, lectures, educational immersions, and international experiences. Cultural engagement programs provide opportunities for the campus community to experience the practice, celebration, and demonstration of culture (Jenkins & Walton, 2005). These programs serve to enhance the campus climate and social environment by providing opportunities for cultural and diversity interaction (Milem & Hukata, 2000). Cultural engagement programs can include celebratory cultural events, festivals, artistic performances, and social programs. Finally, cultural student development programs seek to integrate cultural education, cultural theories, and cultural practice creatively into initiatives that focus on the personal, gender, and moral development of students (Jenkins & Walton 2005). By infusing social, historical, and contemporary issues affecting communities of color into educational and practical experiences, cultural development programs encourage culturally and communally engaged leadership development and civic activism (HERI,

1996). This model provides a framework to approach organizing campus based cultural experiences that is directly aligned with the cultural efficacy ideologies mentioned earlier: the need for greater education on one's culture, the need for spaces to safely and openly engage one's culture, and the need to develop a greater cultural community and leadership ethic (hooks 2001; Woodson 1977).

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODS

“Every portrait that is painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist, not the sitter. The sitter is merely an accident, the occasion. It is not he who is revealed by the painter; it is rather the painter, who, on the coloured canvas, reveals himself. The reason I will not exhibit this picture is that I am afraid that I have shown in it the secret of my soul. Oscar Wilde, as quoted in The Art of Portraiture

Qualitative inquiry was utilized for this research study as it offered an opportunity for deep examination of the multiple dimensions of a very complex human topic. My goal to paint a holistic picture of the concept of culture as described by students fits well with the qualitative process. Krathwohl (1998) describes qualitative methods as particularly beneficial when seeking to determine how to understand a phenomenon. This methodology is then ideal when studying a very complex concept about which there is either little knowledge or when existing knowledge is many and varied. Stake (1995) lists several advantages to the use of qualitative methods. They include the ability to humanize a problem, helping people or situations come to life, allowing the researcher to get inside of others’ world view, and assisting in attaching emotion or real feeling to a phenomenon that makes the study of it more consistent with how it is actually experienced in life. Stake (1995) notes the intent is “not necessarily to map and conquer the world but to sophisticate the beholding of it” (p.229). Krathwohl (1998) further expands the benefits by establishing instances of when qualitative inquiry is most appropriate. I share four of these instances which are particularly important to this study below:

1. When research must emphasize discovery rather than validation
2. When the focus is on the internal dynamics of a situation or problem rather than its effect or product
3. When the interest lies in the diversity and unique qualities among people

4. When examples are needed to put “meat” on statistical “bones”

The last statement is particularly meaningful to this study. Many studies have substantially shown the need for and benefit of expanding cultural resources on college campuses (Hurtado, 1996; Harper, 2006; Milem & Hakuta, 2000; Tierney, 2000; Allen, 1985). The question still remaining is “Now what?” Now that we agree that campuses must commit to cultural resources, now that culturally focused departments, centers, institutes and human resources are increasing in number, how do we approach this concept of culture? As Krathwohl explains:

Qualitative research is especially helpful when it provides us with someone’s perceptions of a situation that permits us to understand his or her behavior. For example, much has been made of how so-called culturally deprived children see the world as hopeless. But when, through qualitative research, a study reveals in detail the hopes, fears, dreams, and nightmares of a few cases that general statement takes on new meaning (p.231).

This offers an important insight regarding the issue of cultural practice. It may not be enough to simply know that students desire cultural opportunities if this knowledge is not complimented with a more deep understanding of what “culture” actually means and looks like to students. The ability to clearly understand the concept of culture as it is understood by the students that we serve may have significant impact on the levels of student engagement with cultural opportunities on campus and hopefully, the meaningful growth that they obtain as a result of this engagement. In this regard, culture should be replicated based on the portrait that students draw of what it is to them as opposed to outside definitions or administrative opinions of culture that may hold no relevance or

meaning to students. The way that students define culture may determine their interactions regardless of the structures the *institution* constructs around how *it* defines culture. Krathwohl (1998) also adds that action is a result of how people not only see the phenomenon but also themselves. This is underscored by the actionable space theory in which action happens as a result of reflection on one's personal experience. Therefore understanding the very personal and individual nature of culture is critical for cultural practice.

Of particular significance for my study is the use of *narrative* to gain a deeper sense of the lived experience that is so much a part of qualitative inquiry. In outlining the key components of qualitative inquiry, Schram (2003) stresses that voice is generally critical to qualitative inquiry. Voice in regards to adequately capturing and portraying the voice of those researched is of course important as noted earlier. But also important is the attention paid to the voice of the researcher. According to Schram (2003) "inquiry, like fieldwork, is a human endeavor in which personal contact and straight talk can carry you further along than academic posturing and heaped jargon." Therefore, value is placed on research presentation that is as personal, approachable, and human as the subjects studied.

Additionally, the aims and guiding assumptions of qualitative research also drive this study. This study has two specific aims that Creswell (1998) notes as being critical to qualitative research: Emancipatory aims are realized through the goal of raising awareness and creating opportunities to engage in continued diversity transformation on college campuses. Explanatory aims are represented by the desire to identify relationships and patterns significant to the issue of cultural practice

Schram (2003) lists five guiding assumptions of qualitative inquiry that are also assumed in this study.

1. An understanding of the world can be gained through personal experiences in the real world. Qualitative researchers are able to fully understand a concept through interacting with the people that experience it “either through physical proximity and participation over time or in the social sense of shared experience, empathy, and confidentiality (Schram, 2003, p. 7).” My study employs both types of interactions through group interviews and review of and reflection on extended cultural narratives. Both experiences evoke a sense of shared experience and empathy as a researcher of color.
2. Qualitative inquiry involves the interactive and intersubjective nature of constructing knowledge. Probably the most meaningful assumption to my study, this idea recognizes the connectedness of the researcher to the subject matter. As Schram (2003) puts it, the research works through you. It is through constant interaction (reading, talking, reflecting, listening) that knowledge is both received, understood, and conceptualized. It is impossible to detach the lens of the researcher from the conclusions drawn and the way information is analyzed and presented. Therefore, rather than seeking to extract themselves from the work, qualitative researchers situate themselves within the context of the findings to provide honesty of motives and bias that might influence the work. The flexibility of the process is also valued in this assumption. As with any aspect of human nature, a researcher or participant may begin traveling in one direction and wind up in a different place in the end. The process of the

research is informative and educative and thus may influence the researcher to change her mind. Therefore, careful monitoring of these experiences is critical to the research. Finally, the value put on self-awareness is also important. Self awareness is critical to the authenticity of the work. This allows the researcher to understand fully the influence of assumptions, beliefs, motivations, and relationships on her inquiry. Researchers choose their topic for a reason whether it be interest, curiosity, or ambition. Realistically answering the question, why are you doing this, is an important step to ensuring authentic and relevant work.

3. Sensitivity to Context: Qualitative inquiry is about making things more complex not simpler. It is based on the belief that to understand a concept you can not isolate it; you must study it in its natural setting. To take it out of this context changes its meaning (Schram, 2003). Qualitative inquiry is the opposite of quantitative in that quantitative methods seek to identify truths that do not depend on context. Context is the very nature of qualitative inquiry. As Schram (2003) notes qualitative researchers don't separate variables and take them apart to see how they work. In essence, what he is saying is that we put the pieces of the puzzle together to portray the complete picture. And like a puzzle, this means including all of the pieces even the most complex and difficult.
4. Inquiry requires attentiveness to particulars: In many ways, the depth and richness that qualitative inquiry gives to particular cases or examples of the human experience, serves as a vehicle through which the larger or broader

experience can be more easily understood. With regards to this study, deeply understanding a small group of students' interaction with their culture, may offer a vehicle through which specific elements of the broad issue of cultural practice can be better understood by practitioners.

5. Inquiry is fundamentally interpretive: Qualitative study is inherently about the search for the significance of knowledge (Schram, 2003). And the designation of significance involves personal interpretation—decisions to include or exclude information, missing potentially important actions or events, and using one's point of view to determine connections. Because the researcher is not only reporting the existence of knowledge but attaching significance and meaning to this knowledge, the researcher is central to the findings and analysis. Results in a qualitative study are innately human rather than scientific. Not only is the researcher's interpretation central to what is presented, credibility is established by whether or not others view and accept these interpretations as viable (Schram, 2003). Therefore, human interpretation is at the core of all phases of qualitative research—from deeming a topic as significant to study, to data collection, to analysis, and finally to public consumption of the scholarship.

Finally, the practice-oriented nature of qualitative research guides this study. As Krathwohl (1998) points out, practicing professionals' knowledge orientation tends to be context specific, metaphorical and narrative, interpersonal or private, oral, and practical. The focus on gaining case-specific and personal understanding through the

use of narrative that is so much a part of qualitative research, makes it a perfect method through which to gain relevant information to inform practice.

Methodological Approaches

Phenomonology was used as the methodological approach of this study. Marshall & Rossman (1999) define phenomonology as the study of lived experience and how people understand this experience. It assumes that there is an “essence” to shared experiences that can be articulated through narration (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). As Creswell (1998) notes, “Researchers search for the essential, invariant structure (essence) or the central underlying meaning of the experience and emphasize the intentionality of consciousness where experiences contain both the outward appearances and inward consciousness based on memory, image, and meaning (p.42).” Therefore, for this study, culture involves much more than the outward appearance of ritual, tradition, and symbol but also involves the meanings that people attach to these experiences, other influences, and the histories that surround them. To an observer, culture might seem to be one set of things, but in the minds of those being observed it could also involve a host of other experiences. Phenomology involves the process of reduction to uncover the possible meanings of these experiences. This process also involves accounting for researcher prejudice through bracketing her personal experiences, and including intuition and imagination in the process to gain a broad portrait of the experience (Creswell, 1998). Therefore, phenomonology is a creative process that welcomes the depth and complexity of the human experience. Creswell (1998) identifies four philosophical themes to phenomology:

1. A return to philosophical tasks: Phenomonology represents a return to the traditional task of searching for wisdom through academic study. It is the quest to answer broad questions of life that is not often found in empirical study.
2. A philosophy without presuppositions: The idea of suspension is key to phenomonology. Researchers must attempt to distance themselves as much as possible from the subject matter to provide a more clear interpretation of the experience. Judgement is suspended until the researcher can establish a more certain founding for her interpretations. This concept is known as epoche. The research method accepts that judgements and past experience exist and rather than ignoring them, researchers bracket their experiences within the data analysis to identify bias, influence, and judgement as it occurs. This allows the researcher to then separate these experiences she embarks on the work of analysis.
3. Intentionality of consciousness: This idea asserts that objects exist only within one's consciousness of it. The subject and the object are not separate, rather, they coexist. Therefore, "culture" is not a separate object. It can not be observed, studied, analyzed, or understood without also studying the subjects that experience it.
4. The refusal of subject-object dichotomy: This is connected to the reality of consciousness but places focus on the individual nature of experiences. It contends that experiences can only be understood through the meanings that individuals attach to them. Therefore, the reality of culture is only perceived within the meaning of an individual. To know how to effectively approach it we must understand what it means to individual students.

This study views phenomenology from the psychological approach. This approach places a strong value on the individual rather than group experience. This study, even in group interviews, examines how individuals make meaning of their culture. Each student speaks from a point of personal experience and the analysis looks deeply at each person's experience and then generates themes across individuals rather than observing a group that shares a similar experience. Creswell(1998) provides the following explanation of psychological phenomenology:

The central tenets of this thinking are to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it. From the individual descriptions, general or universal meanings are derived, in other words, the essence of structures of the experience
(Moustakes in Creswell, 1998 p. 54)

Schram (2003) lists five basic assumptions of the phenomenologist. She assumes that human behavior occurs and can only be understood in the context of relationship. This relationship can be to people, objects or events, but the relationship is central to the meanings that people make about the experience. The second assumption is that perception is central to understanding lived experience. Meaning is attached to life through perceptions of the people that live it. So to study experience is to study how people perceive and act in life. The third assumption is also tied to relationship. It asserts that concepts do not simply exist, they exist through people's interactions and experiences with them. Therefore, it is difficult to understand the concept of culture without studying how people experience it. Even identifying the concept as worthy of inquiry denotes consciousness of it. People then, through their awareness of or

interactions with concepts, breathe life into them. The fourth assumption is key to this study—that language is the key medium through which meaning is constructed and communicated. This then places a strong value on dialogue and reflection as vehicles of language. The dialogue and reflection found in both forms of data collection—group interviews and written narrative reflections (cultural self portraits)—are in line with this assumption. The final assumption is the most basic and broad of them all.

Phenomonologists assume that the essence of an experience can be understood and articulated. Regardless of the complexity of a phenomenon, researchers that use this method have faith in the ability to eventually comprehend aspects of the experience and share this understanding with the world.

Storytelling and Voice.

We learn to love stories at a very early age. Stories teach moral lessons, share knowledge, and pass on values. They provide us with a context to better understand complex issues or broad concepts. Stories help us to make sense of the meanings of life experiences. According to Banks-Wallace (2002), story telling, the interactive process of sharing stories, is a vehicle of preserving culture and passing it on to future generations. In some cases, stories can serve as touchstones that evoke shared memories and feelings between the story teller and the listener (Banks-Wallace, 2002). As a touchstone experience, listening to another person's story may bring forth memories or feelings and can help the listener to better contextualize and understand her own experience---what it is to be a black woman, what being a latino male in the United States involves, or why culture holds such special meaning to a person. Its historical role in African/African-American and

Native American cultures has been most widely noted. In many traditional African cultures storytelling was an important and necessary social practice, with the griot, or story keeper being held in high regard (Banks-Wallace, 2002). Even in contemporary African American literature, the work produced years ago by Zora Neale Hurston is viewed as one of the foundations for African American literature (Gates, 1990). The stories that Hurston collected in the South in the early 1930's offer a glimpse into the lives of African Americans during that period and the culture that was created out of their lived experiences. These stories sustain legacies by providing verbal pictures of the past that put the present more clearly into focus.

The technique of storytelling transcends race, class, generations, and other differences and allows people to communicate on common ground through a common story. Storytelling is universal. It has its roots in ancient African societies, and for centuries, people have used stories to entertain and educate as well as to instill values and inspire people to action. Describing storytelling as a new nontraditional approach to advocacy sounds strange, given its historical roots, but in modern times, with the advent of complicated electronic media communication methods, storytelling has become a lost art. Organizers and advocates often overlook the power of the spoken word and of shared experiences as a way of communicating and moving people to action (Smiley, 2006, p.74).

The recent media and public interest in the slave narrative archives through countless television specials, theatrical productions, and texts also point to the continued value for the role of stories in society. As John Henrike Clarke stated, "The role of history to a people, is that of mother to a child. It tells you who you are, where you are, where you have been and where you are going (Snipes & Bourne, 1996)." In a time

when social and historical scholars question the authenticity of history and social studies texts and warn against the strong influence of mass media in shaping social knowledge, the stories derived from the community—from families, elders, and children---provide a very important understanding of what culture is to people and the factors that contribute to its persisting importance (hooks, 1994). Smiley (2006) shares a quote by Catherine Conant that further explains:

Over the course of the last century, the American culture largely abandoned oral stories and a setting for a collective imaginative experience. Today the norm is for people to be passive viewers, responding to a medium that offers images that are contrived and manipulated to evoke specific responses. Audience imagination is not required but rather their willingness to accept universal images they are shown (p. 75).

Hooks (1994) notes the difference in response to mass media during her childhood and now. She shares that though negative imaging existed on television, the particular shows and in some instances the medium itself were pointedly labeled as a racial and cultural enemy by her parents. She was not allowed to watch television shows that were created by people that “don’t like us” (p.159). However, the contemporary mass acceptance and access to media now places it in a position to have a strong influence on all populations of society. This may mean that home grown and community voiced stories that were at one time used to paint the portrait of one’s culture, have now been replaced by mass entertainment and media structures. The impact that this may have on both students’ understanding of their culture as well as administrators’ approaches to culture is important if this understanding is being driven by simplistic, stereotypical, and negative beliefs in the larger popular culture. Allowing

students an opportunity to truly reflect on their experiences -- to get at the root of their culture -- is an important act of self understanding and rebellion against negative social ideas. Smiley (2006) points out that reflection has a critical role to play in community action and cultural sustainability. He describes reflection as “the deliberate process of taking your actions into account, examining them, learning from them, and then adjusting your future actions in accordance with the lessons learned” (p.77). This seems to underscore the very idea of culture as a toolkit of experiences, values, and lessons that serve to inform how daily life is approached. So, then culture can be best understood through the act of reflection and this act should move in an internal direction rather than be guided by external influences, ideas, definitions, or stereotypes. The reflection shared through stories helps to sustain a sense of self—a proof of existence and history. Because of this, people cling to these stories of the past as they do a beautiful robe—culture is both a valuable garment to be worn and admired by others and a functional cloak in which you can wrap yourself to protect against external forces.

Featherstone (1989) has noted the value of the use of storytelling to inform research. He explains both the richness and complexity of the information gained through story as well as the significant responsibility of the researcher.

The telling of stories can be a profound form of scholarship moving serious study close to the frontiers of art in the capacity to express complex truth and moral context in intelligible ways...The methodologies are inseparable from the vision. Historians have used narrative as a way in which to make sense of lives and institutions over time, but over years they have grown abashed by its lack of scientific rigor. Now, as we look for ways to explore context and describe the thick textures of lives over time in institutions with a history, we

want to reckon with the author's own stance and commitment to the people being written about. Storytelling takes on a fresh importance (p.377).

In this study, the pure voice is heard through the journal experience. Rather than seeking to understand the meaning of culture by having students react to existing definitions and theories on culture, they are provided a blank canvas on which a cultural self portrait can be shared. Their stories provide an authentic voice articulating the structures, layers, and practices that comprise what they perceive to be culture.

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) distinguish between listening to voice and listening for voice. Listening to voice is a more simple act of ensuring all that is said is heard and captured. But listening for voice involves a deeper analysis of communication. The researcher, in this case, is not an idle receiver of messages and information. Rather, she is actively engaged in the dialogue process—listening for nuances in voice, paying attention to the texture of messages, and combining sound, gesture, and word to establish meaning (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Also important in the value of voice is understanding the role that observation has in the interpretation of meaning (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Being observant during dialogues and interviews helps to uncover more meaning than that which is voiced. People also talk with and through their bodies. Therefore, paying attention to the messages being sent of hesitation, emphasis, emotion, or disregard is critical to truly understanding the impact of the topic on the research participants. Finally, silence is another important aspect of listening for voice. Listening for silence, paying attention to it, and noting it is a critical act. Silence also serves as information, a message. In many ways, it can serve as a marker denoting the need to follow up and understand its presence in the conversation.

In this study, which relies heavily on the use of story, voice is the most critical element of data collection, data analysis, and conclusion. It is the student voice that is being collected, the student voice that is being analyzed, and ultimately the student voice that will give form and definition to the concept of culture. In this regard, the final shape of culture is formed by the students' shared thoughts. This allows student cultures to be defined on their own terms, through the merging of past and present. Therefore, culture might be a firmly planted component of a student's lived reality, a vaguely familiar image, or nonexistent concept. The study provides a more clear understanding of how students conceptualize the broad idea of culture so that it can be more thoughtfully approached within educational practice.

Portraiture

Given the focus on culture and cultural narratives, portraiture was also utilized as a methodology that extends the work of phenomenology. Portraiture combines science and art to paint a holistic picture of an experience or phenomenon. Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997), the creator of this method of inquiry, offers the following description:

Portraiture is a method of qualitative research that blurs the boundaries of aesthetics and empiricism in an effort to capture the complexity, dynamics, and subtlety of human experience and organizational life. Portraits seek to record and interpret the perspectives and experiences of the people they are studying, documenting their voices and their visions—their authority, knowledge, and wisdom (p. xv).

Portraiture shares in the traditions and values of phenomenology but it expands the boundaries of methodology by combining “empirical and aesthetic description, in its focus on the convergence of narrative and analysis, in its goal of speaking to broader audiences beyond the academy, in its standard of authenticity rather than reliability and validity, and in its explicit recognition of the use of self as the primary research instrument for documenting and interpreting the perspectives and experiences of the people and the cultures being studied” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p.13). Innate in portraiture is the idea of boundary crossing. Through the science of portraiture, the researcher crosses personal boundaries to gain a more intimate understanding of participants. And through the art of portraiture, the researcher crosses creative boundaries to blend art and science through narrative portraits that share stories and convey meaning in ways that other traditional methods may not allow (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). As an example of boundary crossing, Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) offers W.E.B. DuBois as an example. If I consider Zora Neale-Hurston to be the grandmother of story collecting, then Sarah Lawrence Lightfoot clearly views DuBois as the grandfather of boundary crossing research.

W.E.B. DuBois was the quintessential boundary crosser. More than any other social scientist I can think of, in his work and in his life, DuBois captured the interdisciplinary as he moved from social philosophy to empirical sociology to autobiography to political essays to poetry and literature to social activism. He invented a way of being, a point of view, a style of work that quite naturally, dynamically, organically integrated science, art, history, and activism (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p.7).

By living in the communities with the people about whom he wrote, DuBois crossed personal boundaries that allowed him to better understand their experience. But also, in writing across academic boundaries, DuBois, as a researcher, illustrated the various methods through which a concept can be understood. The value that portraiture places on this interdisciplinary approach to research in many ways is also a value for the idea of the holistic researcher. This allows a researcher to integrate all of her personal and professional interests, talents, and modes of expression into the work. In this regard, as a researcher, I am able to more fully present how I view and analyze the world, as an educator, artist, and activist. Moreover, portraiture sees imagination as a critical skill needed to accurately draw cultures. Creative imagination is needed to provide a thick description that both interprets people's experiences and also presents content in a manner that readers are able to understand and imagine. Portraitists are always seeking the response "Oh, I get it" or "Oh, I see" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

By allowing the researcher to cross boundaries along lines of the art and science of her work, the ability to paint a more vivid, more full, more accurate portrait of the whole can be achieved. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) explains this by sharing her personal experiences as an artist re-examining work that she had produced in earlier years. She describes looking at a portrait as different from looking into the mirror. A portrait is not a simple replica—it is a creative interpretation that projects the essence of the artist or the subject. Qualities of character and history, experience and memory are painted onto the canvas. This line of thinking may be more in line with what it means to truly examine culture—it is not something we can simply look at and duplicate—we must

instead, look into it and produce it (which implies creation rather than copying). In this regard, Lawrence-Lightfoot's goal in establishing this methodology was to create a venue for creative and deep exploration. As she states, "I wanted the written pieces to convey the authority, wisdom, and perspective of the subjects, but I wanted them to feel—as I had felt—that the portrait did not look like them, but somehow managed to reveal their essence. I wanted them to experience the portraits as both familiar and exotic, so that in reading them they would be introduced to a perspective that they had not considered before (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 4)." Therefore, a portrait is not a stagnant description, but rather a complex result of living and sharing. And the portrait should provide insight even to those that participate as subjects. For them, reading a portrait should be more than a reading of biography, it should unveil patterns, meanings, purposes, and values that may have been separated by the rituals of daily life and are not easily sewn together by those that do not analyze life as a professional practice.

Another critical component of portraiture is its focus on goodness. A propensity towards goodness does not mean that portraits must only focus on positive aspects of a topic nor does it mean that information must be presented in a positive light. Rather, "goodness" refers to the refusal to be driven by past research tendencies to focus on failure and deficiency. As noted earlier in the literature review, much research on cultural diversity in higher education is dominated by pathology—what are the problems, what practices don't work, what alienates students, why students leave. Even in discussing its benefits, the discussion is often in the context of filling gaps, countering negative experiences, or warming chilly climates. However, in its natural habitat—in communities and homes—culture does not seem to be created in reaction to negativity but

is rather a tool to sustain positive life practice. It seems that culture in the educational sector should be viewed through this lens of positive abundance rather than negative deficiency. When viewed from this perspective, culture becomes meaningful in college not because it counters a social or campus problem, but because it is a naturally good thing. This means seeing cultural resources not as medicine to treat campus dis-ease but as vitamins that increase the life long health of campus. This would also change the question that often drives research from “Why is culture necessary?” to something that sounds more like “What else but culture?”

So, then portaiture shifts this focus to discovering the inherent good in the people, institutions, or concepts studied. And most importantly, it focuses on how the people that experience the phenomenon define or interpret goodness. To engage the art of portaiture is to recognize the diverse ways in which individuals might view and articulate the same experience (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997).

Key Components of Portaiture. Context is one of the major driving forces of portaiture work. It provides the backdrop upon which the portrait is displayed and the frame from which it is viewed by the reader. There are three types of context that must be considered in this type of research. Historical context involves the various theories, frameworks, and knowledge that influence portaiture and help to distinguish its qualities as unique. And beyond the research method itself, historical context also includes the culture, ideology, and journey (or known historical experiences) that are important to consider as a frame through which to view personal stories. In this regard, context includes much more than the description of the physical settings within which the subjects work or learn, it is the larger context of history and society that shapes the reality

that this person will share (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Personal context refers directly to the researcher. The background of experience, research, and professional ideology situates the research in a particular approach. The expertise and assumptions of the researcher undoubtedly influences the collection and presentation of research. Therefore, it is included in the story. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) describes this as the “perch and perspective” of the researcher. Like a bird sitting on a tree branch, where the researcher is situated through experience and repertoire, effects both what she sees and how she interprets information.

In portraiture then, the place and stance of the researcher are made visible and audible, written in as part of the story. The portraitist is clear: from where I sit, this is what I see; these are the perspectives that I bring; this is the scene I select; this is how people seem to be responding to my presence (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p.5)

The research is not all encompassing or all knowing. It is a portrait of very specific subjects that contribute to deeper understanding. It is intentionally limited, intentionally personal, and intentionally artistic. Portraiture values the humaneness of the lived experience and asserts that researchers should not separate human like concepts such as feeling, attitude, values, or emotion from the study of people’s experiences.

Voice: As a spoken art, the portrait is a duet, a collaboration between the voices of the researcher and those studied. The researcher’s voice is clearly audible but never overshadows the subjects (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). It brings harmony to the study by exposing the shared experience—either shared feelings and understandings of the subject or the shared experience of data collection. Within the research, balance of

voice is achieved through the rigor of examining the entire research experience. Through paying careful attention to assumptions, questioning assumptions, and engaging in systematic data collection methods, the researcher ensures that balance is achieved between the very personal nature and motivations of the work and the procedural nature of quality research. Portraiture is not a choice between the two, it is blending and appreciation of both research values.

The potraitist inevitably renders a self-portrait that reveals her soul but she also produces a selfless, systematic examination of the actors' images, experiences, and perspectives. This balance –between documenting the authentic portrait of others and drawing one's self into the lines of the piece, between self-possession and disciplined other regard, between the intuitive and the counterintuitive—is the difficult, complex, nuanced work of the portraitist. In many respects, it is because the self of the portraitist is so present in the work, because she is the instrument of inquiry and the lens of description, interpretation, analysis and narrative, that it is crucial that her voice be monitored, subdued, and restrained (though never silenced). The voice of the portraitist is poignant with paradox: it is everywhere and it is judiciously placed; it is central and it is peripheral. (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997 p. 86).

This makes the art of portraiture very difficult to engage. The researcher must draw fine lines between the presence of voice that is often inevitable in assumptions, choices of theoretical frames, interview protocols, choices of data to include, and language used to relate these stories in the narrative and the absence of voice that is critical to allow the work to be interpreted by the consumer. As with a great work of art, the portraitist does not write a personal explanation that spells everything out. Instead, through her work, she creatively draws herself into the lines of the work and paints herself into the picture.

Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) explores the complicated role of voice in research. She describes it as a struggle between its “omnipresence and its restraint” (p.86). In other words, dealing with voice involves balancing the desire to include the valuable perspectives of a researcher’s personal experiences, visions, and insights and to exclude personal biases, prejudices, and assumptions. To achieve this balance, portraiture approaches voice from many perspectives. The epistemological nature of voice involves the inclusion of the source of knowledge and understanding. The ideological nature of voice involves the sociopolitical implications of who is speaking and why. Voice as method focuses on what will be heard through the research process and the conclusions made. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) notes that these are three of the typical voices of qualitative research and that portraiture adds several other useful perspectives on voice. Three of these additional perspectives are particularly relevant to this study. Voice as interpretation focuses on the researcher as an interpreter of experience and story. This voice questions the meanings of statements, of information shared and stories told. Geertz’s designation between thin and thick description is shared as a key component of voice (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Thin description relates basic and more apparent information detailing who, what, where and when. Thick description involves decoding the subject, deeply considering context, and thoughtfully discerning meaning from the information shared.

Voice includes both of these types of descriptions. It shares the basic information needed for the reader to situate and to establish a mental picture of the environment or subject but also offers deep reflection and intellectual conversation on what is being uncovered. Voice is a balance between light and heavy, shallow and deep description

that respects the readers potential lack of exposure to the subject by carefully guiding them into shallow waters and, at the same time, also encouraging them to go further and cross boundaries of depth not yet experienced. The portraitist is both the guide and the guard of the life experience being studied. She never relays information in a way that is so deep that the reader can not comprehend it and also works to ensure that no inappropriate or disrespectful assumptions or misinterpretations can be made from what she articulates in the writing. But, she also works to provide enough information, description, and context to set the stage to let go of the readers hand so that they may tread water independently and possibly offer alternative interpretations of the data (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

Voice as preoccupation involves the experience that the researcher brings to the study and how that experience influences and shapes the research (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997). This voice is particularly strong at the onset of research as it resounds in the original tone of the research perspective, the flow of the interview protocol; and the lens through which data is initially analyzed. This original voice, through the process of data collection and analysis turns into harmony as the researcher's voice is coupled with the realities uncovered in the study. But this voice never disappears. Researchers, more often than not, may factor in new perspectives, unanticipated insights, and contrasting ideas into the narrative in ways that expand, broaden, and compliment their theoretical perspectives and intellectual interests. In this way, new ideas grow the researcher's understanding rather than work in opposition to it. In fact, the researcher, because of these initial interests and values, seeks deep understanding and bold new ways to understand a phenomenon (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

Along similar lines, voice as autobiography incorporates the life story of the portraitist into the reflective chorus of the narrative story. Subjects are not the only ones with a culture or a history—the researcher also brings her cultural toolbox to research construction. Her autobiographical experience, in some ways, also shape her lines of questioning and modes of interpreting as much as the literature that she has read and theories that she supports (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Her life experiences with family, community, neighborhood, school, and culture provide her the necessary resources for a humane understanding of the experiences of the actors in her study. She uses these resources to form personal connections and to guide her search for meaning.

Again a struggle is unavoidable. The researcher must balance self-possession with selfless reporting. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) offers the use of self reflection and self criticism throughout the data collection process as key to achieving this balance. The researcher must always work to keep others' stories in focus. She must ensure that her lens of experience is not so thickly shaded by her own experience that it blinds her ability to see and understand someone else's story. Through noting her thoughts and reflections of her own experience everytime it occurs (in interview, document review, observation, etc), the researcher will be able to identify possible points of prejudice and bias that come from her own life experience. This is a difficult challenge—to identify when one's life experience offers either personal insight or personal prejudice. The researcher must include enough of her story in the narrative to illustrate to the reader her particular lens of viewing the world. According to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) including this story helps to build reader trust as they see the researcher as exposed and not concealing any alteriative motives. "A reader who knows where the portaitist is

coming from can more comfortably enter the piece, scrutinize the data, and form independent interpretations” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997 p.96). As discussed earlier, portraiture is a self exposing piece of art that exhibits important dimensions of the researcher’s experience with and through the picture painted of the subject.

Convergence of Narrative and Analysis: The themes that emerge in the study serve as the point at which analysis and the narrative meet. The choice of themes to share in the narrative represent the best available truth of the particular group, institution, or person being studied (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Similar to an artist finally putting brush to canvas and deciding what colors to include, the decision and choice of themes is critical to the authenticity of the research portrait. These themes will essentially frame how the reader comes to know the subjects and understand their life experiences. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) offer three forms that emergent themes may take: repititive refrain, resonant metaphor, and institutional ritual. Repititive refrain are comments constantly repeated throughout one story or across many stories that almost shout to the researcher that they are important. In her own work, Lawrence-Lightfoot, chose to call these refrains a “life litany.” In reflecting on this concept, I have chosen to refer to the repititive refrain in my work as a person’s “cultural cannon” or the comprehensive list of cultural experiences in a person’s life that is most meaningul. As with a literary canon, these experiences represent the essential and authentic cultural repetoire for that particular person.

Resonant metaphors are the creative ways that participants express their lived experience. When the researcher hears experience explained through metaphors, symbols and vernacular this also serves as a red flag of importance. The creative ways that people

partner their experience with other entities may offer important insights: Why did the person liken her experience to that particular object? What does the choice of language mean? What does the use of this metaphor say about how this person views this particular aspect of her life?

Finally, institutional and cultural rituals expose the emergent themes in an institution or community. Rituals expose dimensions of purpose, values, priorities, and life of the institution. In this study, this was particularly salient as I examined two groups of students across institutions. Searching for similarities or differences in institutional life according to how rituals, interactions, and traditions were described in student interviews, provided insight into the influence of institutional life on a student's cultural life story. As Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) note, rituals are not only ceremonial expressions but also community building opportunities. The extent to which students identify current college rituals as valuable cultural experiences provides an understanding of the convergence of the external cultural life and the campus based cultural life.

The Aesthetic Whole: The aesthetic whole is the sense of appreciation for the whole picture of the research. How do all of the stories (if examining multiple stories) or all of the vignettes of one person's story come together in narrative form to establish a full and authentic representation? Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) again provide a firm structure for how to approach putting all of the pieces together. The four dimensions of conception, structure, form, and cohesion all come together to ensure that the broader story has the essential components of any good tale: a beginning, middle, end and meaningful content in between (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Conception refers to the origination of the idea and vision for the entire piece. What will drive the

overarching story and how will it begin? Quoting Madden, Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) explain conception:

An intuitive fusion of emotion and idea produce the conception. A conception is a total, gestalt-like grasp of the story that enables the author to control the development of a situation, the characters, theme, plot, style, technique, so that in the end they cohere, as in a single charged image. The concept orders, interprets, and gives form to the raw materials of the story and infuses it with vision and meaning. (p. 248)

The emerging themes serve as the pool of ideas from which the researcher looks for the dominant direction of the story. The strongest theme might serve as the conception or the researcher may step back and look for an idea that captures the essence of all themes. In this study, I selected the latter technique. By looking across emergent themes for a creative expression or vision, the overarching conception embodies the spirit of all themes discussed in the work.

Structure, through the use of subheadings reflecting the emerging themes, provides a frame for the written narrative and guides the reader down the path of discovery. When studying multiple sites or multiple people, these identified guiding themes provide common structure that ties separate stories together. Form involves the emotional meat of the study. It is the aspect of any piece of writing that draws in the reader and connects her to the experience and creatively binds her to the completion of the text. Form is the reason we often can not put down a novel. Through examples, stories, and illustrations, the portraitist brings the story to life. Irony, complexity, emotion, and meaning are both understood and felt through the intentional use of form. Finally, coherence ensures that through all of these stories and meaningful content, there

is order and consistency throughout the work (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997). By paying attention to consistency in both the sequence of events and stories as well as in the voice used throughout, the researcher can ensure the study flows well and the reader hears a familiar voice of narration throughout the piece. Repetition is a key component of coherence as it offers visible and obvious consistency. Any opportunity to repeat patterns, themes, and images helps to build coherence throughout and across stories.

As Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) share, it is when the empirical and the aesthetic meet that the whole portrait is revealed. When considering the completion of the research, images of the artist dramatically yanking away the black cloth to reveal the masterpiece comes to mind. This also conjures up the image of the painting itself, after months of being worked on in dark seclusion (as is often how the life of great artists like Rembrandt are portrayed) it is finally taken out into the world to be admired and appreciated, exhibited or auctioned. With both of these images, the themes of hard work and careful attention by the artist; time spent with the artwork; art as a representation of the artist and the subject; and art's natural place as a living part of the world rather than in seclusion, all capture the essence of portraiture. As Maya Angelou stated, "There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you." Like a great work of art, when our stories are shared, when they take their natural place and reside among us, they help us and others better understand ourselves and ultimately help to frame how we view the world.

Setting & context

Data was collected at two large, predominantly white public universities. Given the issues presented in the literature that particularly concerned the experiences of students of

color at predominantly white universities, I sought to understand what culture means to this group. One university was located in a largely rural environment and the other was situated in an urban community. The difference in setting helped to determine if differences or similarities existed in student responses if their college experience was situated in a large city or a small rural context.

My interactions occurred at the beginning of the semester with the Sandhills group and prior to the beginning of the semester with the Greystone group (students had already registered, begun meetings to orient and prepare them for the institute, and attended several cultural events as a group). The names of both institutions have been changed to offer anonymity both to the university and the student participants. The names of all students have also been changed to protect their identity.

Sample. Two sites were used in this study. The first school, Greystone University, is a smaller campus of a large predominantly white university in the northeast. The university as a whole has a student body of over 50,000 while this particular campus houses 5500 undergraduates and a little over 3500 graduate students. The campus is situated in an urban city. Greystone, is a campus that blends into the city landscape physically and culturally. It sits in a predominantly African American community within a very culturally diverse city. City demographics establish the city as 53% Black or African American, 26% white or Euro-American, and 14% of other races. Among these three major racial groups, 29% of residents are Latino or Hispanic (from any race). Ninety percent of the student body comes from within the state. The university undergraduate student population is 53% female and of the 5500 students, 3800 of them classify themselves as African American, Asian, Latino, or other. On this particular

campus, white students only comprise 29% of the student population. Both on the campus and beyond, this campus has a high level of structural diversity. The second school, Sandhills University, is housed in a largely rural setting. The total university system has a student enrollment of a little over 80,000 students. This particular campus houses over 40,000 students. The major differences in the size of the student populations and location of both of these campuses allows for cross analysis of both institution type (rural/urban) and size (small/large). Students of color comprise a little over 12 percent of the student population on this campus, accounting for 5300 students. This offers a starkly different contrast to the other campus where students of color make up about 70% of the student body. Sandhills is housed in a city with a similar majority white demographic structure. The town is 90% white.

Participants. The university sites were selected based on the existence of two culturally focused leadership development experiences. Both institutions offer a semester long cultural leadership institute in which students learn leadership development and explore the unique way that culture influences the leadership proxy. This study is less concerned with the actual experience of the institute, but rather saw the groups of students of color that participated in these experiences as viable communities to study. Data collection was planned to take place prior to any formal discussions on culture in order to ensure that student perceptions were not influenced by external definitions of culture. However, by virtue of their participation in these programs, students demonstrated at least a willingness to commit time to cultural engagement and learning. This made them an ideal group with whom to explore the topic of culture. The cohort structure of both groups made initial group interviews as well as individual follow up

possible. A reasonable level of trust had already been established among the group, so students seemed to demonstrate an ease with speaking freely among group members. Additionally, as part of the institute, all of these students had attended campus cultural events in the past (the same number at both institutions, though the content of each event was different). This also helped to ensure that the students had enough experience with campus cultural programs to answer the group interview questions. The institute structure also assisted with the follow up cultural self portraits. These students met regularly and so, with the assistance of the program administrators, I was able to ensure 100% completion of the self authored narratives.

A sample of eighteen students of color participated in this study (nine from each institution). Group interviews were conducted at each institution with each interview including nine students. There were eighteen cultural self portraits examined. Students ranged in classification from first year students through college seniors. Because all students had attended at least five campus cultural events as part of the institute prior to participating in the study, the ability for a first year student to comment on campus cultural programming was not a concern. Informed consent forms were distributed to students at the initial group interview. I verbally read through the consent form, allowed time for students to ask questions or to personally review the form before collecting the signatures. Students were asked to participate in both phases of the study and were informed that though they were participants in the leadership program, they were not required to participate in the study and could voluntarily decline.

Data Collection Procedures

Permission to conduct research was obtained from the Institutional Review Boards (IRB) at both institutions prior to beginning research. After this permission was obtained, campus administrators were contacted to determine if they would allow their leadership program to serve as the community examined in this study. Administrators were forwarded an outline detailing what participation would involve, a timeline for the campus visit, the responsibilities of the study participants (students), an informed consent form, and a copy of the research proposal. Once the administrators agreed to have their group participate, I scheduled an initial visit to campus. During this visit, I met with the administrator to reiterate the details of the study and with the students to initially introduce myself and to describe my research. Students initially signed up to participate at that time. All students who signed up were allowed to participate in the study. A collective decision was made regarding the dates for future campus visits and the due dates for cultural self portraits.

The study included two phases of research. The first phase focused on the perceptions of the concept of culture and the role of cultural engagement in college. Group interviews of students of color were conducted to determine how students perceive the personal benefits of cultural programs and whether students saw the programs as a resource that helped them to understand their culture (see Appendix C). To organize the various types of co-curricular cultural programs, initiatives, and services into clusters upon which students could comment, I used the Tri-Sector Cultural Practitioners Model (TCPM) three types of cultural experiences: education, engagement, and development. Additionally, the interviews served as the opportunity to explore how students defined

culture and what structures they felt made up their culture. Two student group interviews took place, one at each institution.

The interview questions were semi-structured to allow all group members to contribute and to feed off of one another's responses (see Appendix C). Interviews were conducted in the university cultural center at Sandhills University and the campus center at Greystone University. Each interview lasted approximately 90 minutes. All interviews were confidential and voluntary. The interviews were tape recorded with a digital recording device and professionally transcribed. Information was also recorded through written notes and photocopies (if allowable). This information will be stored through computer files, tape logs, and transcription notes.

The second phase of research engaged students in writing a cultural self portrait. The self portrait is a written narrative of any length that shares students cultural story—what culture means to them, their family history, influences and experiences that they feel impact their culture. The sharing of all of this information is done through telling a personal story of their lives. The result then is a more in-depth and individual portrait of their cultural selves. Students were provided a document with a list of questions to address in their portraits (See Appendix D). They were also encouraged to include any other information that they felt relevant including information not covered in the questions listed, photographs, and artifacts. No length was initially given as it was important to allow students to write intimately and freely about their lives.

Students were given six weeks after the interview to spend time writing self portraits independently. Reminder emails were sent out after three weeks and at the end of six weeks I personally came to collect the portraits during an institute meeting. Portraits were

typed on a computer and the completed documents ranged in page length from 5-10 pages.

The second phase was a critical component of data collection as it allowed for individual follow up with each student. Providing a more deep view of students' cultural lives, the self portraits also allowed students to explore the concept of culture through private, personal reflection and dialogue with their families. Students were encouraged to reflect on their family histories in order to articulate their culture in a way that they may not have been able to during the interview. Also, rather than providing students with an external definition of culture and asking them to fit their experiences into this structure, students were asked to take time to reflect deeply on their past experiences and histories including but not limited to values, traditions, and rituals. They were provided a choice of whether or not to include such things in their story. The question guiding the self portrait focused more on students' broad experiences in life through which the researcher might be able to identify themes, values, traditions, practices, and guiding ethics that might construct a culture. Structuring the self portrait instruction sheet in this way allowed those students with concrete ideas about culture as well as students with less of an ability to clearly articulate or define culture, an opportunity to reflect on cultural experiences and concepts. These reflections, when read through a critical researcher's eye, were expected to reveal student ideologies and definitions of culture.

Data Analysis

Coding is one of the basic and fundamental forms of analysis in a qualitative study. Coding is essentially a form of interpreting—making decisions about what to

analyze, what is important, and what the data means (Krathwohl, 1998). Through the use of coding, researchers are able to develop conceptual themes from the data. Various researchers utilize various styles for coding from numerical codes to category labels to metaphor clusters. But, as Miles & Huberman (1994) point out, it is not the label but the meaning that truly matters.

Bliss, Monk, and Ogborn (1983) tell us that a word or a phrase does not “contain” its meaning as a bucket “contains” water, but has the meaning it does by a choice made about its significance in a given context. That choice excludes other choices that could have been made to “stand for” that word or phrase, and that choice is embedded in a particular logic or a conceptual lens, whether the researcher is aware of it or not (p. 56-57).

Thus, coding is very much a subjective practice driven by the researcher’s particular ways of constructing meaning. This coding will allow the researcher to establish conceptual themes. As themes emerge through recurring language, repetitive ideas, and salient patterns, the researcher seeks to ensure that the themes are both distinct and consistent (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). In other words, the patterns must collectively contribute towards the greater understanding sought in the larger study but also be distinct enough to illustrate different parts of the experience. Marshall and Rossman (1997) note that when approaching the labels used, researchers may choose to use “indigenous typologies” or “analyst-constructed typologies.” Because of the value placed on deriving meaning directly from students, I chose to use indigenous typologies in order to keep the student voice present in all aspects of the study. Therefore, each category of meaning that was identified, was also labeled using language spoken by

students in either the interviews or in the self-authored text. Labels such as “Remember home” and “Learn about me” allowed me to capture the emotional essence of the students’ remarks and to cluster similar comments as potentially salient themes.

Miles and Huberman (1994) identify three types of codes: descriptive, interpretive and pattern. Descriptive codes do just that-describe some aspect of the data. Descriptive coding typically occurs early in the process and help with the initial organization of data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Descriptive coding involves attaching a class designation to various occurrences. By initially using this type of coding, I was able to establish initial properties for responses. Interpretive codes signify some particular difference or special category that has been attached to the data. Interpretive coding is a higher level of analysis in that it requires for the consideration of context, field notes, and researcher insight to attach deeper levels of meaning and categorization to information. Finally, pattern codes infer a theme or pattern detected from analysis. Pattern coding is the process whereby the emergent themes of portraiture are identified. Through pulling together and sorting out relatively large chunks of data into coherent and meaningful segments, pattern coding serves as a meta-code of emerging and salient themes. Coding was used throughout my data collection process to help focus my field work and expand my ability to build on and follow up on themes or what Marshall and Rossman(1989) term the “compelling question” in later parts of the process (p.81). Descriptive coding was initially used to help me identify important comments and begin to organize them. The first phase involved using highlighted markers to signify similar voice. Descriptive coding began immediately during data collection. Interpretive coding helped me to begin to brainstorm categories and attach more meaning by attaching my personal thoughts to

each comment. During the second phase, I broke these broader voices down into specific comments which resulted in 13 categories. Pattern coding then helped to bring all of this general data together through themes. During the third stage of coding, I went back and reviewed the data to re-cluster and merge themes. Themes were hand-drawn as a conceptual map which allowed me to move concepts, draw connecting arrows, and visually see relationships. In this third review of data, some comments that were initially clustered together were moved and paired with other comments as I began to see new connections and insights through a deeper examination of the data. I also allowed some time to lapse between the second and third phase so that I could go back and see the data with fresh eyes and an open mind. I wanted to ensure that I was not attempting to make data fit where it didn't belong.

During my data analysis, coding was used in a more relaxed format to help guide organization and to guide me as I stepped back to clearly see patterns. The categories and patterns were not confined, instead they lived in houses without walls that would allow me to re-enter, re-examine, and re-assign as a way of critically ensuring all possible insight was heard and interpreted. As Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) note, the practice of coding helps to bring “discipline and rigor to the synthesis of data (p.191). However, they go on to share that the field of portraiture is a balanced scale of analytic rigor and human complexity. Just as coding is an important aspect of the analytic process so is the idea of nuanced interpretive analysis. This involves scrutinizing an interview transcript to detect discrete nuances in language, sounds, or tone that may not have been outstanding in the initial reading (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). The focus on what researchers have termed “radical empiricism” then means rejecting the researcher’s

desire to control, manipulate, categorize, and confine data. Instead, the radical nature of human life is embraced and accepted along with the possibility that important meaning can emerge through the data even if categories can not be developed. Data that does not fit into categories or patterns aren't discarded because the divergent voice offers important perspective to understanding a phenomena (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997). In this study, data were compared across concepts examining what students shared in their interviews and what was shared in their written pieces. This allowed me to identify consistency, new information, and diverging ideas. Data were also compared across institution to identify similarity or differences in themes.

Authenticity and Trustworthiness

Ultimately, a good protrait is one that when read by a participant in the study, the response is "Yes, that is me." Authenticity refers to the researcher's ability to fully and truly capture the depth and breadth of the experience and narrate it in a way that retains the spirit of the life stories being told. Therefore, portraiture is not concerned with the ability to yield similar results (reliability). As with most qualitative research, portraiture acknowledges that the same thing can not be studied twice as the process of research interaction and life in general changes, influences, and grows the subjects in many ways. Portraiture is extremely context driven, painting the context into the portrait, so that the reader can understand influencing factors and changes through the sharing of the narrative.

Portraiture, in some ways, even pushes the parameters of qualitative research's focus on transferability as the work seeks to paint a very specific portrait of a particular

group of subjects or environment. Factors that influence the respondents are painted into the story and welcomed as parts of the life experience. The portraitist extracts out of unique lives important themes that seem to resound through everyone's life stories. But because of the diversity of the human experience, it acknowledges that these themes may not be all encompassing or experienced by everyone. They are salient enough for readers to consider and take note.

Confirmability is both acknowledged, as noted earlier through the researcher's careful notation of her assumptions, biases, and motivations and challenged by this methodologies inclusion of the researcher's voice and experience into the written study. By beginning the written study with a sharing of the researcher's context, including her life experience, professional values, and motivations, the researcher answers questions of intent and influence immediately. The researcher's open book approach to her personal investment in the work serves as both a welcome mat and an open door through which the reader can walk through and focus on the content of the study. Therefore, the researcher is not concerned with whether or not another person would find the same results. The researcher is so inherently a part of portraiture that the same portrait could not be drawn from another's hand, as in the case of art.

Therefore, rather than focusing on validity, portraiture focuses on writing the most true account possible. The researcher checks and doublechecks notes; listens and re-listens to interviews for new tones, expressions, and comments; reflects and remembers facial expressions and body language; and reads repeatedly documents for new insights to ensure that everything that needs to be noted is included in the story. The portraitist checks for the vividness of the story, similar to how a photographer may approach a

photograph, she checks to ensure the picture is clear enough, bright enough and that the lens is wide enough to fully capture the beauty of the scene.

Issues of validity and reliability were relevant to the interviews that were conducted. Golafshani (2003) shares that proving reliability and validity within social science research is often challenging given its focus on deeper meaning rather than surface level understanding. Because people's thoughts and beliefs grow and change on a daily basis and the very act of participating in a study influences their thought patterns, the idea that one will be able to guarantee the same results or that data can be generalized to mass populations may not always be valid for qualitative inquiry (Schram, 2003).

However, measures have been identified to increase the quality of the study. Many of these methods were used in this study. To ensure trustworthiness and dependability in this study, I engaged in regular inquiry audits or data checks. This involved consistently reviewing and checking the raw data, re-checking emergent themes, reviewing my process notes, and constantly re-engaging data reduction. Triangulation within qualitative methods helped to provide multiple forms of information. By comparing interview recordings, hand-written notes, student self portraits, and process notes (from interviews, general observations, and self portraits), I was able to verify the accuracy of my findings and to confirm that the data was being read and analyzed correctly.

After conducting the first interview and reading the transcript, I assessed whether or not there were enough comments and information. I developed a "saturation list" of questions that included questions such as:

- "Are there too many participants?"
- "Does the interview provide answers to all questions or only a few?"
- "Are some areas commented on more extensively than others?"

- “Is the transcript manageable?”
- “Will adding additional interviews be too much?”

After reviewing the transcripts and answering these questions, I was able to confirm the structure of the next interview and decided that two interviews would provide the wealth of data needed for the study. Given the length, detail, and number of self portraits (18 portraits ranging from 5-10 pages), saturation was confirmed when voices began to sound similar and similar comments were consistently made after reading 10 portraits.

Limitations

Because this research is extremely context specific, it is limited by the boundaries of the two research sites included in the study. The findings in this study are not meant to be generalized to larger populations of college students or universities. Rather, this study provides a deeply personal portrait of the experience of eighteen college students in hopes of providing insight and new ways of understanding the cultural experiences of students. This study is also limited by the methods used to select student participants. Two very specific programs were used in this study in order to capture the values and beliefs of students in these two communities. Students in these programs, by virtue of their participation, indicate some value for cultural engagement. Therefore, they were selected as an ideal pool from which to extract definitions and ideas about culture. An open or random process that included other students may have yielded different results.

The study is limited by time. If I had spent more months (or even years) in the field, with these students, a deeper and broader portrait could have resulted. The time

span of the field work was over the course of one semester (approximately five months interacting across both institutions). The amount of time spent limited the relationship developed between myself and the participants as well as the amount of data collected. Finally, the study is limited by both the theoretical and methodological approaches. If the study had been approached from a different conceptual point of view or using a different method of data collection, other information could have been produced. Future follow up studies may provide important opportunities to utilize new research methods to gain new insights on this topic.

Summary

In this chapter, I have outlined the research methods that drive this study. The type of research, the particular method of data collection, the strategy for data analysis, and the limitations that are important for the reader to understand when approaching this study were explained. In the next chapter, I present the findings, which is followed by the implications shared in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

“Right now, I don’t think that I have any really big dramatic events that made me develop a sense of culture and shaped my personality. But I do have a couple of stories to tell.”

Tony, Sandhills Student

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the findings that emerged from the analysis of data collected in this study. Participants were drawn from students enrolled in a Cultural Leadership Institute at two different universities. The institute is a 3-credit credit course that integrates co-curricular cultural activities into the academic experience. All students in the two courses participate in what has been described by the Tri-Sector Cultural Practitioner’s Model as cultural education, cultural engagement, and cultural development programs. All students enrolled in the courses were provided a choice regarding participation. This chapter shares the results of two group interviews with 18 students (age range of 17-22; multiple ethnicities and genders) and 18 self authored cultural portraits—written narratives in which students reflect on their perceptions of and experiences with culture.

These findings will be used to paint a broad and creative portrait of culture that is established by weaving together emerging themes from stories and interviews and sharing “snapshots” of selected students to help bring the picture of each theme into focus. Five themes emerged from the data collected and will be discussed here to establish culture as: 1) A Half-Full Glass of Family Bonds; 2) A Politic of Survival 3) A Value for Education; 4) A Functional Cloak of Religion and Artistic Expression; and 5) A Personal Legacy to Inherit. Each of these themes were derived from analyzing the factors that students chose to discuss when asked about the topic of culture. These factors come together to form the broader picture of how this contemporary group of college

students perceive culture and why it is important to them. The discussion of each theme closes with a snapshot of one student whose story serves as a particularly salient example of that particular theme. The chapter concludes with a summary that recaptures the essence of how culture is described by students in this study.

Culture as a Half-Full Glass of Family Bonds

At Sandhills University, the students sit comfortably in the library of the cultural center waiting for our interview session to begin. They are familiar with one another and talk amongst themselves about various topics—the upcoming sorority program that night, the details of the required cultural events for the institute, and the activities of the past weekend. As I begin the discussion and re-iterate to them that this will be a group interview/dialogue on how they define culture, a hint of nervousness fills the room. Though students were aware of the topic and had voluntarily agreed to participate in the session, I observe some students sharing quick glances at one another with expressions that seem to communicate “What do I know about culture?” Other students, who were initially sitting upright as I called them to order, now slumped back in their seats seeming to prepare themselves to disengage from the conversation. These nonverbal clues suggested that perhaps the appropriate research question should be, “Can students of color talk about their culture?” After participating in two vibrant group interviews and reading 18 incredible cultural self portraits, the answer to that question (though it is not the research question studied) is unquestionably “yes.” One initial statement about family opened the flood gates of response and unlocked doors of interest among students. “I

think family is a really big important part of my culture,” Norris, a Sandhills student shares. “Yes, yes,” others chime in.

A Family Treasure Chest

For many of the students who participated in this study, whether they were at an urban institution or a rural one, family was the most significant component of anything cultural. The personal relationships between family and community friends established the foundation for their basic understanding of culture and served as the first point of reference for them to engage in critical thought and remembrance of their cultural histories. Their family structure was more of a community that included many people beyond their immediate parents and siblings. Family was a treasure chest of grandparents, other extended family members, neighbors, and un-related friends of the family whom they still referred to as “aunt” or “uncle.” These extended family networks were actively involved in helping to raise and care for them as children. The members of this community family helped to shape students’ values and ethics by sharing with them important wisdom from their life experiences. But most importantly, these extended family members seemed to model an ethic of stepping in to help out a struggling friend or family member (that person typically being the student’s mother). This community involvement personified a cultural ethic of selflessness and generosity that was deeply appreciated by students.

Norris’ initial comment in the interview sparked the lively conversation that followed. He is a sophomore at Sandhills and identifies as African American. From my interactions with him, he appears to be a soft spoken young man who seems to

choose his words carefully. It is clear that he is thinking as he answers the question. In his written story, he further explained how interacting with extended and community family shaped his ideals about family:

It has helped me realize that family is not just people that share the same last name or live in the same house or even people that have the same blood line as you. Culture is sharing different experiences with one another.

Of the eighteen students who wrote cultural self portraits across both institutions, all of them discussed family extensively in their narratives. Bre, a senior at Greystone, wrote about the role family played in shaping black culture and particularly building her sense of self:

Family is a monumental symbol in black culture. Family played an extensive role in helping me cope with my insecurities. My grandfather, whom I lovingly call Pop-Pop serves as one of my greatest inspirations. Moreover, he is one of the reasons that I am where I am today. My great grandmother, my grandmother (mom-mom), my mother and myself are all one.

Bre's comment posits family not only as major influencers of who she has become but also as a *part* of who she is – her family lives *with* her physically and *inside* of her spiritually. Like Bre, many students commented on grandparents playing an active role in their lives. Several lived with their grandparents while others fondly remember the time spent with grandparents as opportunities for cultural growth. Isla, a Greystone junior that spent a large majority of his childhood in the Dominican Republic, shared that he

was sent to live with his grandparents when his mother was left alone to raise him and his sister.

My grandfather became a very big influence on me....He was always there for me through so much that I have a bigger appreciation for how he has impacted my life. As a child, he would take me to the family farm, which was where he made his fortune, and provided me examples about life. I honestly did not know what he was talking about half the time. But looking back at all the things he would speak to me about makes me feel warm inside because all the things he said to me became a lesson I could use through my maturity.

Almost half of the participants in the study spent portions of their childhood residing with grandparents or extended family members. The prevalence of students having spent most of their childhood living with grandparents and other family members, in many ways, seems to challenge the idea in the literature that the “It takes a village” ethic no longer exists in contemporary cultural communities. In her cultural self portrait, Dearra writes about living with a long list of family members and that this experience influenced her so deeply that it blurred parental lines:

The one person that brings a household together is my grandmother.

For two years, though I can’t remember exactly, I lived with my maternal grandmother, Annie Mae Johnson (better known as Momma) and my grandfather, Willie James Johnson (better known as Daddy) in their big yellow unattached house with nearly all of my immediate family members: Momma, Daddy, Mommy, Aunt Thomasine, Antoine, Cousin Q, and I lived together under one roof and Uncle James would often come

visit us. Within those two years of my life, I decided to call my grandfather Daddy, my grandmother Momma, and my mother Mommy. I'm not sure why. I just couldn't distinguish between parents. I heard my Mommy calling him [grandfather] Daddy so I did too.

Many other students also called their grandparents by titles that seem to indicate a parental closeness that may have been motivated by their living situation. "Pop-Pop," "Mom-Mom," and "G-mom," are just some of the titles given to these extended family members which seem to serve more as terms of endearment than explanations of family position. The opportunity for multigenerational connection is a critical insight as even those students that did not physically live with their grandparents or extended family members also referenced the influence of family on their cultural development. Students communicated a value for having a large support network through their family—numerous people from whom they could learn or with whom they could socialize. Keith, a Sandhills student proudly shared the size and importance of his family in his self-portrait:

My mother's side of the family is extremely large. I have numerous amounts of uncles, aunts, and cousins... It's around forty people that I really have a good relationship with... My culture is really around family and family values. I've been raised to respect and believe in your family because they are the only people that really care about you. This culture that I have grown up in has shaped my personality a great deal.

Courtney, a Sandhills student from Philadelphia, shares a story about meeting her father's family for the first time. For her, discovering a large family network was similar to uncovering a treasure:

One day while my mom and I were at the mall, she said that his mother didn't live far. So I suggested we stop by. That day I went to my grandmother's house for the first time and met a whole host of family members I never knew about. I loved it. Considering that my mom's side of the family is fairly small I was excited to see that I had so many aunts and cousins.

During the interviews, students gleamed as they talked about their family—the closeness, the size, and the ways in which their families engage one another. For Laura, a Greystone student, the fact that her family is large and that she is provided opportunities to engage with different family members is important.

Each Thanksgiving at least 32 family members and friends pile into cousin Debbie's home. Everyone contributes to the dinner. As long as it takes for us to get together is as long as it takes for us to depart one another. But my family is big on holidays and everyone contributes. Christmas dinner is at Aunt Edna's house, 4th of July cookout is at cousin Tanya's, Easter dinner is at Grandmoms, Thanksgiving dinner is at cousin Debbie and Aaron's home every year.

Continued family engagement and the sense of having a large community of support (40 people; 32 family members) is a source of pride for both Keith and Laura. These details are shared as they discuss what is good about their family—what makes

their families functional. Greta, agrees that family engagement and connectivity is an important and critical part of culture. In her cultural self portrait, she shares how the importance of families staying together is critical to culture staying intact:

A lot of people I know, their families are so broken up. Like oh, my aunt, she lives down in Georgia, my cousin lives in New York, my other cousin lives in DC. My family, we're so close together, it would be difficult for us to break apart. A lot of my friends like I said are scattered all over the country, my own folks in Philadelphia, no one leaves. All my aunts and cousins are there, all my uncles are there, they are so close.

Culture as a Sense of Togetherness

As mentioned earlier, one important part of this familial culture is the sense of togetherness. The bond among family seemed to be very important to students. In many ways, their family created the initial example and birthed the value for community loyalty and closeness. Though often established within the family, this ethic also extends beyond family boundaries. Tony shares that culture is all about loyalty for him:

My loyalty runs deep with my friends and family and has put me in danger. We believe in sticking together. One night me and a couple of friends went out to an after hour spot back in Philadelphia. One of my best friends (we call each other brothers) started to talk with this girl. But her boyfriend happened to be in the club and saw them talking and got really upset. As the club let out the boyfriend confronted my friend and pulls a gun out on him. I quickly ran to my friend's side and we stood together

looking down the barrel of a gun. Luckily, a cop car pulls around the corner and the guy puts his gun away and runs. I could have been killed that night but if this was to happen again I wouldn't change a thing.

For Tony, cultural commitment is demonstrated through expressing loyalty regardless of the consequences. Norris shares a similar story in his cultural self portrait that is meant to offer an example of how close his family is:

One kind of unusual experience that has made me develop a sense of my culture was during last year's family block party. One of our neighbors that was drunk was having an issue with one of my cousins. My mother being the no-nonsense person she is, decided to nip it in the bud. After talking it soon turned into escalated yelling followed by a shouting match. I never have seen so much of my family at one time because it seemed like everyone appeared out of no where in an attempt to assist my mom. My mother is large and she didn't need any help. But there were 20 plus family members waiting for a fist from the opposing side to be thrown. Although this semi-negative because we should be uplifting one another as a black community, it also showed me that in my family we are strong, many, and we are one.

What I find interesting is the sense of comfort students seem to glean from these incidents. They are examples of family standing up for one another. They offer family members re-assurance that they are safe because they are supported—regardless of the threat of harm. This seems to establish familial support as somewhat different than a generic “belief in” or “support of” a student. Their families are often willing to risk their

lives for one another. If this is an important element of culture to students then it may in fact raise the stakes of the commitment necessary for a community to claim itself as cultural. Laura, a Greystone student shares in the group interview that family closeness is a form of ritual and tradition:

My family doesn't really have very important traditions we just believe in sticking together and being there for each other at all times. We do everything together. That's our tradition.

Floyd agrees:

My father always made sure we went places together. He wouldn't let one of his kids walk to the store alone --you had to go with someone.

Floyd learned to seek out "cultural partners" at home. Being with family members provided a sense of safety. As he speaks during the Greystone group interview, I reflect on how this may be relevant to cultural engagement patterns in college. If seeking out cultural peers is a necessary safety mechanism even at home to do something as simple as walk to the store, it makes sense that students would look for cultural partners on a campus to help them navigate a foreign environment.

Keith shares how family togetherness has been engrained as an ethic in his family since his grandfather was a child, 'My grandfather lived on a road called Baker village. The road was made of mostly my family.'" His grandfather was raised in Opelika, Alabama. This community structure is very familiar to me as my family owns one side of my grandmother's street in South Carolina. It housed aunts and uncles, sisters and brothers who all lived next door to one another. Laura, shares that her grandmother had just spoken about the importance of family remaining close this past Thanksgiving:

This thanksgiving dinner, my great grandmother (Ginny) made everyone realize what our culture stood for. She took us back in time and gave us some history about her and her sisters and brothers and cousins. Ginny said “everyone walking around here so happy to see one another, but if it weren’t for this holiday you all would not have even thought to visit one another. Ginny never talks so everyone is looking at her like huh? She said “Yeah I said it” and went on to preach about how it takes for us to have a dinner or a funeral for us to get together and act as a family. She went on to say I am 88 years old and can count on both my hands Tanya how many times my own granddaughter came to my home to visit me. Not saying we don’t see each other but its not you coming over to say hey Grandmom you need anything or I just was in the area or even I just want to spend the day with you. She said I can count how many times Laura, Sierra, Harry, Jason, been there and they are my great grands. She said you know I don’t blame you Tanya. I blame your mother, my own daughter because that is the way she raised ya.”

The fact that these students are communicating a value for such closeness and sense of cultural community is somewhat unexpected. I ask students if they feel this sense of community in college. Greta connects this value to college. She shares how having friends in school has helped her to feel this cultural bond:

We’ve been there for each other in good times and bad. From this we’ve been able to grow with each other, just like “real” families do.

Mike, an African American young man, that has been listening intensely, nodding and shaking his head throughout the conversation, speaks up for the first time: “Shit, we all we got. Excuse my language.” I tell him its okay—I understand. And I do.

Missing Treasures

It was when families were not able to remain intact or when they failed to demonstrate values of love, support and loyalty that students began to discuss how family can negatively contribute to culture or fall short as a cultural structure. Many of the students came from homes that were populated by many family members except fathers. The absence of fathers then made the extended family even more important. The following comments illustrate this point. Norris, reflects: “Although I did not have a father, I had other male role models within my community pushing me to do the right thing. My mother backed by my grandma and an array of hood uncles and aunts have helped mold me into who I am today.”

The importance of these extended networks went beyond providing security or support—they also provided balance to a parental scale that had been shifted completely in the mother’s direction. Students saw clearly how meaningful this support was both to their development and to relieving their mother’s level of responsibility. Family and friends helped to raise them, cared for them while their mother was at work, and even provided financial assistance. For Terry, it was a community grandfather that bought his mother a home in which to raise her family and that served as an adopted father to him:

At the age of five we moved out of an apartment into a house that my grandfather Carl had bought for us. He was not my biological grandfather

but he was the most positive black male in my life, he was like my father. My sister and I had the same mother but we were born to different dads, but my whole life my sister never seemed like a half sister to me because both of our fathers were not in our life so it seemed as if we shared the same dad—nobody!

During the group interviews, none of the students discussed the impact of not having both parents. Though family was heavily discussed as a general and major influence on culture, students did not get into verbal discussions that dissected *who* their family influences were. However, in their cultural self portraits sixteen of the students spent a significant amount of space reflecting on the absence of their fathers in their lives. Though many students commented that they “survived” the pain of parental abandonment, that the situation was “just life,” or that they had many other family members helping them in place of a father, the fact that when broadly asked to discuss the topic of culture, half of the students at least mentioned the absence of fathers indicates that both parents are seen as important cultural tools. One of Courtney’s statements illustrates this:

I grew up in a single parent home. Although my grandmother and uncle lived with us I was still deprived of a father. My mother is a very strong woman and she made sure I had everything any child could want and need. My uncle was my best friend, the one I looked up to and admired, the one who read me stories before I went to sleep. When he moved I was left without a father figure. I had met my father once before when I was

nine, but he disappeared again as usual. My father eventually went back to his ways of not coming around or calling.

Students clearly communicate a deep love for their mothers and a sincere appreciation for extended family members. However, the missing relationship with the father still leaves a sense that there is more growth to be gained from a father's side of the family. Norris shares how knowing his father and his father's family has always been a desire. He remembers the exact date of the one meeting he had with his father. This illustrates the strength of this desire:

I have always wondered what the other side was like—the other side being my father's side of his family; my dad was never present in my life. For all I know I could be sitting in class next to my half brother or sister and not even know it. The only time I really remember interacting and meeting him for the first time was on April 5, 1990...All I remember is that he was a darker complexion than I was with a bushy mustache and a Latino accent—he was an immigrant from Panama. He asked me did I know who he was and I replied “no” followed by him introducing himself to me. I kind of regret not taking the opportunity to take more time to talk to him then because just as he came, he left walking down the street waving and walking away. That was the last time I saw my father.

Isla's father left the family with the goal to help them by securing work opportunities in the United States. His father eventually disappeared and even after immigrating to the U.S. himself, Isla has not reconnected with his father.

My father moved to the United States to make something of himself and to send money back to the family. As the years progressed my father was out of the picture. When he moved to the U.S. it was the last time I saw him.

Isla's parents eventually divorced and his connection with his father was permanently ended. Tony didn't get to know his father until he was fourteen years old. Stan, a student at Sandhills spent the majority of his childhood in his father's custody and then went to live with his mother at age 13 when his father began to abuse drugs. He has not had a positive relationship with his father since then:

I also remember when my father was a tall strong man. I remember vague images of me looking at his Snoopy tattoo on his arm, he was in the army, he had muscles and all, I mean he held that image of a man and what child wouldn't notice that in their father. But yeah, seeing him go to work all the time and making sure we had everything before he left was a good feeling. Especially when he would take our sneakers to work with him to make sure we didn't go outside. This is nothing but a memory. Looking at him now is like "what the fuck happened".." must have been that shit." We lived in all kinds of places from shelters to family members homes to stranger's homes. I remember calling my mom, crying, telling her whatever it was I was telling her, and she was in Baltimore within the matter of hours.

Stan's disconnection with his father is so strong that in the majority of his portrait he refers to his father as "John." His was not the only story of negative social influences contributing to the lack of male presence within families. Terry wrote about male family

members being influenced by negative behavior. Though many students discuss the absence of their father, Stan and Terry are some of the few that discuss negative social influences that contributed to parental abandonment like alcohol, drugs, and crime.

Terry's portrait also reveals where he turned for positive male imaging:

Most of the males in my family were in jail, on drugs, alcoholics, womanizers, or all of the above. I always wanted to be like the men off my favorite television shows such as Bill Cosby, a doctor; Uncle Phil from the Fresh Prince of Bellaire, a lawyer; or even Carl Winslow from Family Matters an officer of the law fighting crime.

In his case, television provided access to professional black men. This speaks volumes to the need to provide more interaction across class levels in cultural communities. Though Terry had discussed having other male figures in his life, many of these men were either extended family members or men in his immediate neighborhood. All of them were in similar socio-economic situations. These men provided important love and support, however, Terry still turned to distant images on television for models of professional success.

Not all incidents of paternal absence were due to abandonment, the criminal justice system, or drugs. In Greta's case, it was health. Her father died very early in her life which left her without a father but still with a positive image of him as a man:

If you look at my family now we went from having numerous males in the family to very few. We didn't run them off. My father developed a rare form of cancer. He always worked even in his illness to make sure his family was clothed, fed, and well taken care of.

The interviews and narratives revealed a need for greater interaction with older male role models among both young women and men of color. Sons and daughters miss their fathers enough to mention them in their self-portraits. But more importantly, they clearly saw both parents as critical cultural foundations from which their identity is built. Though no one expressed sentiments of cultural deprivation or feeling as if they were culturally half empty, many did want to know the other side of themselves—the other family from which they could learn and the other person from whom they were made.

Insufficient Tools

It is also important to note student comments on the other negative aspects of their families. In both group interviews, students discussed friends and extended family members “hating” on them or not supporting their college goals. Students shared how many of their cousins who were not college bound wanted to see them fail or would make fun of their education. In the group interview at Sandhills, Kedrick is clearly frustrated as he shares:

I come home and they want to see me fail so bad. Cousins, they had babies through high school or whatever. They don't have no good friends and stuff. I come home and I'll be talking about my grades or something. They're like, he's lying, he probably got F's and stuff up there. Im like, why hate?

Another student chimes in:

I know for me and my family its like this. My mom went to college and has a degree. One of my cousins went to college and has a degree. The rest of them

went to college and threw their life away. I have one cousin who got kicked out because he stole a bunch of stuff. But then there's always those comments like oh she thinks she's snobby because she goes to Sandhills.

Many of these comments illustrate a lack of understanding and a feeling of disconnection among family members. One student in the interview labels it as jealousy: "I don't think I agree with what you're saying. Its kind of like, they just see that you got so much potential to be way more successful than they do." Reconciling or understanding why they may be treated with jealousy or labeled as "acting different" now that they are in college was important to many students. Though the students discuss distant cousins as negative it is important to distinguish between these family members and the family members that they saw as critical and important to them. "Distant" relatives, all of whom were distant cousins, were the only family members named as being negative. First cousins, grandparents, aunts, uncles and parents were all family members that students saw as supporting and nurturing. Distant cousins were often put in the same category as friends. Kedrick also shared the following comment:

The biggest thing with me and her (pointing to his girlfriend Tara) is our families. We don't really have any friends or mess with our cousins. Families are like go ahead, do the best you can do. Friends are like man you ain't the same person you was when you were home. You changed.

These students reiterated many of the comments mentioned in the literature on ethnic identity development regarding the pressures of balancing cultural expectations from the neighborhood or community with the new pressure of school. Colleges do in fact seek to change students (often referred to as growth and development) and the

community wants them to do well but culturally remain the same. For several students, the healthy parts of their families help to reconcile this:

When I go home its nothing like that. I have a brother. He left and went to school and dropped out. When I go home it's I didn't do it so I push you harder for you to do it.

During the Greystone interview, a comment by Floyd illustrates that when students dig deep to find the love that they have for friends and family, it also helps them to balance the challenge between their cultural community and their college community:

A few of the dudes I grew up with, I don't really talk to them like that. Its more like a mutual understanding. You don't have to like what I'm doing but you're not going to disrespect me in the same capacity. I try to encourage them also, you know what, you're at community college right now your trying to play ball, or whatever the case may be. You can make something of yourself. I try to serve as an example. Whatever stereotype you have about me because I went off to college and now Im back at home I'm going to show you that I'm here for us as a people and we can come up, rather than just being like forget you.

Mike shakes his head steadily in agreement. His face is proud as he shares with the group:

I like going home. I feel better now, people look to me as a role model now which is kind of weird. I got a story. I was getting off of the bus, and I see two guys from my high school walking toward me. They go, oh whats up man, you still go to Greystone. Oh man I wish I was there with

you man. I say you can do the same thing I do. It happens all the time,
Another time, I went back to my old high school and all of my friends
were like oh he's going to Grey. They showed me all the love—felt like I
was king for a little while.

Whether in the home, at school, or in the neighborhood, “culture” was about the
existence of a healthy affirming environment. Courtney agrees with the idea that culture
is about anyone showing love and support. She shares that the support from teachers and
students at her old school is genuine. This support made the difference for her while she
was there:

When I first got to my charter school, I brought along some of my old
traits, but after getting used to the atmosphere and being around the
teachers in the new school that cared and loved me I managed to
straighten myself up. I was at the top of my class and set to apply to
college. They all support me.

When these students were able to find the confidence to encourage, support, and
talk with community and family, their experiences at home were much different. Also,
when the family and community humbled themselves to love and support their college
pursuits there was less cultural dissonance. Whether positive or negative, family was a
major factor in students perceptions of culture.

A Half-Full Glass

Of course this discussion would not be complete without devoting space to the
clear appreciation, love, and regard students have for their mother's as cultural gardeners.

The role that these women played in planting cultural seeds and harvesting the fruits of their labor through ongoing support of their children in college is incredible. Throughout this section and the others to follow, mothers, mommas, mommy's, and mom-moms are mentioned, applauded, and thanked. Three students included a classic Maya Angelou (1994) poem as a dedication to their mothers and the role that she played in growing them as cultural beings. I share it here to capture the essence of just how “phenomenal” students saw their mothers. Upon re-reading this poem, within the context of all that has been shared by the students in this study, it does in fact capture the strength, sassiness, endurance, perseverance, abundance, loneliness, loveliness, courage, and compassion of these women—sixteen of whom raised their children as single mothers.

PHENOMENAL WOMAN

Pretty women wonder where my secret lies,
I'm not cute or built to suit a model's fashion size
But when I start to tell them, They think I'm telling lies.
I say
It's in the reach of my arms, The span of my hips
The stride of my steps, The curl of my lips.
I'm a woman
Phenomenally, Phenomenal woman
That's me.

I walk into a room, Just as cool as you please
And to a man, The fellows stand or Fall down on their knees
Then they swarm around me, A hive of honey bees.
I say
It's the fire in my eyes, And the flash of my teeth
The swing of my waist, And the joy in my feet.
I'm a woman
Phenomenally, Phenomenal woman
That's me.

Men themselves have wondered, What they see in me
They try so much, But they can't touch, My inner mystery.
When I try to show them, They say they still can't see.
I say
It's in the arch of my back, The sun of my smile
The ride of my breasts, The grace of my style.
I'm a woman

Phenomenally, Phenomenal woman
That's me.

Now you understand, Just why my head's not bowed
I don't shout or jump about, Or have to talk real loud
When you see me passing, It ought to make you proud.

I say
It's in the click of my heels, The bend of my hair
The palm of my hand, The need for my care.
'Cause I'm a woman
Phenomenally, Phenomenal woman
That's me

Whether it was the cultural nurturing that families provided, the cultural void that absent family members created, or the personal challenges and pressures to be accepted by their home communities, family greatly influenced the cultural experience. In this sense, culture was a half-full rather than half empty glass of family bonds. Though students were aware that there were missing pieces, they greatly appreciated the nourishment that was present and were optimistic of future opportunities to continue to grow. One student opened her cultural self portrait with the following quote by Lee Iacocca which probably best sums up the importance of family to culture: “The only rock that stays steady. The only institution that works is the family.”

A Snapshot of Dearra

Dearra is a petite African American young woman with a very reserved manner. During the group interviews she participates sparingly but backs down to many of the other louder students that excitedly dominate the conversation. She is a small woman with an even smaller voice. Though her statements aren't audibly “big” they seem to always make large impact. Her words are meaningful and important. She is a journalism major with aspirations of being a writer. Her literary interests drive her to participate in

campus poetry and performance events. Her creative interests help to explain why her cultural self portrait is so creatively written. As she hands it to me she smiles hesitantly and shares how tickled her family was when she began asking them questions about their childhood. She decided to interview her mother and grandmother to better understand her family's history. For her this was a very meaningful process. Though she knew what her family valued and how they approached life, she didn't necessarily know why. Completing her cultural story helped her to understand her family and understand herself.

I am touched that participating helped her in this way. Dearra was one of the students that gave the initial "what do I know about culture" looks in the group interview. Because of her initial attitude, I paid close attention to her demeanor throughout the interview. Though she participated, she never exhibited the enthusiasm of the other students. After speaking with her upon the completion of her written self portrait, I realized that her reserve was based on how seriously she approached her life. In her self portrait, she described herself as "neat and clean and hardworking." On the surface, this seems a bit superficial. But it actually reveals a lot about Dearra. She takes care and time with everything she does—how she looks, how she works, and what she says. She shares with me that writing the portrait helped her to reflect on herself and to come to know and appreciate herself even more. Her portrait captures the essence of how family is important to a young person of color.

Dearra is from Baltimore, Maryland. Like many students at Sandhills, she is a city girl attending a rural school. In the group interview, the only time Dearra does seem to become animated is during the discussion of "home" and the perceptions of home communities being negative. She talks about how though there are parts of Baltimore

that are bad, she is often frustrated by the stereotypes that many people now hold of her city because of what they view on television shows like “The Wire” or “The Corner.” In her portrait, she shares that her mother was raised on Bonaparte Avenue in Baltimore and though her mother holds fond memories of the neighborhood she can only see a street drowning in crime and negativity. She speaks of that community with distaste, “Mommy said it was more of a community...Back in the day people kind of looked out for one another. Its hard for me to imagine people on Bonaparte Avenue looking out for anyone but themselves. Whenever I tag along with Momma or Mommy to visit people on the old neighborhood, I cant resist the temptation to watch over my shoulders.”

But she also communicates a love for Baltimore—that “home” for her is more of the quality places and good memories than the community failures. One good place is her grandmother’s “big yellow unattached house.” In her portrait, Dearra writes about how hard her grandmother worked to buy the house—how she “saved and saved because she always wanted an unattached house” rather than a row house. Each time she talks about her grandmother’s home she describes it as unattached. There is distinct pride in her family having a lot that is all their own.

It was in this house that Dearra was raised for the first two years of her life. She was the student that lived with so many family members in her grandmother’s house that she began to confuse titles and called her grandmother “Momma” and her grandfather “Daddy.” Her relationships with her extended family members were cemented during those years of living together. In her portrait it is clear that she feels a closeness to her grandparents that resembles the relationship of parent and child. She attempts to explain the connection: “Until this day, my grandfather has been the only true father figure in my

life. So calling him Daddy is explanatory. As for Mommy and Momma, I'd like to think that in my first two years of life I immediately realized our connection. And perhaps that's why their identities are separated by a letter—one letter—one generation of change—an evolution even."

Throughout Dearra's portrait are the stories of single motherhood. Her grandmother, though married, was often left to take on household and parental responsibility alone because Dearra's grandfather was an alcoholic. Dearra's mother gave birth to her older brother at age 19 and then, seven years later and still a single mother, gave birth to Dearra. They lived with the grandparents because of financial need and the challenges her mother faced raising two children by herself. Dearra has never met her father and her grandfather died ten years ago. She is also a student surrounded by beautiful black female role models but still lacks consistent exposure to an equally impressive male figure. It then makes sense why in the interview she states that to her when she thinks of culture she thinks female dominated. "The women in my family run things." In her portrait she writes, "When I look at Mommy I see myself in 27 years. I see a strong, self sufficient woman who has carefully molded me into a replica of her essence."

A writer, poet and singer, throughout her narrative, Dearra weaves in song and poem that give texture both to the flow of her writing and to her life story. She comments often that she sees herself, her mother, and her grandmother as one. And her journey of self discovery occurs on the path of the lives of her "momma" and "mommy." She talks about how every black girl has a song to sing. This song is both philosophical--- the song of her life; and literal—a song that re-members her childhood or culture.

Through her narrative, Dearra sings the songs of her own life—her grandmothers life story, her grandfather’s history, her mother’s journey. She talks about how each of these songs are different yet similar: “Though each generation has a unique song to sing, all are in harmony.”

This harmony is illustrated when she shares the childhood rhyme songs that she and her two mothers sang as children. Though the songs are different, the spirit is the same. For her grandmother the song was sung in the countryside of South Carolina.

Every black girl has a song to sing that lures her to the past. In the 1940’s Southern Black girls played on dirt pathways and sang songs like this:

*Little girl had a rooster
She brought her hen a rooster
The old hen died, the old rooster cried
“I couldn’t lay an egg like I use to”*

Her mother sang her song on a stoop in Baltimore with her friends:

Yeah, every black girl has a song to sing, but its not always pretty. In the 1960’s southern black women moved to the north where their little black girls sat on the stoop and sang songs like this:

*Miss Mary Mack, mack, mack
All dressed in black, black, black
With silver buttons, buttons, buttons
All down her back, back, back
She asked her mother, mother, mother
For 15 cents, cents, cents,
To see the elephant, elephant, elephant
That jumped the fence, fence, fence...*

And Dearra sang her song throughout Baltimore City. She explains, “I sang this song at the playground during recess at Cross-country Elementary school, on the stoop at my apartment house in West Baltimore City—I sang this song amongst childhood friends with sassiness everywhere possible. Thinking of this song brings back childhood memories that I’m now certain Momma and Mommy must share.”

Yeah every black girl has a song, but its not always easy to sing. In the 1990’s northern black women raised their citified black girls who danced in the street to sing songs like this;

*We’re going to Kentucky
We’re going to the fair
To see that sister Rita
With the flowers in her hair
Oh shake it sister Rita
Shake it like you can
Shake it like a milkshake
And do the best you can*

Dearra’s story is full of the beautiful reasons why family seems to be so important to students of color. It is important because the first community to which they belonged was their family. This was most often an extended community and included anyone that cared enough to get involved. Family is important because they were the first people to work tirelessly to help and support them. Dearra’s grandmother working several jobs to buy a large “unattached” home was not a selfish effort. That house sheltered her children and her grandchildren when they had no other place to live. Family is important because it has been the one steady, close, and enduring rock on which they could lean all of their lives. As students mentioned, childhood friends come and go, but their families stay with

them. Dearra may have sang that sassy “Shake it Rita” song with her friends but her familial song is ongoing and everlasting. Because their family modeled the way, paved the way, and created a way to live, to these students family is culture. Dearra’s final paragraph in her self portrait, says it all:

Every black girl has a song to sing and sometimes it’s quite happy... Mommy says that we are all giving people, we like helping people. We are strong and we stick to our ground. I say, “I am who I am because you have showed me the way. I have strength because you are strong. I am content with being alone because you are independent. I value my education because you never took it for granted. I’m a hard worker because you never gave up. I am who I am because of my Momma and Mommy. I love you

Culture as a Politic of Survival

A politic can mean many things. But in this case, I am approaching it as a tactic or strategy that is used to gain advancement (Microsoft, Encarta Dictionary, 2002). When viewing culture as a toolbox of skills, the interviews and student self portraits revealed that some of these cultural “tools” established a politic of learned tactics and strategies in response to social oppression or general life challenges. I expected to hear things like “culture is abundance,” “my culture is about enjoyment,” and “culture is about good times.” Instead I was told that culture is “hard work,” “determination,” “resourcefulness,” and “respect.” Because many students saw culture as a product of lessons learned and growth that occurred as a result of life experience, the ability to work through struggle was a major cultural skill and value. Generally, students saw people in their family (most often their mothers) as hard working and resourceful. Their mothers often taught them that success in life required hard work. Their mothers also modeled the way as family

leaders, demonstrating a willingness to work long hours, hard jobs, or to start from the bottom in order to provide for the family.

Ain't Nothing Going on but the Rent

The most common form of family struggle for which cultural skills were needed was economic. Most of the students in the study, across both universities, shared some form of financial strain within their family during childhood. In her self portrait, Greta starts her reflection on her family with the following sentence: “In truth, my family is composed of some of the poorest people I know.” She goes on to share that her family often sees this as a point of shame and will deny their true financial situation to hold on to “the smallest thread of dignity just so we can proclaim to the rest of the world that we are people too.” Like Greta, many other students commented on their family’s economic struggles as being culturally defining moments that were often intertwined with feelings of pride and shame. Terry saw his mother’s economic struggles as a source of pride. The fact that she was able to develop strategies to survive and to communicate an expectation of success to her children influenced his cultural identity:

My mom had to raise me and my sister by herself off of a salary that would seem to most as poverty. She envisioned a future for her kids that would be different from hers. She wanted us both to graduate, attend college, and have a good job. She did everything in her power to make this happen.

Dearra’s mother was faced with a similar situation as a single mother of two. In her self portrait, Dearra shares her mother’s comments:

“It was hell” said Mommy, who rarely uses profanity. “Well it’s wasn’t really as hard to raise you two as it was a struggle. Basically, what you had to do was get yourself on a budget. You know how much money you have, don’t go over that amount. What I did was budget.”

Dearra, like many of her peers observed her mother working hard to make ends meet. Students understood very clearly that their interactions with extended family members were most often prompted because as Mike put it, “it seemed like she [my mother] was always working.” In his self portrait, Mike, a Greystone student from New York wrote about the exhaustion his mother faced from daily life.

Although I could tell inside that momma was unhappy, I knew to stay in a child’s place. She would come home after work and start crying at the kitchen table ordering me and my sister Erma to massage her feet. She developed really coarse feet as a result of wearing the same tired worn out shoes to work everyday to make sure we at least had food and a roof over our heads.

Greta writes about the critical lessons that were gained from her family’s struggles. She sees these lessons as important markers of culture. The themes in the portraits suggest that it is important to connect the experience of struggle, the strategy developed to tackle that struggle [hard work], and the resulting life lesson that is then shared with children. These struggles, strategies, and lessons are important aspects of culture for these students. Greta writes:

Another aspect of African American culture was understanding that the things we want the most in life are not always granted to us, rather, we are expected to struggle to put up a fight for what we want. My mother was forced to cook and clean doing dishes day after day in order to pay her

way through college. Her profound understanding of her culture has shaped her into the type of parent she is today teaching my siblings and I that if you really want something in life you are going to have to work your ass off in order to get it.

Student after student related how hard their mothers work. They told story after story of how their mothers were “taught very early on about the rewards that are gained through hard work and perseverance” as Bre put it.

Tara, a Sandhills student from Prince Georges County Maryland, tells a story similar to her peers of a family history of economic struggle. But her story of success is not the same story of barely getting by. During the group interviews, Tara talks about the realities of PG County. It is a suburb of Washington, DC. The wealthiest majority black county in the U.S., “PG” is plagued by economic extremes. Outside of the beltway (the major highway connecting MD, DC, and VA, is great affluence with \$700,000 dollar homes in gated African American communities. The interior of the beltway is populated by black and Latino communities living in sheer poverty. But PG is a place where even those who live in large homes with Range Rovers parked in the drive way have to face a racist society where business developers refuse to build high end stores in the area. She shares that even inside of the beltway, the best black people can get are discount stores and this is a source of anger for many. So, for her, money doesn’t necessarily equal respect. Respect is self achievement. As she explains this to the group, it resonates with me—I lived there for seven years. I find myself extremely interested in learning more about Tara’s story of economic struggle. Would she situate it inside or outside of the

beltway? In her self portrait she provides the answer-both. Her family story is a story of determination literally to cross over to the other side:

At first my family was not financially stable and they did not make ends meet all the time to have a well off life. Although it was a struggle to live in this harsh life, they found other measures to achieve goals. My mother's side of the family opened up a barbershop and hair salon that is currently in existence today. The success on both sides of the family shapes my identity. There were not too many job opportunities available so this was a great option for them. My father's side of the family began to enroll in school. His two brothers and their wives are now doctors and each of them have their own medical practice in Maryland. Business ownership and education changed my family's situation. We were able to move. It was like a pursuit to a higher road. My life revolves around my family. How they have developed and learned and changed our situation and moved to a better area, the more they do the more I am culturally shaped.

Bre also expressed appreciation for her family's hard work to provide her even limited amounts of privilege:

"I wish" was a saying I often repeated over and over again to myself reflecting on my ungrateful mind set that I was never satisfied with what I possessed in my life. Till this day, I admit I tend to let those words break away from my lips every once in a while. I used to think I lived a hard unfair life, but began to realize how fortunate I actually was. My grandparents and even my mother at certain points have lead by example

and have worked extremely hard to give me the days that I am living now. My grandparents have paved the way to progress. They lead by example to their families to set higher standards and to show them that with hard work you can do anything.

Family struggles of the past became life lessons of the present. They inspire and motivate students to work hard, to do better, and to achieve more. As Dearra shares, these struggles provide a life model that confidence is the key to rising to success: “Mommy’s job experience encourages me not to be afraid of starting at the bottom and working my way to the top.” For Courtney, this confidence was a family cultural trait. It was what her family does: “We work hard for what we want cause nobody aint gonna give it to you. If we set goals for ourselves, we go for it. We go for it cause we know nothing is going to come to you. You have to go for it!”

Perseverance was a major cultural value—not only feeling as though you can keep trying but also having people believe in you, encourage you, or pray for you. Perseverance was about believing that, regardless of the situation, it can turn itself around. Keith shares a story that immediately made me think about how I am often puzzled by some students who even with horrible grades do not question whether they will persist or attain their law school goals. Keith tells a story of his family’s belief in his ability to persevere. It provides insight into why students may believe they can achieve their goals even when their goals seem unreachable. He labels this as the important “cultural story/example” of his life. In many ways it represents him stepping into the role of persevering through struggle.

I struggled with the SAT's. My first time I only got an 830 so I got a tutor to help me out with test taking strategies. I took it again and I increased my math score by 200 points. But that still wasn't high enough. So I took it again and I did well on both my math and reading. I was finally cleared by the clearing house. About month before its time for me to graduate my guidance counselor calls me into her office and tells me that the NCAA Clearinghouse has red flagged my results. So they cancelled my scores and they told me that I had to take it again and come within 100 point of my last score. So I took it again and I didn't get the 100 points. So my scholarships were about to get taken away. So I studied really hard with my tutor so I can get the score I needed. This event made me closer to God and my parents. My mother and even my father prayed for me everyday before I went to school. So, when it was all said and done I got the score that I needed to get in order to keep my scholarship. When I found that out I almost cried and I just went home to my room and thanked God.

Looking back in history, at African American heritage, the value for having unshakeable faith in life makes sense—if an enslaved person could persist in life, believing with no real supporting indications, that things would turn around one day, why wouldn't their children inherit this spirit? Why wouldn't students of color view culture as having a strong belief in their ability to triumph? Hard work and perseverance are seen as respectful values—attributes of success and cultural decency.

Though many students saw their family's ability to "overcome" poverty as a source of pride, others viewed their persisting economic struggles as sources of frustration and shame. Bre describes her mother's life in this way:

My mother was the first to experience a step up from the "hard life" She had many opportunities but did not use them which is why she is in the dreadful standard she remains in now.

She goes on to share that her mother did not handle money well and that this led to persisting struggle in her mother's life. She loves her mother, but she *respects* her grandparents for the thoughtful ways in which they approached life and managed to take care of her and her mother.

Money, Power, Respect

For a few students, money and success went hand in hand. Their family's economic struggles often led to two life lessons: (1) Success can be gained from hard work and (2) Success is determined by your financial situation. Kedrick, a Sandhills athlete explains his parents beliefs:

They were better off with an education which meant more money. Having more money made it easier for the family to live. My parents stress going to college in our household because they believed that graduating makes you more successful and the more successful you are the more money you make.

Courtney's mom had a lot of money and bought a lot of things but still worked a minimum wage job.

Being as though we lived with my grandma my mom had a lot of extra money at times. My mom worked at Macy's for most of my childhood. She would come home with a new shirt or a pair of jeans for me every Friday.

This ability to buy material things, however, did not make Courtney describe her family as successful or any less financially strained. This may be due to the way in which some students distinguished between money and success. Economic stability was about more than brief periods of access to money. Though some parents had fleeting moments of "good jobs" their lifestyles still screamed oppression and struggle from working several jobs, to still living with their parents, or having their money all disappear as was the case with Isla. His grandfather made a small fortune on their family farm in the Dominican Republic. However, all of the money was eventually lost. Isla expresses an appreciation for this lost because he feels that his character has been built as a result of economic struggle:

My grandfather was a very hard working man and he would make a penny turn into a dollar as if it was magic. He became such a hard working person that my family became wealthy. This was inspiring-- a man who had nothing did so much all for his family. Eventually my family lost a big portion of this money. Our government was very corrupt. The money that the community would make would be stolen by those workers.

Fortunately, we lost a big portion of the money. I say fortunately because I probably would not have the same values I have today. Because I had to

struggle hard in my life, I looked back and think if I had all that money, I probably would have become a different person.

Other students mirror this sentiment and express a disdain for anything superficial—including money and materialism. Many saw money and material things as superficial distractions from true culture. As Floyd states in his self portrait, “It seems that my generation is easily captivated by the fast life.” Greta who spent time in her portrait discussing her family’s tendency to deny the truth of their poverty, later even reflects on herself critically, recognizing how she also engages in behavior driven by a desire to hide her financial situation.

I even try to surround myself with an abundance of material goods so that I can psychologically envision that I’m just as financially stable as the next person when it comes to purchasing consumer goods. But is this indeed truly who I am? ...There is an ever growing pressure that is bestowed upon me to succeed in a society that has made success an obstacle for anyone who even shares my identities.

Floyd includes a Langston Hughes poem (2001) in his self portrait as he discusses community shortcomings. He feels that the masses are “merely existing (not living, but existing) as products of economic, social, behavioral and psychological enslavement.” He sees much of the extreme struggles that his ancestors endured to create new roads of opportunity as a dream deferred. He wonders how many current dreams are being crushed by the dynamics of the streets—how many talented people are wasting their lives and not living up to their full potential. For him deferred dreams are the product of social and cultural failure.

Deferred Dream

What happens to a dream deferred?
Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore-- And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over-- like a syrupy sweet?
Maybe it just sags like a heavy load.
Or does it explode?

We Fall Down: Drugs and the Streets

Sometimes dreams actually do more than fall down—they actually do explode. For several students the effects of drug addiction and community criminality ripped apart cultural values, bonds, and expectations. Because of drugs, dreams died, families fell apart, and parents transformed into strangers. Cultural ties were broken in communities and neighborhoods became war zones, all due to the severe pressures of economic oppression and the bleak coping options presented---criminality to make money or drug addiction to mentally escape. Tony starts his story in the voice of his mother and father at the time he was born:

My name is J.C. and I'm a thirty year-old crack addict from Philadelphia. I have a one hundred dollar a day crack habit, no job, a five year old daughter, and my girlfriend is pregnant with my first son. I currently live in a man's shelter in West Philadelphia. I rarely see my daughter and have no means to support my pregnant girlfriend. For the past couple of months, I have been contemplating suicide, but I know that I must live for my children so I have decided to continue my worthless life. ..Hello my name is Carrie Sue Arlington and I'm a twenty four year old pregnant woman from Philadelphia. My life is okay at the moment but it could be

much better. I currently love with my parents, and I'm a food service worker. I'm happy that I'm pregnant with my first son but in the beginning, I contemplated an abortion. After talking about the issue with my mother, we decided it would be best to give the child a chance to live. I'm in love with a pretty worthless man at the moment. But love is hard... What's up y'all, my name is Tony and I'm a twenty year old college student from Philadelphia. Before I explained my life and culture to you I wanted to introduce you to my parents and explain their mind frame around the time I was born.

Providing glimpses into the lives of his parents was an incredible choice of approach to the beginning of his cultural portrait. His introduction reveals some of his emotion towards his father, who is portrayed much more negatively than his mother. The negative opinions of his father may be due to the fact that Tony was the student who didn't meet his father until he was fourteen years old. Sharing the psychological issues plaguing his parents when he was conceived provided a very intimate understanding of this young man's life. The last comment that love is hard says it all. It must be hard as a child to know your father wanted to kill himself, to be aware that your mother considered abortion, and to live a life of constant economic struggle. However, what is most important as a cultural indicator is the idea that all of this was experienced because of the dedication that his family had to loving him—regardless of the struggle, despite the circumstances. That says something about culture—it is about determined and persistent love—a love that even society can not break. Tony includes a picture collage in his self portrait—pictures of him with his mother, grandmother, and sister as well as a picture of

a fireplace mantel filled with family photos. He states that he has had a good life and his culture has shaped him into a good person. Because of that, he is not willing to compromise his morals and values. If a sense of culture can do that for a person—can help them come out of such a painful situation with a bright outlook on life and an uncompromising sense of self—it is in fact an incredible life tool.

Dearra talking again about Bonaparte Avenue, shares a story that illustrates how ironic she finds the presence of both the sense of community love and the embrace of community degradation within some community members.

One time, Momma ran into a man she once babysat as a child. “little something” is what she called him. He smiled, gave her a hug, told her his parents were in the house, walked to the nearest curb and kept right on pushing drugs. The crime rate on Bonaparte Ave. alone could put any ghetto to shame.

Keith shares a different story of personally falling victim to the lure of selling drugs. His curiosity was motivated by the appeal of the “fast life” and materialism mentioned earlier.

I fell through the cracks and started to experiment with drugs. I never did drugs but I did sell drugs for a while. On my mother’s side of the family there are nothing but drug dealers and they all had money, girls, and a nice car. At first, when I started selling drugs, I had all the new Jordan’s, nice jewelry, and a pocket full of money. But one day I was chilling on the corner and these dudes ran up on me and my cousin with guns and tried to rob us. My cousin was much older and he tried to fight them but he got

shot five times in the chest and died. When I started selling drugs school started to become less and less important. When I was doing bad my parents' relationship started doing bad. They were always arguing. But when I listened and stopped with the drugs my parents started doing better and I started doing better in school.

Keith's story illustrates how when materialistic social pressures are combined with poverty the result is a cultural death warrant. Cultural structures and cultural bonds can not survive in negative environments. In Keith's case not only did he fall down in life due to his involvement with drugs, so did his parent's relationship. God was his bridge over troubled waters. For others, it was school. Terry explains his experience with the challenges of his "block" in his self portrait:

On this block were nothing but kids, drug dealers, and little old ladies. School was my key that separated me from everything negative in my life. As I went on to high school most of my friends were either in jail or dropped out of school doing nothing. Countless of my childhood associates have lost their lives in the pursuit of the fast life. Their loss of life has manifested in the form of gang violence, family casualties, drug addiction, prison sentences, STD's, and the most contagious of all bleak hopes for a better tomorrow.

To Terry, the alternatives to school were bleak—go to school or stand on the corner. Most of his friends that dropped out or didn't go to college fell hard in life. In their cases, their plight went beyond deferred dreams, their lives had either exploded and were lost to prison or gang violence or were ticking bombs awaiting the bleak reality of

HIV and drug addiction. For him school didn't just change his life—it saved it. For Floyd, his parents (mother and father) rescued him:

Some of the largest influences that have helped in shaping my cultural identity have been my childhood experiences. Growing up in a predominantly African American neighborhood filled with gang violence, shootouts, drug busts, and a community whose very lives were filled with deferred dreams, the probability that I would be able to rise above the influence of my environment were not high. The majority of my childhood friends who sat in class with me are either incarcerated, dead, or involved in criminal activities. The only difference between myself and my friends who didn't make it out, was the influence of my parents (mainly my father). It made the difference between me being at Sandhills rather than the state penitentiary or mortuary.

His choice of alternatives is again compelling. The alternative to college is either prison or death. Floyd is one of a few students that came from a two parent household and who discusses his father as being instrumental in his “making it out.” During the group interview, he is one of the disagreeing voices in the discussion on “haters” at home. He feels a responsibility to uplift his peers. But he also speaks firmly about not allowing others to disrespect him. In the discussion, he mentions that most of the guys in the neighborhood know his father so they do not approach him with the same negative comments that other students receive. They respect his father and thus respect him. Having a firm and respected family support is his safety net in his troubled neighborhood.

Snapshot of Stan

I haven't included much of Stan's story in the earlier part of this section. His self portrait was so captivating that I wanted to keep much of it intact and save it for this snapshot. Stan's cultural story was difficult to get through. He is a student that I had been able to spend much more time getting to know than any others in the study because of his involvement in several campus programs. I work on his campus and had interacted with him in various capacities. Stan took advantage of everything on campus. He was involved everywhere—cultural organizations like the NAACP and Black Caucus, Greek Life, cultural center programs, mentoring programs, leadership programs, political organizations, and he was a participant in the Inroads Program completing internships every summer. Though he was very popular and very involved on campus, Stan was an extremely quiet African American young man in public. When he did choose to speak, it was often with passion, assertiveness, and critical thought. He was not afraid to disagree, to lead the crowd, or to tell his peers to “be quiet and shut up” if an adult was trying to get their attention. Stan was also one of my biggest professional supporters. If I needed anything—a chair moved, a room set up, a volunteer for a program or this study—he was the first to sign up. There was respect present deep in his eyes whenever I spoke to him—I knew he valued and appreciated my work at the university. I generally knew that he was from Philadelphia and that he was at the university on full scholarship. I knew that he was a true scholarship student, with real economic problems. If he didn't maintain his grades and keep his scholarship, he would not be in school. But after reading his self portrait, I saw him in a new light, through a very intimate cultural angle. His story personifies culture as a politic of survival.

You can grow up looking up to them, like every child is supposed to: his success, her struggle, his manly physique, her motherly beauty, his word, her trust, some things that would stand out to a child as they are brought up in this world, that would make their mother or father seem like the best in the world. Ha. That's a joke. Let's kiss that success dream goodbye.

So begins Stan's cultural self portrait. Stan's parents were divorced when he was six years old. Their divorce marks the beginning of a lifetime of struggle. Stan recounts that after their divorce, he can only recall his parent's hate for one another increasing yearly and his sense of disappointment in them following suit. Unlike many of his peers, he spent the next six years after the divorce in Baltimore in the custody of his father. He shares how as a little boy he wanted to be just like his father. His initial memories of respect for his father are connected to his memories of his father having a "good job" at a wire company. When his father was going to work everyday, taking them to company picnics, and hiding away their shoes so that they couldn't go outside while he was working, Stan had a heart full of love for his father. He says that he used to think, "Damn he really cares about us, that's a father right there."

But his father was 'let go' at his job and as Stan puts it "after that life was like driving on an up and down hill." For several years, his father constantly moved him and his brothers around. They lived with family members with friends and at times of severe destitution, in shelters. They would go from periods of constant moving to short stints of having a stable life with another "good job" and a "nice home." But his father's financial stability never lasted and so he would pack up the boys and move again. He recalls that these jobs were the only good memory or sense of respect that he has for his father. "The

good thing was that my father was to me known for having a job for at least a long time and they were good jobs. I guess that's why I looked up to him. Honestly, I don't even know what he did sometimes, the wire job was the only job I can recall...but he kept a job though." He goes on to share how their living situation reached a point where he and his brothers couldn't take it anymore. He called his mother who was then living in Philadelphia and she came to get him in a matter of hours. From that point, around age 12, he lived with his mother in Philadelphia which he now calls home.

Stan shares that his mother worked long hours and so he had much more freedom in her house than with his father. He went from never being allowed to go outside in Baltimore to proclaiming "I pretty much raised myself out in the streets of Philadelphia." At fifteen, he started selling drugs. He explains that his "environment and living situation gave him no choice" but to do the things that he has done. His mother was struggling but managing to provide for them-to as he puts it "keep a roof over our heads and food on the table." The way that Stan describes his mother is interesting. There seems to be little respect there. He explains that when he first came to live with her he loved her dearly simply because she was his mother, but he really didn't know her. He started to develop some respect for her when she began to go to school but her pursuits and his pride are short lived. When she dropped out so did his faith in her. He explains:

During that time and afterwards she would consistently lose the few jobs she had. Since I been living with her, she never worked since her last job which was like three or four years ago.

As a son, Stan seemed to want to see his parents staying afloat—even if they were treading shallow waters in a low paying job. He shares that they just need to find any job

or do *something* with their lives. Their inability to press through their economic struggles diminished his sense of respect for them. This respect was lost for good when both of his parents became drug addicts.

Being as though I was raised in the streets, I know all the signs, behaviors, and flaws of someone being on drugs: shit, I been knew my father was back in Baltimore “hitting” that glass dick. What made it official with my moms was that one night I went to the bathroom and on the floor I found a 1212 bag, which was, to keep it simple, a bag that one would bag coke or crack in. I mean I should know, I was selling it. So, I asked her whose it was and she said “its mine.” But basically I could really start to see my mom simulate into something, someone that I could never love nor have respect towards: a crackhead. She would promise things and don’t follow through with them, go through my stuff in search of money and would succeed then talk about “Oh I was just borrowing it, I was going to pay you back, it shouldn’t matter, I do this, I do that, blah, blah, blah. Yeah she became a disappointment.

Stan says that he doesn’t care now, but his entire cultural portrait relating this story suggests otherwise. His parents financial struggles and drug addictions have been a major part of his life. For the greater part of his life on earth—he has lived in constant turmoil. His oldest brother couldn’t take the pressure of this constant struggle. Stan shares that this past summer his brother tried to hang himself.

If you think my side of it is crazy then you might want to hear my brothers tell their stories. Oh, wait, you can’t see my oldest brother is a “vegetable”

right now because he tried to hang himself this past summer. They say he may come back around—time will tell—God is working with him.

He goes on to share that through all of this, he has managed to do well in school even when he was in Baltimore with his father. And indeed, he has. He is not an A student but he persists through school despite his home life and in spite of the fact that he recently became a father himself. He is now getting the degree to create a legacy for his son. He states that he is sure there are others that have it much worse than him so he has accepted his family's flaws—"that's life." Stan still expresses love for his mother and father. He describes his father as the worst factor in his life but yet proclaims, "I still love him, I mean he is my father." He says that he's learning to love and respect his mother because she is his mother despite her flaws. Stan ends his self portrait in the same way that it begins but with new insight:

I started this semi-life story: You can grow up looking up to them, like every child is supposed to: his success, her struggle, his manly physique, her motherly beauty, his word, her trust, some things that would stand out to a child as they are brought up in this world, that would make their mother or father seem like the best in the world. My life's disappointments have only made me want to be a better person. My culture is my knowledge and experiences that I have had that have made me a more conscious person. More conscious of superficial BS, that my generation holds as values. More conscious of others intentions and morals. More conscious of social and community needs. In the end, I just hold my faith as a priority and live life as righteous as possible.

Stan is a student who developed a sense of culture despite there being no steady figure to teach it to him. It seems almost as if the negativity in his life caused him to cling to culture as a symbol of anything opposite of what he saw. Culture, in his case, was the alternative experience of responsibility, hard work, strong values, faith, and righteousness. Stan's life story is a testament to the strength that culture has to pull us up when our world falls down around us.

Culture as a Value for Education

The idea of education being inextricably tied to culture was a bit surprising for me. I expected students to view education and schools as institutions external to their culture. After reviewing so much literature that talked about culture shock and cultural isolation, I expected education to be a dissonant "environment" for students. However, what I found by engaging with these students was that the environment and the ethic of education were something different for them. Campus, school, buildings and classrooms were in fact external institutional forces. But nearly all students spoke about education, learning, college, and academic opportunity as being an important value in their culture. Whether the ideal of education was valued because of the past lack of access to education by parents and grandparents or because pursuing an education was an act of continuing an important family legacy of achievement, education and culture were bound to one another. Kara begins her self portrait with the following statement: "Education alone is an unparalleled symbol of my culture."

Educational Access

Kara's strong statement about education's place in her cultural canon was echoed by several students. Floyd shares that he can not recall a time when his parents were not working diligently to teach him the importance of education. To him, their energy and effort towards making education a life priority shaped his cultural identity and rooted education firmly in the foundation of his culture. In his cultural self portrait he writes:

Aside from knowing that education and knowledge would be a large determinate of how far I would go in life, my parents' focus on the importance of education was primarily driven by their ethnic composition as African Americans. I would attribute this to my parents growing up in times where schools were segregated and academic resources were scarce. To add fuel to the fire, all four of my grandparents were illiterate.

Lack of access to education was most often named as the motivating force for the family's value for education. Many students had parents or grandparents who were denied access to quality education or any education, and so these ancestors worked to ensure that their children were provided the opportunities that they were denied. Many parents saw education as the key to navigating the social struggles of life. Dearra, shares a statement that her mother makes as Dearra interviews her:

"If you don't have no skills you'll be living from hand to mouth," Mommy said. "Education is important so you wont have to depend on nobody –no one but yourself. You know what you can do."

While, as noted earlier, students often saw culture as a navigational tool to pass through rough terrain, their parents often saw it specifically as education. It seems that

the students have molded culture into a collage of all values, tools, and skills needed to navigate life. So, these two perspectives are not too far apart. Students see culture as important to get ahead in life, but culture includes education. For both generations, education is a means through which deferred dreams move to the front of the line. Education allows for family legacies of deprivation and oppression to be transformed. Dearra tells how her grandmother, in New York, often checks up on her academic progress on the weekends:

Momma [grandmother] is always enthused when school is a topic. Her exhilaration makes me realize how much my education truly means to her. During my freshman year of college she would often call bright and early on a Saturday morning (fully aware of the fact that I am still sleeping) to discuss my exam grades, which she southerly refers to as “marks”

“Dearra Ann, (with emphasis on the Ann because I am named after her), what kind of marks are you getting? “I’m getting A’s and B’s Momma.”

“B’s? well that’s good too,” she’d say (not completely satisfied, yet content.) Though discussing my marks on an early Saturday morning was quite annoying, I knew she did it because she cares. She cares enough that I am taking advantage of the many opportunities that she was never given. Going to college was merely a dream for Momma and in her eyes I am fulfilling a fantasy.

Continuing the Legacy

For other students, pursuing an education was about continuing a family legacy that other trailblazers in the family had begun. A few students had parents who were

college educated and one had grandparents that attended college. For these families, the older family members had worked hard to get earlier generations into college and so education was an expectation for younger generations—to continue what they started. Kedrick says that everything he is today can be attributed to his family’s background and his parents achievements. He explains it this way: “My parents were both the first in their family to attend and earn a college degree. This major accomplishment set the foundation for the future. From then on, they were better off.” In Laura’s self portrait, she illustrates how culture is a way of life, so because education was such a priority in her family’s life, it is also a part of her culture:

Culture is a way of life but to each individual it is different depending on their values. For example, I knew that college was where I was going after high school one because it was the right thing to do and two because I knew it needed to be started all over again. My father attended college and he thought that my brother was going to be the first out of his kids to achieve that accomplishment; he started but didn’t finish. Now here I am the second youngest out of his four children and the only one that has made it.

Kara, a tiny and enthusiastic African American young woman from Philadelphia, attending Greystone is the one student who lays claim to great grandparents receiving a college education. For her, this is a strong source of pride. She talks about several family members that attended college, illustrating how widely spread the value for education is throughout her family.

My family is one of the few families that can trace back to their great grandparents holding college degrees. And because of that, I see the success

that my family has had. It was the vision that my great-grandfather had that all of his children would receive an education. My Great Aunt Jean went to community college and became a certified public accountant and my grandmother received a bachelors degree from Temple University about 20 years after high school graduation. But again that seed was planted and the will to know the importance of education. I am blessed with two parents who went to school my mother attended George Washington University and my father the University of Maryland. I can remember my parents starting their own private school... It was set at an affordable price that many of those who normally would not have access to a private education could now attend. The most important lesson about the school that they eventually opened was they instilled a work ethic within the pupils. It was known throughout the campus that all work was to be completed with NCA which stood for Neat Complete and Accurate. This notion was instilled in me from a young age.

Kara's story illustrates that education as a cultural value mostly concerns legacy creation. "Willing," as she puts it, the appreciation for education to future generations and continuing the proud academic achievements of past generations. This is true for any of the families explored in this study—those that had been historically denied an education or those that had long histories of educational involvement---all sought to create a long lasting legacy of educational access.

College & Culture

As benefactors of the value for education, many students reflected on their particular experiences in college. As Zora Neale Hurston revealed in her work, college was a space in which students could step back and fully view and appreciate their culture—admire it, miss it, understand it, and fully see it. College helped to bring the architecture of their culture into plain view. Teddy, a second generation African student at Greystone (his parents are African) explains it this way:

It was in college where I was finally immersed in the learning of African as well as African American history. It was going to college where I was forced to go outside of the classroom to gain more knowledge about my history/culture whereas in K-12 all of my learning was restricted to the classroom. I decided to become a history and education major to hunt for a history and a culture that was all my own. The national council for social studies made this statement about social studies “ the social studies curriculum is designed to acquaint children with their world, to help them make sense of it, and to give them a sense that they might make it better than they found it.” This has become more applicable in my life. This is how I feel about culture.

For Teddy, the entire campus was full of cultural knowledge and education to be explored. In the group interview, he talks excitedly about the importance of cultural education opportunities:

I think cultural education is the most important, critical thing in your four years of college because it gets you questioning your values and your beliefs and why do you think this way. It helps you to be reflective. I took

a lot of African American studies classes. I would go home and I would see guys on the street corner and talk to them like I didn't even know them but I do know who you are now. I'm serious. I would come home and all of my family was like okay what did you learn now about Black people? But I feel like if you educate yourself about situations you have more of a sense of pride in who you are and where you come from. For my parents its easy, but not me. I went back to my old high school and I was like you guys lied to us—I actually said it to my history teacher...it hit me more personal.

Arelis, a Latina junior, chimes in:

Yeah, I would agree in a sense cause I'm taking a Spanish class. And it's like higher end Spanish. And we read stories and poems from back in the day. And its just interesting because I'm just like, growing up I only learned about the history of America. I didn't learn my own history. It teaches me like you know Jose Martin and just different people that have changed Latin America and have influenced it tremendously. And because of them I'm able to be in the United States. It helps me to know what they've done to benefit my culture. And I guess it's kind of like they're my you know Martin Luther King, George Washington. So for me it's important.

For Teddy and Arelis, college education is about much more than advancement and transforming family status, it is about gaining a better understanding of themselves--- knowing themselves more intimately. Their comments speak to many of the points

mentioned in the literature—the K-12 educational deficit; the establishment of cultural efficacy; and the reflective educational space deemed necessary in the theory of actionable space. Throughout the Sandhills group interview, students also mentioned how college was helping them to learn and appreciate the “fundamentals” of their culture or how cultural programs on campus made them feel “comfortable” and “more at home.”

Tara, a Sandhills student, feels that being away from home at a college in a rural community has made her better appreciate her culture:

A contributing factor to developing knowledge of my culture is my college experience. I was raised in a predominantly black neighborhood, but I was not too familiar with my culture until I moved to Sandhills. I took my community for granted. Being in college made me come to the realization of my culture because I was conscious of it, but I was not aware of the significance. My surroundings have allowed me to open my eyes and sufficiently value my life. In college, classrooms are filled with majority white people. I am lucky to be a part of a class that might have 2 to 3 African Americans. Experiencing the feeling of being alone and being a part of “their” world just leaves you empty inside. College has not shaped my personality but more so it gave me a better understanding of my personality. My experiences at home have shaped my personality.

During the group interview at Sandhills, Tony also speaks about his new-found appreciation for his culture:

Before I came to college, I really didn’t think about my culture too much, because that’s all I kind of knew. But coming here has taught me to

appreciate where I'm from a lot more. Like I never really got to miss family or miss my community or miss my corner store or whatever...I got to just kind of appreciate the small things or the really big things coming here.

Student Expectations of Culture on Campus. The students' responses regarding their initial expectations of cultural life on campus coincided with the three sectors of the TCPM. Students expressed an expectation for opportunities to learn about their cultures and themselves, to gain greater education on social issues, and to have opportunities to fellowship among peers through cultural programs.

Additionally, some students communicated that they expected that college would provide them with opportunities to interact with other ethnicities, to connect with students that share their culture, and to be social [cultural engagement]. Kara commented that she expected that the campus "would provide some type of programming and being around people and various ethnicities." Students also communicated a desire for personal development experiences and opportunities to better understand themselves [cultural development]. One student at Sandhills commented:

"I was thinking personal development. That is something that should be experienced as far as culture in college because...we think that we know who we are—but we really don't."

Two other major areas stressed by students in relation to culture in college were having venues that provided a space/inclusive environment and having opportunities for community creation. Several students indicated that they expected to be provided a "cultural safe space," an "ethnic meeting place," or "help with cultural adjustment" to the

environment. And both groups of students stressed the importance of community. They felt that culture on campus was about bringing cultural clubs together and “creating a collaborative community” among students.

Student Perceptions of Culture on Campus. Generally, students thought that their colleges should intentionally create cultural programs and not just “expect for it to happen.” Their comments regarding the benefit of cultural learning opportunities in college underscores their expectation to have access to abundant cultural resources. When I shared with them the cluster of the three types of programs (cultural education, cultural development, and cultural engagement) they were adamant about the benefit of all three types of programs rather than seeing one or two as more important. They stressed the synergy of offering a mixture of all three types of programs to enhance the college experience. Students found cultural education programs to be particularly beneficial as they offer opportunities for “critical thinking,” build a sense of “self importance,” allow students to “better understand the community and family,” and fill the cultural education gap created in high school. The benefits of cultural engagement programs included providing students of color with social options (“something to do”), contributing to their level of “comfort” on campus, reminding them of home, providing opportunities to “better understand the meanings of their rituals and traditions,” “bringing together all types of people” across cultures to participate in cultural celebrations, and providing opportunities for them to “relate and interact with similar people.” Finally, cultural development programs were seen as beneficial because of their ability to influence how students see themselves, “build self esteem,” provide “deeper intellectual

interactions with teachers,” and offer opportunities for more reflection, dialogue and processing rather than “memorization.” And students overwhelmingly voiced the need for college to offer a means for them to help others in their home communities to better understand themselves and to become more culturally aware.

Finally, Isla’s experience posits college as one of the most important experiences of his life. Like Tara, college helped him to appreciate the cultural lessons learned from his family and similar to Teddy and Arelis, college helped him to better understand his cultural history. But for Isla, college also provided him the freedom to explore his whole self in a way that being immersed in his cultural environment had not previously allowed. It provided him with the personal freedom to pick and choose past values and lessons and merge them with new ideas and experiences to create his own life. For this reason, Isla’s snapshot frames this theme.

Snapshot of Isla

Isla titles his portrait with a question: “Who am I really? Looking through the mirror of my past, present and future.” I find this interesting. First, the question, which seems to imply that deeply exploring culture might provide him insight on who he “really” is. And next, the metaphor of the mirror—that perhaps by looking at his past, present and future he will see a reflection—a mirror image of himself as a total man. Isla is a Dominican student at Greystone University. He radiates a welcoming and almost loving demeanor. When I look at him, after years of working closely with college students, I interpret him to be the kind of student that likes to be hugged, who needs

caring interaction, and that wants to feel important to you. His portrait indeed confirms this, but it also reveals so much more.

Isla is the student who's father immigrated to the U.S. and disappeared from his life. So he shares much of the same life experiences as his peers—being raised in a single parent household, struggling economically; spending significant time with his grandparents because his mother was constantly working; and valuing the lessons of hard work and perseverance taught to him many years ago on the family farm in Santo Domingo. He states, “This was my first home.” This is an important statement because throughout his portrait, he talks about having experienced many different environments—there is a sense that he does not call any one place “home.”

My sister and I moved to the United States with my mother in the year 1996. We came here to start a new life and begin a new chapter in our family. My sister and I lived with our grandparents for three years [prior to that]. My mother was traveling around Venezuela, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. to give me and my sister better opportunities. Eventually she resigned and we migrated to the U.S. Living in New York City was very influential to me. It was a change of environment; coming from a farm to a big city where the electricity would run and never leave. It was great.

But for Isla the most cherished environment thus far has been in college. He talks about how he loves his country, but it is very conservative and extremely religious. Education was a different kind of freedom for him. In college, Isla found the support and freedom to come out as a gay man and as a strong and outgoing leader. In his portrait, he talks about appreciating the opportunity that college provided him to value all parts of

himself and be true to his identity. His experiences in college also pushed him to be more outgoing and outspoken. He found himself having a voice and using it within student organizations and through his involvements with the LGBT Student Center and the Cultural Center. College was a multi-dimensional and multi-cultural coming out process for him.

In my life I have been through different environments. I think that my most influential years have been college. During the last couple of years, I have come out, matured, and actually represented myself for who I really am.

These are things I never saw actually happening if I would have stayed in the Dominican Republic. College has been my favorite because I am on my own.

I get to challenge myself and I get to decide what qualities to accept as the real me.

For Isla, college as an educational space offered a place where he could put his cultural values to practice. He started college at 17 and says that at that time, he didn't know much about himself. He did not even have a strong sense of culture:

I didn't know what culture was...it took me a while for me to come this conclusion. This is why culture is important to me—it is part of every aspect of my life. My ethics and integrity were really “hardened” here. I think, as time progressed in college, I began to understand what my ethics were and how I derived them culturally. In a way I was only exposed to the Latino world with a small influence from the American culture. Living at college by myself and experiencing many different things on my own was very powerful because I was able to shape who I am and the ethics that I was taught.

Culture then represented a marriage of contemporary experiences, cultural education, and classical wisdom. Both his individual experiences in college and the familial lessons and experiences of the past helped to mold and shape him as a cultural being. As Isla states, “These experiences have made me who I am and I feel that they played a role in my personal development.” His sense of personal development (or what I deem cultural efficacy) revolves around possessing a clear understanding of and appreciation for his cultural values and ethics, using the skills taught to him to navigate difficult life situations, and valuing his true self.

My ethics revolve around my emotions. Whether I like to admit it or not I am a loving person. If it comes to making a hard decision, I reached down to my emotions and figure out if I could honestly make a mature judgment. But when I get a feeling that something is not right, I know I need to think about it and contemplate what it means for me and how it will affect me and others. That I got from him [grandfather]. My mother made me into the person that I am and I thank her for that. I learned this when I came out to my mother and she apologized to me...It will always be with me to see my mother tell me she was sorry for not accepting me and hurting me. To me it was profound to hear my family say ‘all we hope for our children is to become a good person and to not make the mistakes we have made in our life time.’

Isla is creating a new legacy in his family. He is traveling down new paths with education as his developmental vehicle. His mother and grandparents were farmers and domestic workers and so, he is the first in his family to attend college. College has and will probably continue to open wide many doors of intellectual opportunity, professional

opportunity, and cultural opportunity for his family in the years to come. He has challenged his family to show unconditional love in new ways through being true to his sexual identity. The independence experienced through education has helped him to step back and appreciate the image of his full self—to feel confident in living openly as a gay man. He is the first to do many things in his family thanks to school. The idea that college or education in general changes students in some ways was discussed earlier---their minds, their views of the world, their images of themselves, or their opinions of their communities. In Isla’s case, education brought about a welcomed change in his life and made concrete (or “hardened” as he put it) his cultural definition of himself.

Growing up, I was taught to always look at the past because there is a lesson there. But all [aspects] of my life---my culture *and* my college experiences--are incorporated in the definition of *this* me...really.

Culture as a Functional Cloak

As I walked through the student centers at both institutions, I saw what seemed like hundreds of flyers taped on walls, tacked on cork boards, or lying on the ground advertising cultural programs and events. As a cultural practitioner, I am always drawn to see what other practitioners are up to—what student organizations are planning and what the cultural centers have on the semester calendar. These flyers were overwhelmingly familiar—encouraging students to come out to a “cultural dinner;” attend an “international fair;” spend time listening to “ethnic music;” audition for the upcoming “fashion show;” or participate in the “gospel choir.” They were all there—the usual suspects of culture. I most definitely expected them to appear in my conversations with

students or in their cultural self portraits. I assumed that these factors are what most of us automatically think of when we hear the words “culture on campus.” And they indeed greeted me as I journeyed into the cultural lives of the students, but I found myself staring religion, music, and food in the face and not recognizing them. They were not the strong, overbearing figures that I assumed they would be within the students’ stories. Some students didn’t even mention them. This provided important insight on how students define culture and what they perceive it to be. Religion, music, and food were a quiet presence in the room, background figures that allowed other factors mentioned earlier to take the spotlight. For these students, these concepts were about much more than organized spirituality, entertainment, and a home cooked meal—they were about functionality.

The Usual Suspects: Religion

For many students, religion was an important part of their cultural experience, particularly their childhood. Several students were “raised in the church” and within families that saw the church as an important symbol of tradition, values, and ethics. Religion served for many as an ethical foundation to their culture. For some, like Terry, it was a cornerstone of childhood: “Growing up and being so involved in my religion played a major role in shaping my values.” For others like Stan, religion and spiritual practice came later in life, during college and helped them to navigate their own struggles as adults. I recall his statement in his self portrait, “In the end I just hold my faith as a priority, live life as righteous as possible and change minds along the way.” But overwhelmingly, when students described the role and importance of religion and church

in their lives, it took the shape of yet another tool to help them navigate life. Religious concepts were less often abstract issues of morality or organized rituals of spirituality and more often concrete venues for community safety and social relief. Kara explains it this way, “Church was the place to go because it was one of the few places blacks could feel safe.” Tara describes it as a form of relief and release, in her self portrait, “Church was the place to be when all hope was lost, but when you came to church you had faith that God will make a way.” Greta also discusses this in her self-portrait:

A significant component of my culture is God. In my household, on Sundays we are not allowed as a family to listen to nothing besides gospel. Gospel music is an inspiration...you can release all your troubles, worries, happiness and praises through gospel music.

In his self portrait, Keith shares how his family would regularly attend church meetings in their community and why these meetings were important as a community vehicle for change:

Prayer meetings was a time when anybody from the community could come and pray about anything that was on their mind and then they would discuss things they wanted to change in the community.

As I read these portraits, I was reminded of the student townhall meetings that regularly occur during turbulent times on campus and the weekly “Sankofa” community discussion meetings held by the Black Student Association on my campus. No longer attached to prayer or religious ideas, they still seem to be connected to the spirit of those prayer meetings as attempts to continue the tradition of the cultural community coming together to talk to one another about relevant community issues. In the Sandhills group

interview, Norris talks about church within the context of black history---that it was central to the process of building community. He states, “The church was the center of the community. It was the social center, it was the political center.”

These statements make me wonder how many students currently seek out church on or off campus for this purpose. When I pose the question, only one student says she regularly attends church. Others answer that church “isn’t a big part of my life anymore” or that it is “another superficial institution.” The “church” that they talk about as meaningful is the church with a community purpose, the church that is a place where everyone has a voice, the church where contemporary politics and social struggles can be strategized against. The actual “church” that they saw on or off campus was steeped in “conservatism” and “superficial rituals.” For many of them the new community center was the cultural center on campus. This is the place where they expected to “connect to the community”, “to gain assistance with adjustment,” to feel a sense of “safety”, to be “educated on community and cultural issues”, to “focus on certain problems in society,” or to receive “personal development.” It was becoming clearer that, to these students, the ideal of church was more of a symbol of a community center where the problems of the community could be discussed and the very best of the community could be celebrated. It functioned as a community resource.

For Terry, religion was also a means to an end in his life. To his mother, religion was the pathway for her child to receive a better education within a safe school environment:

She first got me baptized as a catholic at Saint Thomas Aquinas church and that is where I would begin schooling, at a private school where the

tuition was something she knew she could not afford. I am still not sure today if the only reason she had me baptized as a catholic is because catholic students' tuition was cheaper.

Terry brings back a memory in my own life. I think of my father whose family was so poor they could barely afford to eat, but who spent his entire K-12 education in a Catholic private school that allowed him and his siblings to attend on a “clean the school” system. As a young boy, he helped to clean the school each year in lieu of his tuition. But for his mother, the alternative options in the local schools necessitated her drive for them to receive a private school education by any means necessary. I think it's ironic, that despite that education, my father grew up to spend the vast majority of adulthood as a janitor. Perhaps the fact that Terry's mother bore the brunt of sacrifice and allowed him the privilege of just being a student without also having to pay his own way, made the difference for him. Or maybe the difference was the generation in which each man was raised. What Terry helps me to understand for sure is that for him, catholic school was literally a saving grace. Though he feels that it clearly shaped his values he doesn't talk about it bringing him closer to God or it making him a more religious man. Instead, he identifies it as the reason he is in college. Religion, like education, served as a positive institution through which family and community dreams could be realized.

The value for family closeness comes into the discussion again as students reflect on religion's role in their culture. For several students the most important religious ritual was the act of engaging it together as a family. As one student states, “Sunday was family day.” Sunday—a Christian holy day—is a time for family fellowship and reflection. Sunday is not only a time to set aside and give to God, it is also a day reserved

for familial engagement and connection after a hectic week. Gathering on Sunday is a family cultural tradition for Tara:

One of our traditions in my family is to get together on Sunday for food and to reflect on our week and some of our future plans. My grandparents have always been very religious. It taught me a sense of community.

The bond that is created with community and family through religion is an important cultural factor. A sense of culturally belonging to something, whether it be a family or a community, is made real through the regular engagement of religion. Religion convenes the community and calls together the family—even if it's just for one day.

Isla is a student who is both critical and appreciative of his religion. Though he spends time discussing the conservatism of his religion and its lack of embrace of his lifestyle, he still discusses religion and religious symbols as personally meaningful. These symbols are meaningful not because of what they represent within the religion but because of the special and personal meanings that they have for his family as symbols of their personal struggles:

The cross that I wear everyday is a symbol of my culture. This cross represents everything that my family taught me. It was given to my mother to give to me as soon as I came of age. This was a way my grandfather wanted me to remember all the struggles that my family has gone through for me to be here and make something of myself.

Again, similar to education, we see religion functioning as a tool to create change in the family legacy—to build a new future that will allow student to succeed beyond the

limits of the past. So religion not only holds special ethical meaning to students, but it also has a concrete function in their lives. It is a physical or theoretical space to rejuvenate and release, to come together as a community, to gain the determination to succeed, and to reconnect with family.

The Usual Suspects: Meals

As mentioned earlier, much of the family reunion activities experienced by the students are most often accompanied by some sort of meal—Sunday dinner, holiday meals, or neighborhood cookouts. These meals offer more than just “food for the soul” as Tara calls it. They also provide important opportunities to fellowship with family and close friends. She explains this in her self portrait:

Cooking became one of the most important traditions in my family because it was a symbol of love and togetherness. Even though the foods we prepare are not that expensive, it’s still our tradition. The types of food we eat are fried chicken, yams, collard greens, black eyed peas, turkey neck, ham hocks, cornbread, and macaroni and cheese. Whether it is after church, holidays, birthdays, births, funerals, there is always a well prepared meal.

Laura echoes this in her group interview:

Food is a big part, we do almost everything with food. It could be a funeral and we have food—family dinners. You know, rice and beans and curry and macaroni pie.

Other students shake their heads and someone comments, “Sharing food is actually a huge part with mine too.” Teddy shares that the central focus of his family’s meals is cementing the family bond and understanding one another:

Our dinners make sure our family stays connected. We eat traditional African food. I believe it is a sense of togetherness for my family, yes we come together to eat, but we also express our feelings and views on different subjects in our daily lives.

For Keith meals tie together family and religion:

On Thanksgiving, before we eat we get in a circle and thank God for at least one thing that he has done for you and then someone will say grace.

My grandmother would cook up a big meal and all of her kids would come with their kids. It was a time of fellowship.

These meals, like the cultural celebrations and rituals that they accompany, serve to bring the family together. The students stories seem to weave a cross pattern with every thread leading back to family. So again, we see the deeper meaning of a very traditional component of culture. Yes, these students confirm that whether it is soul food from the south, rice and beans in the Caribbean or South America, or traditional African cuisine, communities of color appreciate and find comfort in their indigenous forms of food. But, these meals function as a tool to bring the family together. The individual body may find sustenance in the plate, but each person, as a cultural being is fed by the fellowship. The comments cause me to consider those flyers posted on the walls of their campus. I wonder if the planners are paying as much attention to the fellowship piece as

they are to the menu because it is clear that students seek out connection, the meal is just a wonderful bonus.

The Usual Suspects: Music

Surprisingly, music was only mentioned as an important aspect of culture by a few students. For the few that did mention music, they saw it as a quintessential tool for communicating who they culturally are. “Every since I can remember, I can recall my parents singing in church choirs or in the car as we traveled,” Kara writes in her self-portrait. Hers was a family filled with singers and more specifically, professional singers. For her music is much more than simple entertainment, it represents a legacy of excellence and pride.

My grandmom and her three sisters all learned to sing and then traveled the city of Philadelphia to various churches playing piano and singing gospel songs which continued even into adulthood and throughout her career. My grandmother was responsible for forming the Philadelpia Compound Choraleers while working for the United States Navy as the Chief Equal Opportunity Officer. I admire my grandmother’s ability to not only pass this musical culture on to my family but that the members of who sang in the choir, when they were younger now have placed their children under her direction passing on the tradition.

Kara’s mother is a professionally trained violinist. Her sister is a music major in college. And she shares that everyone in her family can sing, including herself. Music and education were two items that she specifically named as factors that defined her

culture. According to Bre, music is important because it is a tool to express struggle and perseverance:

Hard times are often expressed in rap and R&B music. Some songs portray the negative and positives of our culture. These songs are sometimes facts and opinions. We use art to depict moods, struggle, reality, and detail.

For Bre, music and art aren't valuable simply for art's sake. Rather, they are critical communication vehicles. For Arelis music is a source of historical reflection:

Like when I hear some drum beats, it makes me think back to the influence. It kind of puts me in a place where I think of the influence of African music on the youth today and how it transcends from then until now. You can see how we still have some of this stuff. And the influence of that into Latin culture. Even though someone may be dancing to the rhythm differently, I can dance to it with meringue.

To Arelis, music in many ways is one of the true and honest reflections of the interconnectedness of our cultural histories. The original rhythms found deep in the music and her organic response through sway, tap, and dance tells the story of her historical and cultural ties to Europeans, Africans, and the Taino of Latin America. The drum calls to attention history, culture, race, and ethnicity. Through art, the best and the worst of the culture can be placed on a public table for discussion. The thread is again working and weaving this pattern connecting music and art back to elements mentioned earlier like struggle, history, and family legacy.

Snapshot of Kedrick

Kedrick is an incredibly friendly and outgoing young man. During the group interview he very quickly comes out as the “life of the party,” joking with almost everyone and generally bringing an overwhelmingly positive attitude into the space. Kedrick does in fact have much to be happy about. He is a star athlete at a university where football is a major tradition. His choice to attend Sandhills was heavily covered in his home town. Kedrick, like his girlfriend Tara, is from the Marland/DC area. And like Tara, Kedrick is an “outside of the beltway” student. Both of his parents went to college and his father played in the NFL. He is popular on campus and it seems rightfully so. Not only is he a well known athlete but he is also a very nice person. He smiles warmly each time we interact and is always respectful and courteous. He is the type of student that even makes the researcher feel comfortable enough to relax and let go of any anxiety and anticipation of student’s reactions. Kedrick helps us all to enjoy the experience.

In reading his portrait, it is very clear that his family has also played a major role in shaping his sense of culture. The first experience that Kedrick chooses to share is his being taught how to prepare soul food as a child and participating in Sunday dinners. He shares that Sunday dinner has been passed down from generation to generation and for his family, it is a time of reflection. Over Sunday dinner, his family discusses school, family, and of course sports. During these dinners his father’s past sports experiences are shared and his son’s future sports dreams are envisioned. Kedrick shares that the food represents a “sense of togetherness” and is a “gift from the women” in his family.

Our Sunday dinners come from the women in my family. To make sure our family stays connected. My mother, aunts, and my grandmother before she

passed away would prepare dinner together. My family concentrates on soul food such as greens, black eyed peas, yams, and cornbread, some of the best food I have ever tasted is right from the table on Sunday. Maybe the men in our family should start a tradition and cook for the women. Its really about all of coming together. We talk about sports, jobs, relationships and future goals. I find it helpful to talk to my family because they give me advice so I will not make bad decisions.

Kedrick clearly illustrates the broader importance of cultural dinners as an experience to connect family and a space in which issues can be reflected upon and talked about. In this statement it even seems that he recognizes the importance of balance and reciprocity to maintaining tradition—perhaps everyone in the family needs to get involved and play a part in creating tradition, not just the women.

Religion was also an important aspect of Kedrick’s life. His grandfather was a preacher and his family was heavily involved in the church—as choir members, ushers, and participating in daily worship. He recalls that his family would “pray every morning and night.” The ethical model that his family provided has impacted him deeply and he thinks, made him into a more thoughtful person. For him, prayer allows the mind to get clear and priorities to come into focus:

I thank God for allowing me to see another day. I am thankful for the ability to get through the struggles of the day and think about how I need to handle everything that I am facing. I am fortunate to still be able to breathe and have mobility and so I give thanks for that.

Again, religion as a functional tool reminds a student athlete that the gift of mobility is a privilege. Kedrick uses his religion to make sense of the world—to quiet himself and reflect on his life struggles and to sift through those struggles to identify his privileges. He also shares how gospel music serves as a stress reliever. He talks about how hearing Kirk Franklin’s voice automatically makes him feel “relieved from stress, happy, and expressive.” Music is yet another tool used to get through the day. Kedrick also shares another important musical legacy for him that is a symbol of his regional culture:

Culturally we developed a different type of expression of music called Go-Go. It is a continuous and complex heavy rhythm arrangement focused through congos, cowbells, and drums. Modern day bands use keyboards, horns, and snare drums to give it a different sound. We attend a lot of Go-Go concerts—it’s an expression of love. One common form of go-go dancing is called beating your feet. Another type is called battling. Teenagers and young adults usually battle each other through dance instead of fighting each other. It doesn’t stop crime but it is a step towards positive energy.

Kedrick devotes significant space to sharing the love he has for the cultural expressions that have shaped his local culture. There is a sense of pride in his roots within the Washington, DC area. This pride seems to be tied to his interpretation of the usefulness and positivity of even popular forms of local culture. Though he recognizes that not all forms of pop culture are positive, he speaks of the good in Go-Go music—the benefits that the community can reap from pouring their energy into artistic expression

rather than violence. Even clothing (as an extension of urban popular culture) was also mentioned. In local clothing stores where hip hop music often blasted, regional clothing lines with a meaning and a message are sold in DC.

My culture also supports local clothing lines in the metro area. The clothing lines were invented to show positive work. The clothes that we wear all have positive meaning for our community. For example a clothing line that I personally wear called HOB0, which means helping our brother out. When I wear HOB0 I feel like I am contributing to a constructive environment.

For Kedrick, both family culture and popular culture play important roles in positively impacting the community. Kedrick is one of two students that were raised by both parents, in a two parent household. And like Floyd he points directly to his father as a major influence in his life. The most salient aspect of his father's presence in his life is the intentionality in his father's approach to parenting. For his sports minded father, parenting was a well thought out field play of exposure, experience, and advice. Through the wisdom shared during family dinners, the cultural exposure and support of positive local popular culture, or consistent involvement in religious activities to provide release and encouragement, Kedrick's family approached culture as a functional tool to build a better future. Kedrick attaches to his self portrait a copy of a card that his father gave to him. As he hands me the paper, he makes a special point to show me the actual card and shares, "I wanted to include this with my portrait, but I can't give it to you. I keep it in my wallet at all times. My father gave it to me so I can't risk losing it. But I read it every morning and it really says everything about my culture." He and I walk to the copy

machine and make a copy for me to keep. As he walks away, placing his card carefully back in his wallet and patting his pocket as secures his wallet there, I begin to read the card:

God, my wife and my family mean more to me than gold!!!
Covington Family Guidance & Values

Life

1. Trust in and believe and believe that the Lord will make a way through your worship, trust, and obedience
2. Pray before each event and ask the lord to be with you before and after
3. Stay humble and respectful to everyone.
4. Never forget where you came from and always remember to give back to those who are less fortunate.
5. Be a leader through hard work and dedication
6. Maintain your family and religious values

Sports

1. Run, run, run and when you get tired run some more (stadium steps, track, hallways, and etc...)
2. Maintain a weight that you can easily move with
3. Drink water and make sure you have at least 10-12 cups a day
4. Stay confident that as long as you have put in the work and have god on your side you will be successful
5. Be determined to be the hardest worker with a positive outlook on each event you participate in.

We will always love you!!!...Mom and Dad

After reading this I think about all of my observations of Kedrick, his respectful manner, his positive attitude, his performance on the football team, and his peer's sincere belief that he will be in the NFL one day. I am so impressed by the type of man his family has raised him to be and when considering the potential model he could be to other younger black male athletes, I can not help but to think "Thank God."

Culture as a Personal Legacy

A legacy is something to both inherit and to will. The students in this study are undoubtedly benefactors of valuable components of culture. These components are personal and individual to the students—no one can define their culture but them. Their stories revealed that culture is most definitely a toolbox packed full of experience and skills, disappointments, life lessons, values and struggles. But the study also reveals strong agency towards creating cultural heritage and changing future cultural realities. Although the students clearly recognize missing pieces in their cultural cannon, they express a drive to replace these links through the futures and families that they will one day create. This future focused orientation represents their desire to will to their children an even greater cultural inheritance.

What Culture Means to Me

The four themes shared thus far are the emergent and persistent concepts that appeared throughout several self-portraits and group interview comments. They are my critical interpretation and view of the gallery of cultural portraits that I observed. These themes represent both direct comments made by students as well as the indirect inclusion of meaningful experiences and concepts that also suggest a level of importance. But what else did students say about their culture? When they were asked to give a definition, what other direct comments did they make? The one thing that all students were asked to ensure that they did in their cultural self portrait was provide a personal definition of culture. They were told to free-write this statement—to have the ideas come from their head and heart and not Wikipedia or any other tempting external resources. The goal was

to hear directly how they would define their culture if someone were to plainly ask, “What is your culture?” In this section, I share direct definitions of culture that either confirm much of what was shared earlier or fall outside of the parameters of the other themes, but still provide useful insight on how students perceive culture.

The overarching theme in these direct statements is that culture’s definition is particular to each person—it is personal and individual, intimate and internal to each person’s life experience. Students rejected the tendency for external agents to impose views or define their culture for them—culture for them is whatever they say it is. And they said that their culture is:

Kedrick: “Respecting our family, going to church, and receiving an education.”

Mike: “How you and your family view life, practice beliefs, and values.”

Tara: “Our language, communication, music, and art. The way we speak and communicate to each other positively forms a bond within our culture because only our culture can respond, appreciate, and understand the true meaning of the way we verbally communicate.”

Kara: The very essence in which my environment has produced the traditions of my family, the gifts and talents that embody my families traits and values. There are three distinct cultural traits that have shaped my life: music, strength, and education values.

Tony: Undefined. “I really don’t have a definition of culture. My culture is really around family and family values.”

Greta: “both part of and distinct from American culture. African Americans have contributed literature, art, agriculture, skills, food, clothing styles, music, and language. Black culture is the very essence of our survival as a people.”

Keith: “Historical milestones such as slavery, the civil rights movement, million man march, million woman march, etc.. These highlights serve as symbols to the struggle we continue to overcome.”

Floyd: “Tradition, honor, respect, hard work, and courage. They are virtues which we endeavor to hold true.”

These comments illustrate that many students had very concrete ideas about what formed their culture. Many of these comments reiterate the themes shared earlier. Culture is about family, religion, community, struggle, history, perseverance, art, and education. But these separate and direct answers to this question also illustrate how connected all of their definitions truly are. Whether in a firm or passive voice, through stories or poetry, for the most part these students are in harmony—they describe culture in much the same way across both institutions. Culture for them is not a distant abstract

or intensely anthropological concept. It is a warm memory, a personal treasure, an important story to tell. Bre offers insight in her self portrait:

I find it very interesting how some non-black people define black culture as only enriched religious spirituality or an urban experience. Although these presumptions are undeniably true about black culture, I believe each person defines and creates their own according to their family values, traditions, and experiences. My family in addition to my goals, the obstacles I have overcome, and the triumphant achievements I have attained overall molded me into who I am and what I have become.”

Floyd’s beliefs support her statement:

Culture is a word that cant really be defined as one thing. For me culture was more about knowing exactly who I am and understanding my beliefs and values and customs that have shaped the lives of my parents. It [culture} doesn’t necessarily reflect the most obvious things like the way you dress or things you eat. Rather, it’s a more complex process that deals with understanding and interpreting factors that have forced the generation before you to wise up.

Keith describes it as a personal process:

Culture is about coming to terms with who you are as an individual and embracing every aspect of it, whether it be through the food you eat, the way you dress, or simply by what you believe. My culture has developed through my experiences.

On the surface, it seems as if Keith and Floyd disagree. One student rejects food and clothes as cultural. The other sees culture as an act of coming to terms with these concepts. But when I examine their comments I am compelled to think that they actually agree. Both men agree on culture being about insight, understanding, and interpretation. For them it is not simply food, clothes, music and religion—it is the answer to the questions: Why these clothes? Why this music? What is the purpose of religion and music? These critical experiences that inform the process by which someone is shaped into a cultural being were most often interpreted as lessons—life lessons that students personally experienced or the lessons taught to them by their parents as a result of their lived experience. But this sharing of insight and wisdom, advice and information underscores the idea of cultural heritage—passing down legacy. It seems that this is what Keith means by culture being a process. It is an act of receiving a lesson, wrestling with its meaning, and then settling down to allow the insight to shape your values and actions. The importance of experiencing this process and maintaining cultural heritage was supported throughout every cultural self portrait in this study.

Laying Down a Legacy

Many of the values and ethics discussed earlier as critical components of culture were learned by students through a process of lesson sharing and story telling. Through either demonstrating the lesson through their real life experiences or verbalizing the lesson through sharing reflective conversations, the families in this story laid down legacies of survival and perseverance for their children and grandchildren to pick up and carry forward. Through the student snapshot and in the discussions of the four previous themes, I have shared an extensive amount of information on the actual lessons learned.

Now I want to spend time with the process of learning, the act of passing on cultural heritage. For many students this process or action is as much a marker of their culture as the lesson itself. For them, much cultural weight is placed on valuing the act of creating legacy—remembering, teaching, advising, and sharing. Laura sees it as a value inherited from somewhere deep in her cultural past:

From the beginning of time, my ancestors were adapting to the world around them. They did the best they could to survive in the time period in which they lived. Then they took what they learned and handed those teachings on to their children, and grandchildren.

Courtney also reflects on history and cultural legacy in her self portrait. Her comments support the statements made by Marable (cite), regarding his personal identification with history because of his cultural connection to his ancestors. Courtney shares:

My family's history has definitely shaped my identity. I am who I am today because of my ancestors and past history. Even though I was not a part of slavery, it has affected certain views and beliefs that my family has, therefore my beliefs are similar to theirs.

Families will to their children all of the lessons that they have learned from their past experiences. Through sharing survival tactics like “if you don’t have skills you will be living hand to mouth” or sharing motivational wisdom like “don’t depend on nobody—you know what you can do,” these students inherited cultural lessons that shaped their lives.

My culture has provided me with the essentials of life. Family is there to support you and bestow specific values inside of you. The backbone of our history can influence the knowledge of our mistakes.

As I read this statement it sounds familiar—that any loving parent or grandparent is merely a farmer planting seeds of cultural heritage to be harvested later in life as insight and wisdom. Many students’ stories echo this, but I distinctly recall Isla’s words whispering again to me:

I honestly did not know what he was talking about half the time. But looking back at all the things he would speak to me about makes me feel warm inside because all the things he said to me became a lesson I could use through my maturity.

Like Isla, Norris also recognizes his cultural inheritance—a bank of values that have molded his cultural identity:

My family has had a profound effect upon my sense of cultural identity. Values such as determination, work ethic, and persistence inherited by my ancestors and passed on to myself contributes to the very essence of my culture.

Floyd, in his typical insightful and critical fashion, takes a broader outlook on the importance of cultural heritage. To him, the ills of his generation are tied to their lack of connection to past generations. This disconnection has made them physically unable to receive their cultural legacies:

Often times there is a disconnect in the African American community where the current generations don’t have an accurate or healthy

knowledge about extended family members who came before them. We have a sense of why or what we are because of our history.

Floyd's comments reiterate the earlier discussion on keeping family bonds intact. Keeping the family together and talking is the most important act of legacy creation and personal understanding. His comment that you gain a sense of who you are because of history, demonstrates how powerful he sees history and heritage—without it you can not recognize your own image because you have no point of reference.

With pride, Laura shares how her immediate family is applauded within their larger family for the dedication they show towards teaching lessons and maintaining family bonds. Whether it is the simple act of learning how to show family members love and respect, her mother teaches the children the families cultural values:

The family always says my moms kids have so much respect. It is what we've seen and what we will teach our kids my nephews already are taught when you see g-mom hugs and kisses when they see me (auntie) hugs and kisses-it's a tradition.

The Importance of Cultural Heritage

Many students saw cultural heritage as an important tool for gaining greater personal understanding. They shared beliefs like, "Knowing about your culture helps you know who you are" and "Culture is very important to me because I believe you have to know where you come from to know where you are going in life." For Teddy, cultural knowledge was tied to feelings of self-worth (what I have considered as cultural efficacy):

Knowing where you are in life and more importantly where you come from can assist with gaining great qualities of worthiness. I absolutely love my culture so there is no doubt in my mind that culture is important.

For Tony, his loyalty to his overall culture is as strong as his loyalty to friends and family:

I'm not willing to change my culture for anybody. I'm not willing to compromise it for anyone.

Many students learned to value cultural heritage from the example of their families. Families not only passed on cultural lessons but also a value for wanting to learn these lessons. In the Gresytone interview, one student makes the following statement:

Growing up as a child my mother always told me how important it was for her to understand who she was without forgetting where she came from.

You gotta know where you came from to know where you're going.

Because of the emphasis placed on learning family history and values, many students talked about their desire to play an active role in carrying on their cultural heritage. As young adults, they were beginning to transition into becoming more intentional learners within their families. This transition seemed to be motivated by the goal of stepping into the role of teacher and leader in their families. Tara recognizes that her cultural development is an ongoing process. But she now listens intently, seeks out information more fervently, and heeds advice more willingly. She understands how inheriting cultural heritage is important not only for herself, but for the children she will eventually have:

On a personal level, I am still growing. I want to develop wisdom and an interest in preserving history. I hope to carry on my traditions, family values, and let my children form their own views on life.

Floyd, again sees his cultural agency as taking a broader, community focused approach. He sees himself passing on cultural heritage in an effort to change the realities of his community. Throughout his self portrait, Floyd rarely discusses major family problems. He saw his mother and father working as a team to raise him. His family generally experienced the normal struggles of any family and was still generally in tact. So, his focus even for passing on heritage was directed more towards plugging up the cultural holes of his broader cultural community:

It is my hope that I will one day be in a position to further dispel the negative notions by reaching back into my cultural community which I came from and to pass on cultural lessons and provide an alternative future for those who come after me.

Floyd was the student that gave the three extreme examples of life choices in his community: college, the penitentiary, or the mortuary. For him, cultural heritage can be used to saves lives and changes futures. And for Laura, it is just about continuing what is good in her family and maintaining continuity. She remarks with a “matter of fact” tone: “Hey, I may take over thanksgiving dinner sooner or later, my brother may take Christmas from Aunt E. that’s what its about—its about to be our turn.”

For Bre, cultural heritage is much more serious. She is a young woman who has spent much of her life struggling with identity and a sense of belonging within the black community. A small woman, with a very light complexion, her color has played a major

role in her feelings of racial isolation. But her culture and the heritage that her family has passed on to her has also played a major role in putting her back together, making her feel whole. As she reflects on her history in her self portrait, she can now speak with a firm and eloquent voice rooted in her culture:

My black history is my heritage, a saga that has molded me into the person I am today and will guide me wherever I go tomorrow. I am history. I am heritage.

The Identity Wars: Race vs. Cultures

The literature reviewed in preparation to engage this study warned of the complicated and often contentious relationship between culture, race, and ethnicity. They are distinct yet similar; separate but still broadly tied. As issues of race and ethnicity surfaced in group conversations and within cultural self portraits, I found it interesting how the various stories and beliefs that were shared helped to distinguish between these concepts. Students never directly discussed the differences they saw in simple things like how the terms are defined. Instead they shared critical experiences that offered a more complex understanding of the feelings and emotions attached to ethnic, racial, and cultural experiences. By examining these feelings and emotions, it becomes very clear how students distinguish between these three concepts.

Racial issues were most often presented as very negative. From examples of psychologically damaging racial experiences to examples of family members being in physical danger due to racial prejudice, race was yet another struggle to overcome. For

some, racial lessons came from their families past. Keith shares the stories told to him by his grandfather:

My grandfather told me there were times when some white person would try and fight one of his siblings and all of his brothers and sisters would be there for one another. His dad, my great grandfather, got shot and killed when he was young. He got shot for fighting a white man who hit one of his daughters.

As a young child, Keith learned of the physical danger that race often presents. He shares how he was warned to be careful in the world, particularly when interacting across racial lines—to his family careful negotiation of race was literally a matter of life or death. His story, like many of his peers in this study, illustrate how negative issues of race often made culture even more important. In his example, when facing racial threat, the cultural bond of family offered protection by “being there for one another.” This was also the case for Greta’s mother. Greta shares: “For my mother growing up in a society that was racially divided between blacks and whites forced her [my mother] to embrace her African American culture even more.” Again, culture seems to appear as a foundation and support to help their family members counter negative racial experiences.

But parents and grandparents were not the only ones with racial struggles to share. Many students had experienced their share of racial encounters within and beyond their families. Norris tells the story of how racial issues, specifically colorism, broke into the cultural comforts of his home and family, causing his own grandmother to treat her children and grandchildren differently because of race. Colorism is the engagement of intra-racial prejudices based on skin color. Historically, the preference for lighter skin,

due to its close proximity to white skin, has plagued many populations of people of color—Latino, African, African American, West Indian, and Indian communities have all contended with various forms of internalized racial hatred influenced by social beliefs that darker skin is negative and less desirable. Norris’s story is a perfect example:

We will begin with the interracial discrimination, as a child. I always noticed how my great grandmother Dorothy, a very dark ebony woman always put an emphasis on skin tone. To her, I was her “little light-skinned baby” and my cousin Teesh was always referred to as her “little dark chocolate baby,” Years after her death, I have become even closer with my Grandma Betty discovering that we have a lot of similar experiences. After talking with Grandma Betty, she revealed to me the dark side of Grandma Dorothy. Grandma Betty was one of two girls born to Grandma Dorothy was “jilted” by her boyfriend after she got pregnant. After Grandma Betty was born, Grandma Dorothy finally got married and everything seemed perfect, except the fact that everyone in the household was darker complexion and Grandma Betty was a “red bone” with sandy red hair. Grandma Dorothy was always the butt of jokes from her friends, who said that Grandma Betty was the milkman or insurance man’s baby. (At that time most of those jobs were held by white men). Aggravated and annoyed, Grandma Dorothy took her racial issues out on Grandma Betty. “Reds” as Grandma Betty was often called because of her skin color was abused physically and mentally by Grandma Dorothy. From old fashioned beatings to washing her hair with coffee grounds to make it more dark, in

addition to sitting outside in 90 degrees plus days to seal in a darker tone—these were just some of the things my Grandma Betty had to endure in her youth. As I child I was even teased because my cousins felt that Grandma Betty showed me favoritism because I was lighter. Before I learned black and white, I learned light skinned and dark skinned.

As Norris points out, through his family he learned that racist beliefs can be internalized and engaged even within home. As he says, sometimes it's "Black on Black." His story prompts me to remember a past conversation with another group of students that I had many years ago. I collaborated with the television show, 20/20 to do a segment on colorism and it featured a group interview of African American students leaders with whom I worked at my university. All of these students told similar stories of prejudiced behavior and hurtful comments expressed by friends and family members. Darker students shared how they were made to feel ugly and inferior and often prayed to be lighter as children and lighter students shared how they experienced extreme privilege or hatred from their own racial communities. These experiences often left all, whether dark or light, feeling shamed. To those students and to Norris it seems clear that race and colorism were also a part of those negative environmental influences that stunts the healthy growth of loving and affirming cultural bonds.

Greta directly names race as a persisting and negative social construct. Race is clearly seen as a label created by society. It is a construct imposed upon them (by a racist society) but not created by them as was culture and ethnicity. Most of the comments dealt with race as racism as opposed to race as an identity:

Unfortunately race has always carried a negative connotation with it within the context of my American society. And as sure as the wind blows, faithfully continues to do so today.

For Greta, Norris, and several other students in this study, race is what *others* feel that they look like. Culture and ethnicity actually identify who they are. Race is seen through a social lens, culture and ethnicity a personal one. Race divides, ethnicity distinguishes, and culture re-members.

Students do spend time discussing ethnicity and how it distinguishes them and ties them back to a homestead. They discuss being West Indian and African American and they talk about the learning that takes place as they merge multiple ethnicities in college. Arelis shares how she began to truly appreciate ethnicity when she started dating her Dominican boyfriend. Their broader cultural ties serve as a starting point for them to share their specific ethnic differences:

I'm you know Colombian and he's like Dominican. There's some things that like even just food or how he prepares foods that are different. It makes you really aware of regions in Latin America. We share the same holidays but we may take a different twist to it. So to me like, I'm learning and sharing a lot because we can still relate so its easy to share.

Tara also provides an example of culture as a unifier and ethnicity as a distinguisher:

When I got here I was like, okay me and Kat we're a part of a culture. Cause you know we share similar values and our families—they struggled. So we identified with each other. But Kat's Caribbean and then I have

friends who are African American in the sense that they're from Africa and they immigrated here. And then there's me who has been here, my family has been here for generations. So I consider myself a part of this culture of people with some of the same experiences but when you get to the heart of it, we have some practices that are completely different and its cool.

Terry thinks that culturally there are a lot more similarities than differences. For him ethnicity is about minor deviations in practices but beliefs about "differences" are really influenced by stereotypes and racism:

I'm an African American. Growing up all my mom's friends are West Indian. And it's like all of my friends are West Indian. And my girlfriend is Haitian and we have conversations all the time about the differences between African American and West Indians. But when you get down to the real nitty gritty there really isn't a cultural difference. My family is full of strong hard working people. When I say if they got to scrub a toilet they going to scrub a toilet to provide for their family. And I get really offended when I hear West Indians talk about they are different from African Americans-that we're lazy. Cause its really them believing racist stereotypes. They believe African Americans are lazy. What makes that different from a white American that stereotypes? It's really race and racism. You know what I mean? Unless you live with me and you completely understand my culture you can't stereotype us. I'm not

allowed to disrespect my grandmother. I was raised in the church just like them. Everything we learned is the same—culturally.

Courtney chimes in:

Yeah, I mean the real differences are just in like our music, our food, the way its cooked, the spices, the language—you know patwa as opposed to how African Americans might say “grill” and that means face. Its just little differences that are special.

Though race was clearly identified as a negative social struggle, there were many more examples of *negative cultural realities* named--from parental abandonment to economic struggle to general social oppression—yet, these experiences were still seen as important and defining moments. Unlike race, culture, even when possessing negative aspects, was seen as an uplifting, character building experience. Cultural struggle taught valuable lessons and served almost as a rite of passage, giving students their own cultural stories of struggle and perseverance to tell.

Many of the students who shared the pain of growing up without a father acknowledged this reality as unfortunate but still voiced an appreciation for the life lessons taught through these experiences. The following statement by Courtney was shared earlier:

His absence taught me how to appreciate the things around me and not dwell on what I don't have. He taught me to expect the unexpected. I never thought that after meeting me he would leave again, but he did and I still survived.

For Terry, his pain was transformed into motivation to be a better man than the examples shown to him in his life:

Growing up, I realized how it felt to be an adolescent with no father so I vowed to myself that I would never do to a woman what was done to my mother or even make a child grow up fatherless.

Stan stated this earlier in his self portrait as he shared how his life challenges have made him a better person:

My life's disappointments have only made me want to be a better person and more conscious of spirituality, more conscious of others morals and intentions, and more conscious of societal and community needs.

Then you have those who feel their means of life is to be pessimistic and hateful. All of the factors contribute to my personality. Whether it is positive or negative, it shapes my culture. Sure my family is not perfect, that is why they guide me in the right direction. Learning from their mistakes benefits me because I have them in my life to lead while I follow their footsteps.

Kara also supports this sense of reconciliation with the mistakes of the past:

Some [of my family] are strong and others are weak but I am reminded to never be ashamed of where I come from no matter what the hardships, failures, and even triumphs may remain.

And Norris considers the idea of a cultural self portrait to be *rooted* in telling the story of cultural struggle. These stories are a source of pride:

To me a cultural self portrait is representative of the personal struggles and victories that we go through in life. It represents not only my life but the life experiences of my ancestors who came before me.

Culture, as an important part of these students lives was easily forgiven when it fell short. Its imperfections made it even more easy to love and appreciate. It seems that this may be due to how deeply they saw culture as tied to themselves. Culture was how they were raised, it was their family, their values, and their personal priorities. So even when it involved struggle and stress, to disown it was to disown themselves. So instead, they accepted it. Comments like, “I accept my life’s flaws now. They paid off” and “The let downs, the moves, the addictions, the streets, the independence, the self determination to not be like them that continues to grow stronger, the untold, and the effort to do better by striving in school,” illustrate how cultural struggle was seen as defining, motivating, and beneficial.

For Bre, culture was legitimizing-- it took her hand and welcomed her into her race. It let her know that she belonged, not because of how she looked but because of who she was:

My family, my grandfather reminded me to not let anyone tell me I wasn’t black or black enough. Its my culture—I don’t doubt if I belong anymore.

Snapshot of Breanna

Breanna, better known as Bre, is a 19 year old African American young woman from East Orange, NJ. In her self portrait she states “I am Breanna Miller born July 7th, 1988 in East Orange, NJ to my mother and grandparents of African American descent with black heritage so powerful and inspiring that it changed the world.” This reveals a

lot about this young woman. She is another student who belongs to her mother and grandparents. She is another student whose life story is filled with economic struggle and extended family support. And she like, many of her peers, expresses a deep appreciation for her heritage. But for Bre, this has been a long and difficult road to inheriting her cultural legacy. She describes her history as a “saga” that has molded and shaped her. She views each day as history in the making and the history that she inherits and creates is shaped by her culture. “I am history,” she declares. “It is my responsibility to carry on this history and my beautiful culture.” Throughout her self authored narrative, Bre claims culture—she calls it her own: “I reflect on the firm and true beliefs I hold about *my culture*,” “It is the very essence of our survival;” “I believe each person alone defines and creates her culture according to family, values, traditions, and experiences.” To Bre, culture is personal, meaningful, and all her own. She learned this through her own struggles with identity.

“Mom am I really Black?” Bre shares that she often asked her mother this question as a child, not understanding what “black” meant. Reflecting on her childhood, she describes herself as a “skinny, light-skinned girl” that was surrounded by all shades of color at her black Catholic school. As a child, her entire understanding of black identity revolved around “the shade of your skin and your physical appearance as a whole.” She shares how everything she learned about African Americans was associated with blackness—“first black everything (scientist, athletes, etc.) in the way that they appeared they looked very different from me. Brown skin and black hair were just some of the features that seemed to be the typical look for black people which caused me to feel unordinary. Mom, am I really black?”

Throughout her childhood, her peers confirmed Bre's uncertainty. She was called horrible names in school like "light-bright" and "so-white" which she says made her feel awkward and alone. It was her family and their firm dedication to having her understand her cultural heritage that turned things around for her. She is one of the students who states, "You have to know where you came from to know where you can go." Indeed, understanding that her place in her culture and race was about where she came from, not what she looked like, was an important lesson to inherit. It helped her to understand her cultural legacy.

I had no idea there was so much more to being black and proud than the cover. The real definition of culture is family. Family is an important symbol. Family played an extensive role in helping me cope with my insecurities. As I grew older maturing into an adolescent they encouraged me to always hold my head up and be proud of who I am. Constantly enlightening me that being different made me special even within the family as the one with the lightest skin. Reminding me to not let anyone tell me I wasn't black or black enough. I thank my Pop-Pop for this.

Her "Pop-Pop" shared with her stories—important stories of family history and family survival that taught her critical lessons. One of these lessons was that her black family struggled and shared the same history as other black families. Her history was her admission ticket to confidently enter her cultural community.

He serves as one of my greatest inspirations. He was born in the country. And by country I mean endless fields, hills on the prairie, silent streams, clear bright skies, and tractors country—Accomack, Virginia. He was

born during the start of the civil rights movement and during a time of midwives and gigantic families. He picked vegetables in the field. He always worked hard. He is the epitome of a revolutionary to me. My mom has struggled too. Although I didn't live the extreme hardships and adversities as my family did, I still know struggles... Culture has become a crucial sphere of influence in my life, it has taught me to cherish the beliefs, values, and customs that have been bestowed upon me. It has also taught me that there is no reason why I should walk around holding my head down; I have too much pride, dignity, and respect to do otherwise. My family history and legacy is something that I hold very dear.

Her family's history and experiences and her own sense of struggle legitimizes her as a cultural group member. If culture is about struggle and perseverance then Bre feels she has earned her place. Bre also knows something about cultural forgiveness. Though she speaks about her past racial experiences with pain and anger, she offers a much more forgiving tone for the shame of family disappointments and failure (associated with culture). On the same page that she talks about family being a major symbol of her culture and how important culture is to her she also states that her family is dysfunctional.

My family is the epitome of dysfunctional. I don't even know where to begin. The domestic problems became our way of life. Anger and resentment was common. Family gatherings were rare and the holidays were solemn sometimes. But whether it gives me a sense of pride or

shame, my culture is my history and my family which has shaped my life and me as a person.

She was the student that spoke about her mother having been the first to gain an opportunity to experience “the good life,” but she didn’t take advantage of it. She shares that her mother made bad decisions which led to their economic struggles and dependence on her grandparents. She acknowledges that her father abandoning them before she was born also contributed to this. She goes onto share her past judgments of her mother and her desire at one point to be nothing like her:

People often say that every one of your ancestors is part of you spiritually, mentally, and physically. I didn’t believe it, however as I began to grow I soon realized the theory to be true. Surprisingly, we possess some of the same qualities, both virtuous and ghastly. Discovering this phenomenon petrified me to the point where I obsessively tried to change myself in a desperate attempt to be a different person. I loved my grandmother and mother but some aspects were appalling. I used to think I lived a hard unfair life, but I began to realize how fortunate I actually was. I am living and learning. I believe that until you encounter failure, real success is an absent achievement. “What doesn’t kill you makes you stronger.”

Whether it is acknowledging the dysfunctional behavior of family, and by extension parts of her culture, or naming the negative mindsets of some family members, Bre admits and forgives the shortcomings of culture and family. Again, I see the cultural structures coming in to play as important. Family engagement and togetherness,” and “love, support, and affirmation,” are critical markers of a positive cultural experience.

When they aren't present, as in Breanna's case, life is judged as dysfunctional. But once again, culture makes students whole. Bre's story is a story of coming full circle—settling into her cultural place in society and appreciating her family. Amazingly, after sharing all of that about her mother, she is one of the students that include the Maya Angelou poem, Phenomenal Woman, in her portrait as a tribute to her mother. As an adult, she can now see with more clarity and greater focus her mother's struggles and forgive her shortcomings. And she expresses her desire to now assume the role of changing her family's legacy:

It is my destiny to be a phenomenal woman for my ancestors who have achieved this status and better yet for those who have not. Whether my calling is to be a doctor or a writer, my goal is to make a true difference in this world by making it a better place than I found it. The Miller name will never bear shame despite past, present, and future failures, and misfortunes. It is my legacy, my heritage, it is who I am, My general black history classifies me as black; however, my individual experiences and traditions defines me as African American. My black history is extraordinary, but my African American inherited culture is PHENOMENAL!!

Chapter Summary

The findings presented in this chapter provide a more clear image of how students of color view their culture. The five emergent themes served as a snapshot of the factors and experiences that students saw as critical to their cultural life. Through deep reflection on their family, community, and college experiences within their self authored

cultural portraits, students articulated a complex and comprehensive approach to defining culture. They discussed the values, experiences, rituals, traditions, and institutions that influenced their cultural development. The participants offered great insight into the complicated nature in which issues of race, ethnicity, and culture are negotiated. The personal and individual nature of culture was also highlighted in the chapter. This revealed a tendency for students to seek to define culture in their own way and through their own words. For many of the students, culture was not shaped by broad standards or driven by social ideals. Instead, culture was birthed in the home and raised up in their own hearts and minds. Finally, students discussed their sense of agency and responsibility to continue to grow their knowledge of their cultures and to maintain their cultural heritage within their families and on their campuses. The idea of cultural legacy was highlighted by almost all of the participants, underscoring the value of offering college students opportunities for critical cultural reflection on their lives as was provided through the cultural self portraits. Cultural heritage and cultural legacy was most often tied to the act of story telling or story sharing among family and community members. The way in which students aligned heritage with learning lessons and hearing stories from their parents, supported the validity of the study and its use of reflective self-narratives. The study allowed students to tell their own stories of cultural pride, values, and struggles. In the next chapter, I summarize the overall study and present the full portrait of culture as a discussion of the findings and implications of this study.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, & IMPLICATIONS

Summary

The goal of this study was to determine how college students of color conceptualize and define culture. The study focused on identifying the critical concepts that students use to articulate and describe their culture as well as understanding how they made meaning of these factors. Cultural practice in college has been a highly supported ideal throughout the field of higher education. However, the complicated nature of negotiating campus structure with cultural authenticity while appealing to retention efforts, classical academic notions of what is cultural, and contemporary student interests, makes creating cultural programs and environments on college campuses difficult. By examining culture through the lens of those who experience it, this study establishes a new basis for understanding what culture may need to look like on campus and how it needs to be approached in order for it to appeal to today's college student of color.

The literature review in Chapter Two provided important background on several of the issues that factor into cultural practice in a college environment. A broad interdisciplinary discussion of the various perspectives on culture and cultural heritage including definitions, frameworks, and ideologies derived from years of research illustrated the complexity of identifying one standard or approach to cultural practice. A brief overview of the interconnectedness and differences between race, ethnicity, and culture helped to provide a distinguishable identity of culture and a frame for how it would serve as the focus of this study. The major issues impacting issues of diversity within higher education practice spoke to the hard task faced by many higher education professionals to create cultural programs that not only speak to cultural engagement but

also retention, achievement, and inclusiveness. Probably the most critical information revealed in the literature required a return to the very beginning—how and why centers of culture came to exist on campus. This took the discussion outside of campus and back to the home communities of students of color where they learned from historical models in their neighborhoods the value of constructing venues for cultural engagement and cultural connectedness. The “story” of the emergence of Black Cultural Centers on university campuses in the 1960’s served as the first snapshot, or example to frame this idea.

Despite the rich information offered from existing literature, gaps continue to persist in the study of cultural practice. Within the field of higher education, much of the campus climate, retention, and diversity research have focused on how cultural resources help students to feel that they are a part of campus, how these programs impact retention, and how they contribute to the multicultural development of white college students. Within other disciplines like anthropology and sociology, culture is focused solely outside of campus and within “indigenous” communities or in the context of broad social issues within neighborhoods and communities. Very little has been done to link the two—to understand what culture becomes in the minds of young people of color as they move from their home communities to the college community.

This study shifts the focus in several ways. First, the study focuses on culture for culture’s sake. Students were not asked about how cultural resources impact their retention in college or perceptions of the university. Even when discussing culture in college, students were directed to focus on personal dimensions of importance (how students think that they personally develop from participation, why students feel cultural

programs are meaningful to them) as opposed to institutional benefits (how students use cultural resources to adjust to college or why these programs are needed to change the campus climate). Second, the study focuses on these personal development issues with students of color specifically. It seemed that there was a tendency in the diversity research for students of color to be studied to understand issues of institutional inclusiveness and institutional retention while white students were often studied to understand institutional inclusiveness and personal development. The persisting question for me was, “How else do students of color benefit from culture besides staying in school, getting involved, and feeling safe?” The study also situates culture both on and off campus. “Culture” is broadly approached from a blank slate that allowed student to determine where to situate it and how to articulate it. Allowing a flexible approach to context--culture in life rather than culture in college--provided a much more realistic image of culture. The benefits of cultural heritage are displayed across environments, academic and familial, and the expectations of cultural learning span across institutional inclusiveness to holistic personal development.

A phenomenological study was used to gain insight into the essence of culture. Portraiture framed the methodology with the goal of the study being to paint a picture of what culture looks like to a small group of college students of color. The primary research question focused on how students of color conceptualize their culture. Additionally, the study was concerned with why, if at all, culture is important to students of color? Eighteen students of color at two different universities (nine students at each university) participated in the study. Each group participated in a group interview and wrote cultural self-portraits as a follow up to the interview. These students were

provided six weeks after the interview to complete their portraits which allowed for deep and reflective responses as well as opportunities to engage family, reminisce through family photo albums, and personally reflect on their experiences. Students voluntarily participated in this study. They were recruited through two cultural leadership programs at each university. Ten students participate in each of the programs, however, one student was absent at one institution on the day of the group interview and there was one white student in the program at the other institution. To make the groups equal one student (white student) was allowed to participate in the study but neither her self-portrait nor her interview comments were used in data analysis.

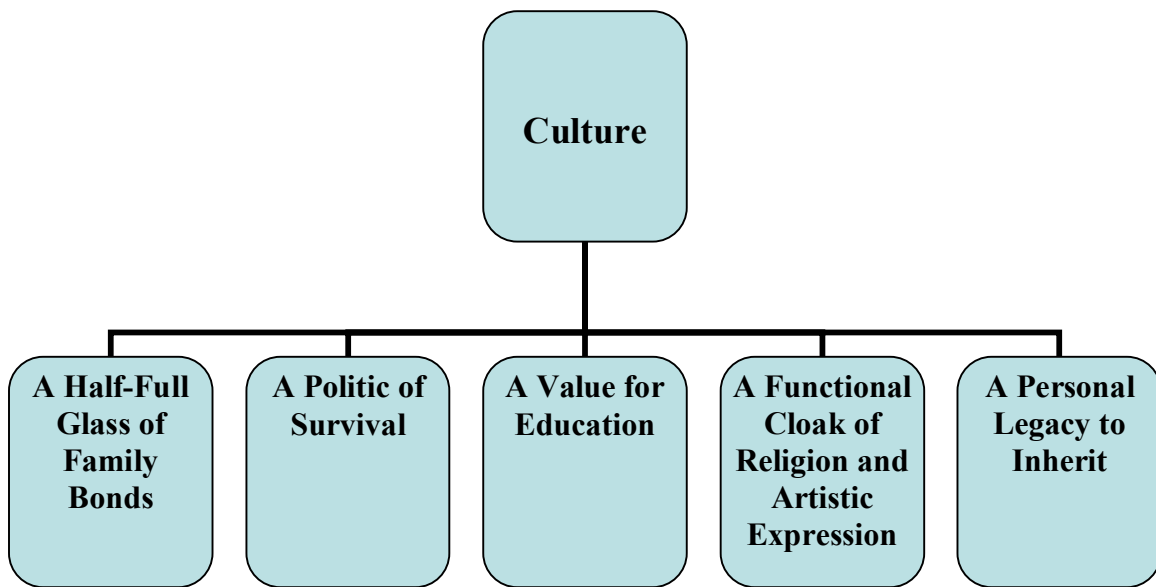
During the group interview, the Tri-Sector Cultural Practitioner's Model was used to organize the types of college cultural experiences for students to reflect on whether or not they found them to be important or necessary. These types of cultural opportunities included: Cultural Education, Cultural Engagement, and Cultural Development. The interviews also broadly touched on definitions of culture and allowed for an opportunity for students to discuss their cultural histories and experiences both on and off campus. The interview transcripts were analyzed to reveal emerging themes as well as indications of cultural self efficacy through mentions of concepts, feelings, and experiences that might indicate aspects of the actionable space personal development theory.

The cultural self portraits were driven by the research on the value of cultural storytelling and the methodology of portraiture. These two concepts were combined to provide a personal space in which students could share their self authored stories of culture. These stories were then analyzed to identify emergent themes, cross analyzed to identify similarities and differences, and then compared against interview transcripts to

compare themes and identify indications of actionable space. A data analysis matrix developed during a pilot study was used to help organize and identify embodied, reflective, dialogue, and actionable space language in all of the data (transcripts and portraits).

Five themes emerged from the data. These themes were discussed in detail within Chapter 4. These themes are below illustrated in Figure 4. The five themes revealed that students saw culture as a concept shaped by family bonds, social survival, educational values, the functionality found in religion and art, and heritage building. The cross analysis revealed strong similarities in both the concepts used by students to discuss and define culture as well as the level of importance of cultural engagement and cultural heritage. Whether college life was situated in a rural or urban setting did not emerge as a significant influence on students' perceptions of their cultural experience. What this study did reveal is that this generation views culture as a broad and complex concept and they view things like tradition and ritual through a very different lens. The rituals revealed in the study were less ceremonial and more functional. Cultural engagement was less about celebration, music, décor, and dance and more concerned with fellowship and building a sense of familial legacy. Through these students' lives, culture was revealed to be as much about the bad times and the difficult struggles as it was about the good times and the proud heritage. And overwhelmingly, culture was inextricably bound to education. When it came to education, students felt that their culture valued it, strived for it, and paved avenues for them to participate in it.

Figure 4 The Architecture of Culture



Implications and Conclusions

The perceptions of culture shared in this study offer important insight for cultural practitioners in any field that work with college age students. It provides a new way to view and approach culture that both intersects with and moves away from traditional notions of culture. The study confirms Swidler's (1986) definition of culture as a toolkit of skills, experiences, values, and traditions that help people to navigate their world. Culture was indeed a practical tool for many of these students-it did not just help them to enjoy life, it helped them to survive and understand it.

This study also answers some of the challenges found in the literature to conduct more research that focuses on the development and cultural experience of students of color. More research of this nature will help to establish a better and more intimate understanding of how students of color benefit, use, and perceive culture. But this study

provides some initial understanding of what seems to be a paradigm shift in this generation's view of cultural engagement from ceremony, ritual, celebration, and lecture to practical, personal, functional, and interactive. Therefore, to effectively provide cultural engagement or education opportunities that will interest students, practitioners should begin to mold programs from the model offered up by the students themselves. This is relevant for any field of study that examines culture. For the humanities, this study can motivate increased research on the experiences found within each of the five themes mentioned. This might include further research on how culture is used as a politic of survival within communities of color or how cultural arts is seen as a functional social tool of expression and a reflection of the community as opposed to simple entertainment. Within the field of education, the study might motivate an increased focus on providing a deeper understanding of culture to future educators prior to them assuming roles as faculty or administrators. This is particularly salient for those that will work in multicultural affairs, student affairs, or university cultural centers. These practitioners should in many ways be cultural experts, familiar with traditional and contemporary ideas about culture. This study offers some insight for these practitioners. Because these professionals most often create cultural initiatives and programs for college students, the insight on how these students define their culture and why they appreciate it can be used in developing new campus programs.

The study switched the traditional focus of assessment away from asking students if cultural resources were needed on campus. The literature illustrated that this question has been thoroughly answered-undoubtedly students want cultural resources on campus. Instead students were asked *what* is culture and why is it important. By better

understanding how students picture culture, practitioners might be able to more adequately duplicate this picture on their campuses through resources and programs. When examining the websites of several university cultural centers, the usual suspects mentioned in the study were found: lectures, brown bags, dance and drumming troupe performances. The information provided in this study might offer a new vision for cultural programming and motivate practitioners to paint outside of the traditional lines of cultural practice in the academe.

Another meaningful outcome of this study is its role in legitimizing the concentration on culture in regards to personal growth. As mentioned earlier, despite the wealth of literature available on college retention and achievement the question still remained, “How else do students of color benefit from culture besides staying in school, getting involved, and feeling safe?” This study provided answers to this question by illustrating that students perceive broad personal and life-long benefits of cultural engagement and learning. For them, the benefits of culture did in fact, spread across and beyond the institution. Culture helped them to adjust and to identify peer communities and support systems. But it also helped them to navigate life in their home communities, to face all of life’s challenges on and off campus, and to better understand themselves. The ways in which students defined their culture underscore, Yosso’s (2005) cultural capital framework and the idea that students of color enter college with valuable forms of inheritance that often goes unacknowledged by the institution.

The study also illustrates the deep importance of culture to students of color. Students stressed the need for cultural programs on campus and the desire to continue their cultural legacy within their family. Culture was important enough for them to expect

it in school and create it at home. They saw it as important because it provided the foundation for them to understand and appreciate themselves, their communities, and their families. To love their culture was to love themselves. This supports, from a different perspective, the research on the importance of cultural diversity within higher education. In addition to the role that cultural resources play in helping to warm chilly campus climates and providing students of color with healthy adjustment and inclusion opportunities; these resources also impact students' perceptions of themselves. Cultural education, development, and engagement are important tools to build cultural efficacy among students of color. The study illustrates that, through cultural experiences, not only are students' impressions of the institution made stronger but also their opinions of themselves and their families is made stronger and is better appreciated. This study confirms that for students of color, as Gates (1995) mentioned, culture is a major force that "holds them up" in the world.

The study also supports the viability of portraiture as a methodology. Portraiture allowed for the intimate re-telling of the creative, personal, and revealing stories that were shared during the data collection. It illustrated the personal nature of the study-the closeness of both the topic and the subjects to the researcher as a result of the research process. Portraiture allowed an opportunity for the researcher to interact within her own embodied, reflective, dialogue, and actionable space. The use of portraiture revealed the value for any educator to engage this process of story sharing as a means to better serve and understand students. The process includes the practitioner honestly sharing her own story, ideas, and perceptions of culture prior to student interaction (embodied space); Reflecting and reacting to students stories through personal notes (reflection and dialogue

space); and taking action on the new visions of culture derived from these student interactions.

For the qualitative researcher, this study illustrates the value added to research when combining two approaches that compliment one another in very creative ways. The well established structure of phenomenology offered a valuable foundation to support and integrate the more non-traditional method of portraiture. For any researcher, the decision to combine these two methods would depend on their personal interests, goals, and style. This study reveals that phenomenology and portraiture are twin spirits within qualitative research-one twin a little formal, the other twin a little artsy. However, they are familiar and are derived from the same foundation. Therefore, they work well together.

Based on the findings of this study six critical conclusions and implications were made:

1. *The most valuable and culturally affirming spaces are the ones in which students can truthfully tell their stories and make sense of their experiences.* This underscores the actionable space framework and the need to create intentional spaces for reflection, dialogue, and action to take place. What students in this study said about the three types of cultural programs in the Tri-Sector Cultural Practitioner's Model and how they reacted to the incorporation of the various actionable spaces into the study itself, suggested that these two frameworks can be valuable models to use simultaneously in practice. The three types of programs (cultural education, cultural engagement, and cultural development) might serve as the broad umbrella that frames how programs might be organized and developed within a cultural department. For example, a department might choose to offer three programs under each sector. Then *within* each

sector, the shape and structure of each program might be guided by the goal to provide either embodied, reflective, and dialogue spaces. These two frameworks can serve as tools to help practitioners bring the idea of intentionality to practice.

2. *Family is the most central component of anything cultural and must be included more in the college experience.* The intended audience of campus programs must be expanded to provide a more open campus-one that occasionally invites the family and community to join the conversation. Also, the topics of cultural programs should focus more on the real family issues experienced by students.
3. *Students have a strong sense of dedication to education. They see education as an inherit part of their culture.* This offers insight for practitioners and encourages a shift in the focus of student interactions. Practitioners should keep in mind that, for some students, interactions should take the approach of confirming rather than convincing them of their educational inheritance. Not all students of color doubt their place in higher education.
4. *Cultural Legacy is important to students of color.* The more practitioners can help them to feel comfortable, knowledgeable, and experienced enough to assume cultural leadership in their families and communities, practitioners may be able to contribute to greater cultural efficacy and allow students to depart college with a sense of having gained beneficial and useful cultural skills. Additionally, the institution has a responsibility to create a sense of cultural community and cultural legacy on campus. Students expect the same levels of hard work, dedication, and unconditional love from their campus community as they receive from their home communities in order

for college to truly feel like “A Home Away from Home.” In this regard, culture was seen as a tool for both institutional adjustment and personal development.

5. *Culture, Race, and Ethnicity were viewed as different concepts to the students in this study-each making a unique impact on the students’ lives.* More opportunities should be offered for students to discuss these topics as separate entities. Opportunities for students to wrestle with some of the negative aspects of these issues such as colorism, ethnic prejudice within Diaspora communities, and cultural struggle may also be important.
6. *Practitioners must begin to reshape the structure and approach to cultural programming and initiatives so that these experiences reflect how today’s college students interpret culture.* The ability to understand how culture must look on campus, may require more pre-program assessment or review of research like this study, to better understand what culture looks through the eyes of students. In other words, the structure of programs needs to be transformed from dualistic campus lectures and passive entertainment performances to participatory learning and engaging fellowship opportunities. To the students in this study, culture was a practical kit of tools that they could use to help them navigate real life issues. Therefore, cultural program topics must be transformed to strategically address pressing cultural issues in students’ lives such as understanding the cause of family struggle; coming to terms with parental failure, answering the question “Do I Culturally Belong?”; exploring the expectations of contemporary pop culture; examining the function of religion in the every day lives of students; celebrating mothers; and offering opportunities to share stories of survival (through story sharing,

dialogue circles, or the arts). Traditional practices should not be discarded-heritage is important. Instead, the parameters of cultural programs can be expanded to include new forms of practice.

Similar to the structure of the emergent themes, a portrait of culture is shared below in a personally narrated voice as a final conclusion to this study. This portrait brings together all of the themes and offers more discussion on the practical implications of my analysis.

A Portrait of Culture

Painting a portrait of culture is similar to painting a portrait of home. The home that I found myself observing was not a large and flashy suburban home it was rather a small and modest dwelling. It was the type of house that upon first glance, you know that it has some stories to tell—it has known years of laughs and cries; triumphs and tribulation. The simple image in the picture brings your imagination to life. In an instant you envision its small rooms overflowing and crowded with family during the holidays. But this house has also known quiet and lonely days. It needs paint. A shingle needs repair. The doorbell doesn't work. It is not perfect. Yet, despite all of its imperfections, the door is always open. The interior is always comforting. The residents are too busy cleaning and cooking, birthing and raising to fix all of the external problems. However, the thought is always there—one day I'm going to fix this place up. One day I will find the time, energy, and creativity to renovate and design the cultural home of my dreams.

The eighteen students that welcomed me into their cultural home as a visitor were like any household residents. They walked through the house with comfort and modest pride and gave the tour as if it were second nature—this is my house, this is my culture. Expressed through their attitudes was the thought, “Of course this is what it looks like.” But for me, I stood examining the picture that they painted of their culture and saw a unique and intriguing structure. I looked at it but I also stood *in* it. And I must admit that while looking at the portrait of their culture I saw my own. I was indeed looking at a picture of home.

The Exterior

Like a home, culture seemed to be built with an exterior to shield and protect from harm, an interior to cultivate life; and a foundation to help it to remain and stand for generations. The exterior was molded with what I called a politic of survival. These were survival tactics and strategies that were shaped by experiencing years of personal storms. When oppression rained down on the family, the walls of survival and perseverance kept the family going. This ability to withstand the hardships of life was seen as a critical component of culture to the students in the study. Years of struggle chipped the wood and so culture was not seen as perfect. It included issues of failure, abandonment, and poverty. But the students revealed that a house doesn't have to be pretty to still feel like home. In fact, many thought that these imperfections gave their culture its character. Each chip or missing piece was linked to a story of survival, triumph, or struggle. Like communities that survive a natural disaster, the students enjoyed the opportunity to come out of the house, observe the damage, and tell their

storm stories. Because of the protective walls provided by culture they survived, they lived, and they appreciated the vitality of the house they call culture. I interpreted this as an important revelation that more opportunities for students to tell their own stories of culture in their own words and from their own perspectives should be provided within educational environments. Students may become more culturally aware and centered if they are provided opportunities to share the beauty of their culture with their peers and to develop a sense of community from hearing the similarities in their stories. One of the insights revealed in this study is that the contemporary student of color is not alone in how she conceptualizes culture. Across two institutions that were housed in very different geographic locations students articulated culture in similar ways.

As a practitioner, I do not view providing such student centered cultural story sharing opportunities as the simple act of allowing students and student organizations to plan programs as a means of empowering student voice. In practice, practitioners should instead mold and establish complex, safe, and creative institutionally created spaces for personal reflection and story sharing among students. As noted in the Tri-Sector Model, the practitioner is central to the process of creating cultural space and as referenced in the cultural diversity literature, institutional action and involvement plays a significant role in equalizing cultural capital on campus.

Students' portrait of their cultural home also revealed the deep impact of some of the dilapidated areas. From economic struggle, racial challenges, and parental abandonment students named and pointed out the ugly and rough patches without shame. The willingness among students to share very personal and hard life stories also struck me as salient. Students of color are ready to talk through their own encounters with

racism, oppression, and family failure in safe and personally therapeutic spaces. The reflective and dialogue space provided through the self portraits were created for the sole purpose of helping the researcher better understand the student and the student better understand herself.

During the interviews many students shared the frustrations of being encouraged to participate in class discussions on race and culture for the benefit of teaching white students or representing the race. Different from that experience, the self portraits were centered on establishing a more clear sense of one's cultural self. Students reflected for themselves. They spoke and engaged in dialogue to come to know themselves better than they had before—to see themselves more clearly. Providing space centered in the cultural growth of students of color and offering opportunities for them to make sense of their experiences provided meaningful information to the study and can offer important implications for cultural practice.

One important implication is the need to provide critical spaces to sort out issues regarding their parental experiences. College can be an important space to tackle the culture of manhood. For both men and women, we need to do more to dispel myths about the shortcomings of men of color. The vast majority of students in this study, men and women, did not have a constant in-house father figure from which to develop a healthy and realistic perception of manhood. Therefore, educational environments should establish new views of cultural education as providing opportunities to expose young people, particularly African American students to positive male figures to balance their cultural lives. The focus on manhood in fields like education and sociology might need to be expanded beyond the research about the number of men that are in prison,

unemployed, or on drugs and the social structures that create these struggles to also include directly addressing the impact of their imprisonment, oppression, and drug addiction on the college age children that they leave behind. University practitioners might also create more opportunities to discuss this issue or provide more cultural programs that intentionally provide opportunities for students of color to develop relationships with men of color. This educational space must also include opportunities for students to sound in on their personal experiences and to reflect the information learned about this issue through the mirror of their own lives.

The Interior

Undoubtedly, the cultural education discussion must start with the world the student knows. This world is strongly tied to family bonds. Inside the cultural house, students rest on the comforting cushions of mommy's, mama's, and mom-moms. They come to understand how to navigate the outside world through the religious and artistic values taught inside the home. And it is in the home that they develop their first understanding of the importance of education. The strong impact and importance of families to students of color reveals that the university should do more to include families of color in the educational life of students. Greater inclusion might help to dispel the myth of the college experience among family members and also help them to feel more able to give support.

Additionally, greater involvement of parents in college life might help to communicate a value for the overall role that families play in student lives. These students revealed their parents and grandparents to be more than family—they were also

teachers. Colleges might also benefit from looking at parents in a different light. This might include inviting family members to facilitate workshops, serve as panelists, and lecture on campus. Or it may mean veering off the beaten path of traditional academic programming (lectures, brown bags) and creating safe non-traditional and culturally affirming family/community events like family dinners, community storytelling circles, or sponsoring cultural “family vacations” by inviting families to attend cultural learning excursions and trips. Whatever the shape this educational space might take, if we want to make our campus communities more cultural we must find creative ways to include rather than exclude families.

What the students in this study point out is the need to have their real home communities understand and support their college experience. As I reflected on this issue, I thought it almost shameful that many of the students that I come to know very personally as a practitioner, who I talk to daily, who I regularly invite to my home for group dinners, who I love like members of my own family—I don’t even know their mother’s name. This woman who clearly has been one of the most central figures in getting these students to college is disconnected from the experience for the vast majority of her child’s college career. I reflected on how diligently my colleagues work to get students to stop going home as often, to stop calling home, and to become completely immersed in their new campus community. College adjustment is undoubtedly important. However, could we possibly need to change our views of what healthy adjustment looks like? Could students possibly establish a “both home and campus” experience rather than being forced to adopt the “either family or college” philosophy? It seems that finding ways to merge these two worlds may help students to culturally

transition into and out of college. For it is home where students most often immediately find themselves a few days after commencement and it is with their families that they will experience the rest of their lives.

Religion and art took the shape of the family room. Students want to see and understand these concepts as functional spaces of involvement. To them, these are not living areas to be admired but never touched or spaces that are so formal that they serve no real daily function in the home. This implied that participation in religious and cultural arts events should not be automatically assumed for students of color. In order to appeal to students, these programs should communicate their usefulness—the function that they will play in student’s lives. This function may be to provide opportunities for fellowship, personal development or to pass on tactics of survival. But program communication and structure must go beyond interest and focus on function.

Education as a space in the cultural home can be found in the kitchen. It is the life food that parents work hard to afford. It is the space where everyone belongs. They might belong there because they can smell the aroma from several rooms away and come to the kitchen to claim their plate. They belong because they have a history of good cooks in their family so they feel at home in the kitchen. Or they may come to sit in the kitchen because they are aware that their mother has worked hard to prepare the meal and they respectfully take their place at the table. (Whatever, the reason everyone hangs out in the kitchen). What I took away from how students discussed education was that they do not doubt if they belong in college—so why do we constantly focus on convincing them of their place? Too often, our services originate from the intent of making students of color feel that they belong and they have a right to be there. Perhaps we need to

refocus the lens and begin to affirm what they already know—they belong there because they have a proud heritage of commitment to education, because their families worked hard for them to get there, or because they are the dream of their ancestor. Again, approaching service from a point of abundant reasons why college is their rightful inheritance as opposed to a deficit focus that centers on everything working against them may be helpful. This does not mean that practitioners should ignore educational obstacles in their practice. What I am suggesting is that in our conversations and interactions with students and in the focus of some of our programs, we balance the bad with the good and make students of color feel about their campus as they do their culture: “This is my home, this is my culture.”

The Neighborhood

Understanding the value of community and extended networks to students of color is critical to establishing better educational practice. Students do value the sense of being surrounded by love rather than having to seek it out. In general, students in this study valued feeling a sense of togetherness within any community—the school, neighborhood, or family. Opportunities for fellowship provided the means to engage the act of togetherness and to demonstrate closeness. When researching university cultural centers, I found several statements about these centers being a “home away from home” or the staff feeling like “family” to the students (Patton, 2006). Cultural spaces on campus that can genuinely establish these ideals seem to be most appreciated by students. Similarly cultural programs that provide opportunities for fellowship—for the community to connect—were also greatly valued. This supports previous research on the necessity to

establish a critical mass within the student population, to recruit faculty of color, and to support physical spaces that provide a venue for such fellowship. Undoubtedly, those efforts are needed to retain students but this study illustrates that these efforts also help students to have a culturally meaningful college experience. Through the interactions with peers and faculty/staff of color, students' do not merely stay but rather they continue their cultural journey.

The Foundation: Cultural Efficacy

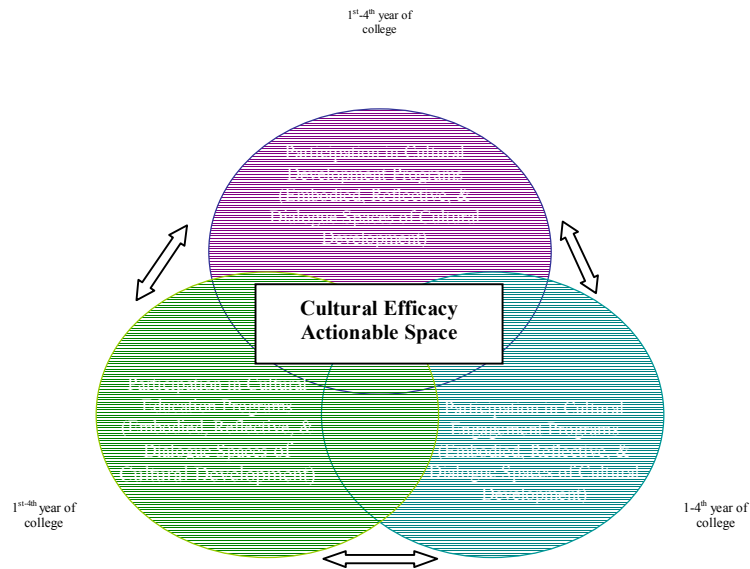
Many students wrote directly in their portraits how much they appreciated the opportunity to reflect on and discuss their culture. The space established through the study allowed them to more clearly shape their own story and position themselves to assume the role of cultural storyteller. Their comments suggested a need to incorporate more opportunities for cultural research, reflection, and story sharing among college students of color as a form of cultural engagement. They also underscored the viability of establishing intentional cultural spaces for students to interact within embodied, reflective, dialogue, and actionable spaces of learning.

The actionable space theory emphasizes providing spaces for students to understand who they are (embodied space), to reflect on their experiences (reflective space), and to discuss these reflections (dialogue space). These three spaces then create a process by which students are more willing to take intentional action in a phenomenon, in this case culture (actionable space). In this study, I provided these spaces through the interviews and self portraits. But, these spaces can also be provided through cultural programs and resources in practice.

Students specifically talked about how “valuable this opportunity” was to think about their family and their past in helping them to better understand and appreciate their culture. Many students pointed out that they weren’t sure what the real definition of culture was but to them culture was about things like family, education, and struggle and they preferred seeing culture in that way. Like an artist, as they described their culture, they took a step back, looked at it, and liked what they saw. Many expressed a deep desire, motivated by the process of reflection and dialogue, to play an active role in helping to maintain their cultural heritage. These statements that ended fifteen of the eighteen self portraits expressed a desire to pass it on, to keep it going, and to embrace the fact that “its my turn.” I consider these statements to be evidence of actionable space and cultural efficacy—a desire to take action in laying down new legacies or to play a role in maintaining the legacies that they have inherited.

In this regard, cultural efficacy can be viewed as an ongoing process void of stages. Students might reflect and dialogue at the same time. And their sense of embodied space might morph and change as they experience new things like college. They may enter college with one sense of embodied space and exit with another. But what is important to note, is that students don’t move through embodied space—they are always shaping their sense of self. It is through the opportunities for reflection and dialogue made possible through cultural programs that their embodied and actionable space grows and develops. This is illustrated in Figure 4 below. Practitioners viewing cultural programs as creative “spaces” for learning, reflection, and dialogue is very important.

Figure 5 The Cultural Efficacy Process



What I most value in this creative use of the word space is that it allows for space to be both physical and philosophical. Therefore, these creative and actionable spaces might include actual structures such as university cultural centers where a sense of community fellowship can be developed or the space may take the shape of a co-curricular cultural program that allows students to discuss and share their cultural experiences. Spaces may be large scale events that alert students to the extended family that is present on campus (cultural engagement) or they may be small group discussions that provide intimate opportunities for dialogue (cultural development). Educational spaces might teach the complex, historic, and social issues that influence culture, while also including the close and personal experiences of students (cultural education). Space, like culture can take any shape and reside anywhere—in the classroom, within faculty/staff/student interactions, among student peer groups, within student life

departments, the list is endless and the opportunities plentiful. Any area of campus is an opportunity to create cultural space. And any professional can help lay the foundation to create this space within their area of campus.

The contemporary college student of color fits into what Swidler (1986) describes as a “settled” cultural life. In settled lives, culture is often hidden by habit and normality. It seems often hard to see the cultural engagement of college students. Their cultural habits, skills, and styles may have become imperceptible even to them and difficult for them to articulate. According to Swidler (1986) in settled periods, “ideology has both diversified, by being adapted to varied life circumstances, and gone underground, so pervading ordinary experiences as to blend imperceptibly” into everyday life (p. 3). Students of color in this study articulated their culture as unique and different, but were initially hesitant to articulate what their culture was. As students of our society, they were plagued by internal pressure to recite a definition. Instead, I encouraged them to sketch a unique vision—to paint their own picture. When they met this challenge, the picture that they painted was abstract, difficult even for them to transition from theory to practice. Students voiced a need for cultural resources on campus but were not be able to point to a specific cultural ritual, tradition, or practice that they expected of the university. This seems to be the professional challenge of cultural practitioners—to be able to interpret the portraits that students paint of their culture into viable programs and resources that will both interest students and help them to develop. The charge of the cultural practitioner is to bring this imperceptible image of culture into focus and to ensure that the beauty of the portrait is not overwhelmed by the shadows of the normality of daily life.

Students revealed that culture was most often about the process of negotiating the past and present, oppression and ambition, race and ethnicity, ritual and purpose, discretion and disclosure. The full image of culture was revealed when family or community members were brave and bold enough to tell the true cultural story. Culture was about honest revelation – experiences that completely reveal true selves with all of the positive attributes and negative shortcomings. The cultural experience being one that allows family members to be themselves was a critical piece of learning for me. Whether it was stories of mothers crying at the kitchen table, parents managing money poorly, or parental drug addiction, these stories illustrated that regardless of your shortcomings and in spite of your mistakes culture is a space in which you can still be loved. This may indeed define what a “cultural environment” is for students of color. It may be less of institutional public statements and presentations on the college’s commitment to culture. Creating a cultural environment may instead be about doing the hard work and taking the difficult action of unconditionally loving students, supporting students, and providing resources and spaces where they can be themselves without judgment or being made to feel that they are asking for too much. In this regard, students are not the only ones whose actions reveal their commitment to culture. For this group in my study, experience, parents, and ancestors have taught them that there is no such thing as working too hard, giving too much, or exhausting all resources when it comes to creating a cultural legacy. This can apply in their home and on their campus. Perhaps that is why they expect so much of us.

Epilogue

Cultural Legacy

Toby S. Jenkins

*We need some inspiration...some fire...
We need a spark or revelation to ignite our desire
To do more, to be more, to want more for our families...
To understand what it means to lay down our legacies
To cultivate and grow, to sculpt and to mold...Skills in another soul
That helps them to go farther...to be the constant gardener...
of their values and ideologies
To help them to navigate the geography of their destiny
To help them determine what direction to travel...How to steer on dirt road or on gravel
That's sometimes filled with glass and rocks...
To understand that sometimes life might frighten and shock
you...but...There's a sign up ahead...
A familial compass that has led
You to this point, so don't disappoint them by missing the point of why you were put here
They taught you to drive—open eyes—no fear...Because of them you can now steer
your life forward. So just wait...that spirit will tell you what exit to take
That memory will help you to know when to brake...
Your ancestor's hopes and dreams are at stake
We are their garden--The rose that they grew through hardened soil...
The flower that they nurtured and toiled for
They taught us how to garden and now its time to put on the gloves and grow more
and be more and do more for my family
To give them that cultural medicine for their racial pain
That loving acceptance to counter the social disdain
That empathetic knowledge of their struggles and stress
That inherited history that I won't let them forget...
I need--- to plant the seed ---of a love ethic so strong...
That later generations and after several duplications
Of my genes...the spirit that I originally put in it... lives on
I want to pass down values and leave clues for distant nephews that are confused
About what to do...with their life
I want to put together the pieces of the puzzle of life for my nieces
And give them skills and confidence that increases
Their opportunities in life...
That demands them to make the most of their life..
That commands their attention to take their life seriously...I just want them to succeed me
I don't want to go the extra mile ...
I want to go so far I wind up in exile trying to love my child
Because that child is my heaven...
My infinite life support...My grandchild will be my resurrection
They will forever allow my soul to give insight and wisdom
I'm not searching for the fantasy...my family is my kingdom*

*I'm not trying to pursue selfish goals...trying to reserve an afterlife place for my soul
I need to value my time on earth...
Because death is only a motivation to appreciate life's worth
My family's actions are the only judgment on my soul
And if they can do right because of some wisdom I told...if they can grow old
Being guided by the cultural values that I sewed
Onto the fabric of my family's foundation
Then let that be my motivation to lay —down —a legacy...*

To *all* of the elders whose spirits were named in this study, I say thank you for laying down a legacy-the cultural foundation from which all of these stories were told.

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Appendix A

Important Terms

There are several terms that will be used throughout the discussion of this research that are important to define in order to provide an understanding of the context in which they are being used within this study.

Cultural Efficacy	The term combines the definition of efficacy [power or capacity] with the concept of culture. Cultural efficacy is considered to be a demonstrated level of cultural capacity or agency [feelings of power within one's culture; positive feelings about one's culture; strong understanding of the components, values, and structures of one's culture; confidence in one's culture to contribute to the world].
Multicultural	Of or relating to a social or educational theory that encourages interest in many cultures within a society rather than in only a mainstream culture.
Intercultural	Of, relating to, involving, or representing different cultures
Intra-cultural	Of, relating to, involving, or representing the various components within one culture
African Diaspora:	The term Diaspora derives from the Jewish "Diaspora" or communities living outside either the present-day state of Israel or the ancient biblical kingdom of Israel. The African Diaspora refers to African descendants that were scattered throughout the world and who are currently living outside of Africa.
West Indies/Indian	An archipelago between southeast North America and northern South America, separating the Caribbean Sea from the Atlantic Ocean and including the Greater Antilles, the Lesser Antilles, and the Bahamas Islands. The original inhabitants were the Taino

Indians called Caribs and Arawaks by Europeans to denote either peaceful assimilation (Caribs) or their resistance (Arawaks). Several of the islands were sighted and explored by Columbus during his voyages of 1492-1504. The first permanent European settlement was made by the Spanish on Hispaniola in 1496. During the colonial period the English, French, and Dutch also laid claim to various islands, and the United States acquired Puerto Rico and part of the Virgin Islands in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The term West Indian refers to descendants of Africans that were enslaved and transported to the land masses of the West Indies or the descendants of East Indian indentured laborers.

Caribbean: Of or relating to the Caribbean Sea, its islands, or its Central or South American coasts or to the peoples or cultures of this region. Thus the term Caribbean, refers to descendants of Africans that were transported to the landmasses of the Caribbean.

North America The landmasses and islands of North America. Thus the term African American refers to descendants of Africans that were transported to these particular landmasses of the Northern Americas.

Latino (a) The term "Latino" refers loosely to any person having Hispanic or Latin American background and is often taken to be a synonym with "Hispanic". However, while official use of the term Hispanic has its origins in the Census Bureau in the 1970s, activists like MEChA, Crusade for Justice, Brown Berets, Black Berets, and the Young Lords often preferred the term Latino because they felt it is more inclusive of the broad range of peoples in Latin America.

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form for Social Science Research

The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: Understanding How College Students of Color Define and Make
Meaning of their Culture

Principal Investigator: Toby Jenkins, Graduate Student
015 Hub-Robeson Ctr
University Park, PA 16802
(814) 865-5646 tsj3@sa.psu.edu

Advisor: **Dr. Dana Mitra**
302D Rackley Building
University Park, PA 16802
(814) 863 7020 dln54@psu.edu

1. **Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this research study is to explore how campus constituents perceive three dimensions of cultural learning within co-curricular university offerings [cultural education, cultural engagement, cultural development). Also of interest is how the practical outcomes of these types of experiences impact cultural growth among students.
2. **Procedures to be followed:** You will participate in a focus group. This focus group will be comprised of undergraduate students of color. As a follow up to the focus group experience, you will also write a narrative reflection on your culture [Cultural Self Portrait].
3. **Benefits:** You might learn more about yourself by participating in this study. You might have a better understanding of how important culture is to you. You might realize that you share similar values ad beliefs about culture and learning with others.

This research might provide a better understanding of how to provide adequate cultural co-curricular experiences on college campuses.

4. **Duration:** The focus group session will be 60-90 minutes.
5. **Statement of Confidentiality:** Your participation in this research is confidential. Only the person in charge, and his/her assistants, will know your identity. The data will be stored and secured at the Paul Robeson Cultural Center. In the event of a publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personally identifiable information will be shared.

6. **Right to Ask Questions:** You can ask questions about this research. Contact Toby Jenkins at (814) 865-5646 with questions. You can also call this number if you have complaints or concerns about this research. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or you have concerns or general questions about the research, contact Penn State University's Office for Research Protections at (814) 865-1775. You may also call this number if you cannot reach the research team or wish to talk to someone else.
7. **Voluntary Participation:** Your decision to be in this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. Refusal to take part in or withdrawing from this study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits you would receive otherwise.
8. **Statement of Confidentiality:** By participating in the focus group, you agree to keep all participant identities and responses to questions confidential. You agree not to share or discuss the responses of others after the session with others outside of the focus group. If you speak about the contents of the focus group outside of the group, it is expected that you will not tell others what individuals participants said.
9. **Statement of Recording:** This group interview will be recorded and all voice files will be kept in a locked cabinet in the director's office of the Paul Robeson Cultural Center. Toby Jenkins, the director of the Paul Robeson Cultural Center and the advisor for this study will be only the persons with access to the recordings. The tapes will be destroyed two years from the date of this interview.

You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study. If you agree to take part in this research study and the information outlined above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

You will be given a copy of this signed and dated consent for your records.

Participant Signature

Date

Person Obtaining Consent

Date

Appendix C

Interview Protocol

Describe your culture to me. If someone were to come up to you and ask, “What is your culture?” How would you respond?”

Is culture important to you? Why or why not?

How if at all, do you engage culture while you are at school? If you do, why do you engage in cultural programs on campus?

What was your understanding of and feelings about your culture prior to college? Has it changed at all? If so how?

I am passing around descriptions of three types of programs. I will first read the descriptions aloud. Please refer to them as I ask the next set of questions:

How important is cultural engagement (performances, social programs) to your college experience? Why is it important to you? How if at all do you grow from such experiences?

How important is cultural education (lectures, workshops, academic experiences focused on culture) to your college experience? Why is it important to you? How if at all do you grow from such experiences?

How important is cultural development (leadership programs, gender based programs, career programs) to your college experience? Why is it important to you? How if at all do you grow from such experiences?

Appendix D

Cultural Self Portrait Instruction Form

Cultural Self Portrait

The portrait should tell the cultural story of who you are. This story should paint a picture of what you consider your culture to be. Please ensure that you answer the question: What is your culture? How do you define it? The portrait should also include a reflection on what ideals have shaped your culture and any meaningful cultural experiences in your life. You can incorporate creative forms of expression into the narrative if you like.

Consider the following questions as you write (answer all five in the paper):

1. Is culture important to you? Why or why not?
2. How do you define your culture?
3. Share your cultural story: How did you become who you culturally are? What experiences have made you develop a sense of your culture and shaped your personality?
4. What affect has your experience in college had on how you view your culture?
5. Is cultural engagement important to you while you are in college? Why or why not? How have you engaged your culture in college?

Appendix E

Recruitment Email

My name is Toby Jenkins and I am a doctoral candidate in the College of Education. I am conducting a research study that focuses on college students of color and campus cultural programs. You have been identified as a participant in the cultural leadership institute. The director of the institute has agreed to allow the group to participate in this study. However, individual participation is voluntary. I am writing to invite you to confirm your willingness to participate in this study.

As part of the study, I would like to interview you for approximately 90 minutes to discuss your thoughts and opinions of your culture and cultural experiences while in college. Your participation in the study, will assist in developing an understanding of how cultural experiences impact students of color. Approximately 20 students across two universities will participate in this study.

As a participant, you will participate in a group interview in the cultural center. You will receive a free meal during the interview. Any information that is obtained through the study will be kept confidential. You will not be identified in any summaries, reports, or publications. All information collected with your identity will be kept confidential and will not be shared with anyone not involved in this study. I am attaching an informed consent form. Please read it carefully to make an informed decision regarding participating.

If you are interested, please complete the attached group interview schedule indicating the times that you will be available. This will be used to schedule the group interview that will take place on November 6th or 7th 2006. Please email this scheduling form back to me by October 31st. You will receive a confirmation email prior to the interviews which will provide details on the location, time, and date of your interview.

Thank you for your participation,

Toby Jenkins

TOBY S. JENKINS

Paul Robeson Cultural Center The Pennsylvania State University
015 Hub Robeson Center University Park, PA 16802
814-865-5646 (O) 814-280-7948 (H) tsj3@sa.psu.edu

EDUCATION

Ph.D. Educational Theory & Policy: Social Foundations, The Pennsylvania State University,
University Park, PA Dissertation: *In Full Color: Understanding the Meaning and Importance of
Culture to College Students of Color through Cultural Self Portraiture*

M.Ed. College Student Personnel, Emphasis: Multiculturalism, University of Maryland,
College Park, MD Masters Paper: *Institutional Change versus Student Change in Diversity
Transformation*

B.A. African & African American Studies and Mass Communications, SC Honors
College, University of South Carolina, Columbia SC, Honors Thesis: *National Bateman
Competition: Boys & Girls Clubs of America in Communities of Color*

INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

Arts in Social Action Cultural Spring Break, Trinidad & Tobago [Program Director], Spoken
Word & Integrated Arts as Tools for Social Change in the African Diaspora, University of the West
Indies, Spring 2007; **K-12 Costa Rican Study Abroad Program [Program Director], *Culture &
History in Central America*, Summer 2005**. Middle school outreach initiative that provided an
opportunity for 50 middle school students to study abroad for three weeks in Costa Rica; **University
of the Witwatersand, Johannesburg South Africa, *Educational Policy Institute* [Participant]
Summer 2004**. Summer institute that joined South African educators with U.S. Higher Education
educators to explore issues of institutional transformation and cultural transformation within policy
and politics post apartheid.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

- **Pennsylvania State University, University Park**: Director, Paul Robeson Cultural Center,
Division of Student Affairs September 2005-present
- **The University of Maryland, College Park, MD**: Program & Research Manager, College of
Education, Institute of Urban and Minority Education; Assistant Director, Nyumburu Cultural
Center, Division of Academic Affairs; Instructor, Faculty Diversity Training Course, Office of
Orientation Programs; Coordinator, Campus Program Board, Office of Campus Programs
- **University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh PA**: Student Life Coordinator & Resident Director, Semester
at Sea Program/Institute for Shipboard Education, Summer 2001 Contract

TEACHING EXPERIENCE: AAAS 201 Global Perspectives on Women of Color

Department of African & African American Studies, College of Liberal Arts, Penn State University;
African American Women in the United States, Department of African & African American
Studies, College of Liberal Arts, Penn State University; **AAAS 297B Culture, Ethnicity &
Leadership** (Developed course), Department of African & African American Studies, College of
Liberal Arts, Penn State University; **EDCP 371 Intro to Leadership** Department of Counseling &
Personnel Services College of Education, University of Maryland, College Park; **University 108D
Career Exploration** Department of Counseling & Personnel Services, College of Education,
University of Maryland, College Park.