

Illinois State University

ISU ReD: Research and eData

Theses and Dissertations

4-13-2023

How I Got over: a Phenomenological Study of Black Vertical Transfer Students' Academic and Interpersonal Validation at Historically White Institutions (Hwis)

Brittany Michelle Barber

Illinois State University, bmjone4@ilstu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.library.illinoisstate.edu/etd>

Recommended Citation

Barber, Brittany Michelle, "How I Got over: a Phenomenological Study of Black Vertical Transfer Students' Academic and Interpersonal Validation at Historically White Institutions (Hwis)" (2023). *Theses and Dissertations*. 1721.

<https://ir.library.illinoisstate.edu/etd/1721>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by ISU ReD: Research and eData. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ISU ReD: Research and eData. For more information, please contact ISUREd@ilstu.edu.

HOW I GOT OVER: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF BLACK VERTICAL
TRANSFER STUDENTS' ACADEMIC AND INTERPERSONAL VALIDATION AT
HISTORICALLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS (HWIS)

BRITTANY BARBER

114 Pages

This phenomenological study sought to understand how Black vertical transfer students experience interpersonal and academic validation at historically white institutions (HWIs). Rendón's (1994) validation theory provided a theoretical framework to examine their post-transfer experiences. A qualitative research design was used to collect data through one-on-one interviews with students who identified as Black, were at least 18 years old at the time of the interview, and had transferred to an HWI within the past six years. Once the analysis was complete, three themes emerged: invalidating HWI experiences, HWI peer validation, and pre-transfer validation experiences. The results revealed the unique experiences that Black vertical transfer students have at HWIs, the networks they rely on to navigate at these institutions, and the influence of Black families and peers on Black vertical transfer students' beliefs and experiences. Key recommendations are provided that could improve the support offered by institutions and Black transfer students peer and family networks.

KEYWORDS: Black transfer students; historically-White institutions (HWIs); transfer experiences; validation theory

HOW I MADE IT OVER: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF BLACK VERTICAL
TRANSFER STUDENTS' ACADEMIC AND INTERPERSONAL VALIDATION AT
HISTORICALLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS (HWIS)

BRITTANY BARBER

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Educational Administration and Foundations

ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

2023

© 2023 Brittany Barber

HOW I MADE IT OVER: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF BLACK VERTICAL
TRANSFER STUDENTS' ACADEMIC AND INTERPERSONAL VALIDATION AT
HISTORICALLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS (HWIS)

BRITTANY BARBER

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Mohamed A. Nur-Awaleh, Chair

John Rugutt

Lydia Kyei-Blankson

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Jesus, I used to dream about what I would write on this page. Who would be included. What and who would be most important to mention. Without knowing fully what I would say, I always knew I would thank you. You've been the safest place I've ever known. THANK YOU for keeping me, for pushing me to start this program, and for not listening when I told you (several times) that I was done. I love you.

There is not enough room on this page to thank everyone in my village that helped make this possible. You watched the kids. You let me cry and vent. You prayed for me and with me. You called me "Dr. Barber" before I even believed it could happen. You encouraged Rodney and I to still go on dates and laugh together between days of exhaustion. You talked me off the proverbial ledge. You kept pushing me to finish well. You were there in every way that counted. I carry you on my shoulders when I walk across that stage!

To my husband Rodney. Oh my gosh babe, *WE* did it. This moment is just as much yours as it is mine. Thank you that I don't have to be strong with you. You allow me just to be and always leave space for me to become. I love you!

Dr. Mia Hardy, had you not shared your office, expertise, and heart with me, I would have never even imagined I could occupy doctoral grounds. I love you tremendously. Professors Joyce Fountain and Clark Hallpike, you are the elders, the leaders, the ones who helped me become and survive in the world of academia. This accomplishment is just as much yours as it is mine.

Dr. Darnell, thank you for seeing the light in me and the finish line at the darkest and most unclear hours. Your brilliance is so understated. Dr. Jim Query, I did not know I would need you as I did. Thank you for everything.

To my committee—Dr. Mohamed A. Nur-Awaleh, Dr. John Rugutt, and Dr. Lydia Kyei-Blankson, THANK YOU. It is advocates and door openers like you that make this journey worth walking (and crawling) through.

To the students who entrusted me with their experiences, I hope this research gives you the space you deserve to take up and the honor you deserve. Each of you are incredible and I'm so grateful for your trust.

And to my sweet, brilliant, unique, God-sent girls. Nina and Zoai Barber. I literally started and ended this journey with the two of you. Two kids born WHILE pursuing a doctorate?! Girls, mommy didn't know God would grace me like that! Though I birthed you, each of you were used to birth something in ME that ultimately helped me get to where I am—where our family is—today. THANK YOU for being the gifts that you are. My FAVORITE titles will always be “God's daughter” and “mom.”

B.B.

CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	i
TABLES	vi
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of the Research Problem	4
Purpose Statement	6
Research Questions	7
Definition of Terms	7
Overview of Theoretical Framework	8
Research Paradigm	10
Significance of the Study	10
Limitations/Delimitations	11
Organization of the Study	12
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW	14
Context--The Community College	14
Transfer Policy	18
Transfer Outcomes	20
Post-Transfer Experiences	22
Transfer and Race	25
Black Transfer Students	26
Theoretical Framework	28
Summary	32

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY	33
Research Questions	33
Researcher Positionality and Assumptions	33
Research Design	35
Study Participants and Ethical Considerations	36
Qualitative Data Collection Methods	39
Data Analysis	39
Trustworthiness/Validity	41
Ethical Issues	42
Summary	43
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS	44
Participant Demographics	44
Participant Narratives	46
Emergent Themes from the Data	51
Invalidating HWI Experiences	52
Absence of HWI Faculty Relationships	52
White Peer Exclusion & Campus Discomfort	55
Black Transfer Students Initiating Community	57
Peer Validation at the HWI	60
Peers as Motivators	61
Peers as Empathic	64
Peers as Co-Community Creators	66
Pre-Transfer Validation Experiences	67

Community College Faculty and Staff Connections	67
Internalized Capacity	70
Family as Validation	72
Summary	75
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION	76
Summary of the Study	76
Findings from the Study	77
HWI Academic Invalidation	77
HWI Peer Validation	79
Pre-Transfer Validation	80
Implications of the Study	83
Recommendations for Practice, Interpersonal Relationships, and Leadership	85
Institutional and Faculty Practice	87
Interpersonal Relationships	87
Leadership	90
Future Research Recommendations	91
Summary	92
REFERENCES	93
APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM	107
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL	110
APPENDIX C: RESEARCH QUESTIONS/INTERVIEW QUESTIONS MATRIX	112

TABLES

Table	Page
1. Demographics and Attributes Table	45

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

How I got over? (How I got over)

How I got over? (How I got over)

You know my soul look back and wonder

How I made it over? (Oh yes)

-Mahalia Jackson, "How I Got Over"

Community colleges, originally called “junior colleges,” are defined as any regionally accredited institution that awards associates degrees and certificates to students (Cohen et al., 2014). While the mission and history of community colleges have long been debated amongst scholars (Beach, 2012; Cohen et al., 2014; Jain et al., 2020; Sims et al., 2020; Sullivan, 2017), vertical transfer has been integral to the primary function of community colleges. A vertical transfer is the matriculation of students from community college to a university after completing credentials or a degree at the community college (Jain et al., 2020). Some students transfer to universities to complete their programs after earning an associates degree (Cohen et al., 2014). To date, there are several forms of “transfer.”

Transfer does not have to begin at a community college (Jain et al., 2020), but vertical transfer is the most discussed in literature. While vertical transfer sounds simple—the transitioning of student from one institution to another—it has been a largely complicated and unsuccessful function since its inception (Beach, 2012; Cohen et al., 2014). This difficulty is attributed to several argued factors. First, community colleges themselves were created to be a barrier for less-academically prepared students to go to college, not a “bridge” (Beach, 2012; Cohen et al., 2014; Jain et al., 2020; Sims et al., 2020) thus, by design, transfer was never meant to actually help students transition *out* of the college. Second, community colleges were to

benefit historically white institutions (HWIs) by “cooling out” racially and socio-economically diverse students, reserving HWI access for academically prepared, wealthy, and White students (Beach, 2012; Cohen et al., 2014; Jain et al., 2020; Sims et al., 2020). Some scholars (Jain et al., 2020; Sims et al., 2020) argue that the founding of community colleges in 1901 was less about an interest in democratic access and more about a commitment to creating a sustainable workforce for the economy. The second argument includes those with a less critical eye of community colleges. Scholars, such as Parnell (1985) and Sullivan (2017), herald community colleges and the transfer function as equitable because they are open access.

Growing data demonstrates inequitable gaps in transfer and degree completion for Black, Latinx, first-generation and low-income students (Chase et al., 2014; Laanan & Jain, 2017; Taylor & Jain, 2017). All of these scholars do agree, however, whether be they critical (Beach, 2012; Jain et al., 2020; Sims et al., 2020) or fully-celebratory (Parnell, 1985; Sullivan, 2017) of community colleges, that the vertical transfer function is one of the most critical to equitable outcomes for historically marginalized students in higher education (Jain et al., 2020) that cannot be overlooked or left ineffective.

Vertical transfer is only one type of transfer and function within community colleges, but it is the most frequently discussed. Once thought of as strictly “vertical”, transfer is now very diverse, including reverse transfer, lateral transfer, dual credit, swirling, alternating enrollment, and co-enrollment (Taylor & Jain, 2017). Students do not merely move from one institution to the next. Conversely, transfer students can change institutions several times before earning their bachelors degree or even enroll simultaneously at more than one institution. Concerning the literature on vertical transfer, quantitative studies are primarily used to: analyze and critique transfer rates (Laanan & Sanchez, 1996), articulation agreements (Kintzer, 1996), transfer state

and institutional policy (Robertson & Frier, 1996), transfer student academic performance and characteristics (pre-and post-transfer) (Townsend & Wilson, 2006), post-transfer adjustment (Laanan, 2007), and institutional impact on transfer. In recent years, critical scholarship has utilized qualitative studies to explore transfer student narratives and experiences, highlighting the inequitable gaps in the transfer that impact minoritized, low-income, and first-generation students the most (Herrera & Jain, 2013; Jain et al., 2020; Sims et al., 2020). Referred to as the racial transfer gap, two main arguments emerge in research as to why these gaps exist for low-income, minoritized, and/or first-generation students. Some scholars (Bensimon & Dowd, 2009; Crisp & Nuñez, 2014; Nuñez & Elizondo, 2013) argue that community colleges created this issue and thus are solely responsible for fixing transfer inequities, while others (Jain et al., 2016; Jain et al., 2020) defend that HWIs are to bear, or at least share, the blame. A host of scholars have specifically studied Latinx transfer student experiences and their outcomes (Bensimon & Dowd, 2009; Crisp & Nora, 2010; Kraemer, 1995; Nuñez & Elizondo, 2013; Rendón & Valadez, 1993; Suarez, 2003). Scant attention, however, has been given to Black transfer student experiences and outcomes. Transfer is too diverse a function for a singular solution at any given institution to support all transfer students (Jain et al., 2020). It would follow, then, that even if any institution did provide support for one type of transfer, there would still need to be specific support in place that accounted for the diversity in transfer student populations (Jain et al., 2020). Transfer students overall differ from students who began at HWIs (Jain et al., 2020). Black students have experiences at HWIs that are different from their White peers (McCall & Castles, 2020; McFeeters, 2006; Sims et al., 2020). Transfer students, in general, tend to be less socially active post-transfer (Lester et al., 2013). At the intersections of race and transfer, it is worth

gaining an understanding of the experiences of Black vertical transfer students and what helps them, academically and interpersonally, post-transfer.

Statement of the Research Problem

Although HWIs have increased their focus on transfer students because of the tuition and campus diversification opportunities their enrollment creates (Acosta et al., 2021; Jain et al., 2020), it was not until the early 2000s that institutions began thinking about how to provide services for transfer students (Jain et al., 2020). In the past ten years, scholars (Jain et al., 2011; Jain et al., 2016; Jain et al., 2020; Nuñez & Elizondo, 2013) have been calling for a more critical lens to understand how race impacts a student's transfer experience and how these diversified experiences should then shape what institutional supports need to be in place (Jain et al., 2011; Jain et al., 2016; Jain et al., 2020; Nuñez & Elizondo, 2013). The Black transfer experience, however, is missing from the conversation; thereby, limiting practitioner and institutional abilities to provide necessary services and support to aid Black student persistence and degree completion.

From 2020 to 2021, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Black vertical transfer enrollment fell by 6.1%, which was greater than their decline before the pandemic (Sedmak, 2021), while Latinx and Asian vertical transfer enrollment grew during by 1.4% and 5.9%, respectively (Sedmak, 2021). Although White vertical transfer students saw a decline in enrollment, their decreased rate did not differ from the pre-pandemic rate (Sedmak, 2021). Overall, transfer enrollment decreased by 8.1%. However, when considering all types of transfer (lateral, reverse, and vertical), Black transfer enrollment declined by 12.9%, more than any other racial group in 2020-2021 (Sedmak, 2021). The current racial and low-income equity gaps in transfer has prompted the formation of the Equity Transfer Initiative (ETI) (NSC Blog, 2021). Formed in

partnership with the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), and the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), the ETI is committed to increasing the transfer completion rates of 6,000 marginalized students within two years (NSC Blog, 2021). The preceding goal may be met by enrolling students in one of five available transfer pathways (American Association of Community Colleges, 2021a). Seventeen community colleges and 19 HWIs in 13 different states have joined the Initiative (American Association of Community Colleges, 2021a). Through this partnership, schools will receive coaching to assess current obstacles to transferring and identify best practices/solutions to create or modify transfer pathways with an equity lens (American Association of Community Colleges, 2021a). Institutions will also have to improve currently available student services to mitigate inequitable or culturally incompetent practices, which may contribute to low transfer student completion (American Association of Community Colleges, 2021a).

In two years, the ETI is anticipating helping 6,000 students with marginalized identities will transfer. In the 2020-2021 academic year, however, 39,500 Black transfer students did not persist or enroll (Sedmak, 2021). The ETI is helping to bring national attention and encourage substantive discussion towards racial and socioeconomic inequities in transfer. Unfortunately, there is no ongoing and informed discussion about how transfer student data will be collected or tracked to assess effectiveness. Although ETI successfully addresses the need for institutional relationships and enhancing or improving student support services, given the diverse groups that ETI is aiming to assist, the initiative assumes in their press releases that all transfer students may need and benefit from the same services. While ETI will be assessing current institution relationships and transfer pathways (American Association of Community Colleges, 2021a), data

shared on academic outcomes will offer no insight into the experiences of Black vertical transfer students that may or may not be helping them academically and interpersonally post-transfer.

Student voice and input are also not discussed, thus limiting how institutions can effectively respond and support. As evidenced by the differences in transfer student enrollment and persistence, racially minoritized students are having different transfer experiences. Concerning Black students, their transfer experience is not understood (McCall & Castles, 2020). In the absence of this knowledge, practitioners, administrators, and policymakers are left ill-equipped to serve Black transfer students. Most importantly, the needs and voices of Black transfer students are often unheard or given short rift, and not included in campus-wide and national dialogue about how to close the racial transfer gap.

Purpose Statement

Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study is to understand how Black transfer students experience at HWIs. Specifically, this study looks into the students' academic and interpersonal validation at universities because validation helps Black students, as well as other underrepresented groups, feel like an integral part of the academic community (Rendón, 1994). Research has found that transfer students often feel like outsiders and not included at the universities they transfer to (Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Similarly, Black students feel excluded at HWIs which can negatively impact their academic success (Harper, 2013; McFeeters, 2006). Validation theory (Rendón, 1994) offers a framework to understand how Black transfer students are being supported and included during their transfer experience because validation helps historically underrepresented students be academically successful. Such an approach should strengthen the weak understanding concerning what role institutions play in

Black student transfer experiences and what social and academic supports Black transfer students rely on to achieve their intended academic goals at HWIs.

Research Questions

This study is guided by two research questions:

1. How do Black vertical transfer students experience academic validation at HWIs?
2. How do Black vertical transfer students experience interpersonal validation at HWIs?

Definitions of Terms

Black student: A student who racially identifies as Black and/or African-American.

Community college: Although there are community colleges that now issue bachelors degrees, this paper defines community colleges as accredited institutions that primarily issue certifications and associates degrees to students.

Historically Underserved Students: Underserved students are those who fall into the “non-traditional” category when considering college student populations (Rendón, 2002). Historically underserved student populations include: students who are low-income, first-generation, have working-class backgrounds, often racialized minorities (although White students can be considered underserved as well), and often doubt their ability to be successful in college or obtain a bachelors degree (Green, 2006; Rendón, 2002).

Historically-White institution (HWI): Institutions that award bachelors degrees as part of their credential options. The term, HWI, recognizes that higher education institutions were originally created for White people and helped to normalize Whiteness as superior to other races (Wilder, 2013).

Transfer Student Experiences: The cumulative experiences of transfer students, from community college through an HWI, that differ from students who began their collegiate path at an HWI.

Validation: The intentional, ongoing process initiated by in-and-out of class agents to affirm students in their collegiate journey which can result in students believing in their own capacity to contribute in the classroom, belong to their campus, and be academically successful (Rendón, 1994). Rendón (1994) defines validation as being academic (what occurs in the classroom) and interpersonal (what occurs outside the classroom). Validation can come from faculty, staff, peers, and family members.

Vertical (Upward) Transfer: the matriculation of a student who began his/her collegiate studies at a community college and, after earning the intended credits or credentials, matriculated to an HWI to earn a bachelors degree.

Overview of Theoretical Framework

This study's theoretical framework is based on Rendón's (1994) validation theory. This theory builds upon the work of Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) which acknowledges the vital roles of academic and interpersonal interactions in shaping student persistence levels (Rendón, 1994). Validation theory (Rendón, 1994) is considered a critical theory which critiques how race, socioeconomic status, gender, and the historical context of institutions impacts diverse student experiences and academic outcomes. Interested in student involvement, formal and informal, Rendón and her colleagues were intrigued by "non-traditional" (historically underserved) students, whose confidence in their academic capacity and commitment to persist, grew substantially as they received validation from someone within their institution. Validation is defined as the intentional, ongoing process of affirming historically underserved students to

believe in their academic capacity (Rendón, 1994). Historically underserved populations includes students who are racially-minoritized, low-income, first-generation, identify as LGBTQIA+, are veterans and/or are adult learners (Green, 2006; Rendón, 1994). The process of validation is initiated by in-and-out of class agents, which can include peers, faculty, staff, and/or family members, and improves the likelihood of student persistence. The theory recognizes the importance and need of agents to initiate meaningful connections with students that are not limited solely to the scope of academic outcomes. These relationships also acknowledge that students are multi-faceted with a need to be seen as both scholars and humans with an identity outside of school (Rendón, 1994). While Astin's (1984) involvement theory centers on student agency and defines student involvement on campus as paramount for student retention, Rendón's (1994) validation theory addresses the institutional barriers that historically underserved students face in becoming involved. Additionally, it suggests there are institutional agents and peers that can help students connect with the institution. Validation theory thus recognizes that while some students may want to be involved academically and socially, circumstantially it may be difficult to do so because of their race, gender, socioeconomic status, and/or prior experiences in education (Rendón, 1994). External agents—be they staff, faculty, or peers—can help to acknowledge and validate students who may be limited in time and/or may have a limited view of themselves as being successful (Rendón, 1994). This theory addresses what literature on transfer student experiences reveals; i.e., transfer students struggling with feeling isolated and becoming involved due in part to external factors such as employment or family (Townsend & Wilson, 2006). As the focus of this study is to understand how Black transfer students socially and academically integrate at HWIs, validation theory creates a lens to do so. As previously

noted, it recognizes the need for validation in and outside the classroom; especially for students who feel they exist in the margins of institutions and society (Rendón, 1994).

Research Paradigm

Phenomenology is well-suited for this study since there is an imperative to understand how Black transfer students make sense of their post-transfer experiences (Creswell, 2014). Phenomenology focuses on learning about the human experience in the world and deems every experience as worthy of inquiry (Adams & van Manen, 2008; Creswell, 2014). Rooted in both psychology and philosophy, the goal of phenomenological research is to understand how humans assign meaning to phenomena (Creswell, 2014). This study thus did not seek to create conclusive solutions; rather, I wanted to understand the experiences Black transfer students were having with academic and interpersonal validation post-transfer.

Significance of the Study

Little is known about Black transfer student experiences, pre-and-post transfer. The key conversations about transfer include outcomes, policies, and student experiences. The literature on transfer outcomes revealed that while there are many studies that evaluate student academic performance and characteristics, more research is needed; in particular, to understand how HWIs impact transfer student outcomes, especially from a critical race perspective. Such an approach might better explore intersections of race, gender, and transfer; or race, socioeconomic status, and transfer or even race, race socialization, and transfer. Recent research (Cepeda et al., 2016; Jain et al., 2020) advocates for acknowledging and investigating student transfer capital, and their knowledge gleaned outside of higher education contexts. Currently, there is a paucity of such research and this gap provides an impetus for focusing on strategies which influence academic successes. The literature is also relatively quiet about how transfer students interact

with other transfer students, or how they interact with peers of their same race. Laanan (2007), as well as Townsend and Wilson (2006), delved into social integration and key issues transfer students encounter therein; however, very little has been discussed concerning how race impacts transfer students experiences and successes, with the exception of Jain et al. (2011; 2020).

Validation theory creates the possibility of ascertaining what, or who, impacts Black vertical transfer students' post-transfer experiences; thereby highlighting what experiences and resources help Black transfer students navigate and persist at HWIs. Such a process could lead to further study and dialogue on the need for institutions to be intentional in the supports offered to Black and other historically underserved transfer students. Validation theory should help highlight the strength and capacity of Black transfer students, while also revealing what institutions need to do to better partner with them. This theory acknowledges the racially hostile and culturally incongruent climates at HWIs (Rendón, 2006). Given the invalidating environments at HWIs, validation theory holds institutional agents responsible for proactively fostering relationships and validating historically underserved students (Rendón, 2006). This is most critical for Black transfer students who have two intersecting, marginalized identities in higher education: Black and transfer students.

Limitation/Delimitations

There are several limitations to this study, the first being its scope. There are many different means by which students can transfer, but this study focuses on vertical/upward transfer. Transfer students are also diverse in age, with the median community college age in 2021 being 28 years old (American Association of Community Colleges, 2021b), however, this study involves students who are between the ages of 18 and 25. Participants in the study are from a midwestern state and currently attend or recently graduated from an HWI therein. A study of

transfer students in a different geographic region may yield different results. Further, this study focuses solely on students who identify as Black/African-American. It did not include students who may have may be of more than one race, or those who do not identify as Black/African-American.

For delimitations, this study included only Black-identifying vertical transfer students who were either currently enrolled at or a recent graduate of an HWI, recent being within the past three years given the recent impact of COVID-19 on transfer (National Student Clearinghouse, 2021). Research on transfer students pre-pandemic and during the pandemic is different given how heavily the pandemic disrupted higher education, particularly transfer students (Acosta et al., 2021). Given the gaps in literature on Black transfer students, the study focuses solely on this population. Also, because I only had connections with staff at two midwestern community colleges, the study is delimited to where the researcher has access to participants.

Organization of the Study

Chapter one introduces the research problem and problem, as well as the guiding research questions and theoretical framework. Delimitations and limitations were also discussed. Chapters two through five are outlined to clearly explain the organizational flow of the study.

Chapter two is an overview of the literature on community colleges, vertical transfer, and Black student experiences in higher education.

Chapter three explains how validation theory frames the study and how phenomenological methodology shapes this research design.

Chapter four shares the narratives of participants and themes that emerged through conversations.

Chapter five identifies salient limitations, implications, and provides key recommendations for future study and practice.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Context—The Community College

To contextualize the function, outcomes, and associated experiences of transfer, it is important to provide a brief overview of the history of community colleges. Community colleges are often lauded as the bastions of democratic access to higher education (Dowd, 2007). Transfer and vocational preparation were the primary functions of these institutions, although both missions were, and still are, in conflict with one another (Cohen et al., 2014; Jain et al., 2020). Cohen et al. (2014) explain the creation of community colleges was influenced by three, primary forces: 1) the need to expand higher education access due to the growth in high school graduates; 2) the intentional attempt to divert students into a vocational track; and 3) the need to protect the elitism of the academy by dividing coursework into “lower-level” and “upper-division” (Cohen et al., 2014).

In 1901, the first community college emerged as Joliet Junior College (Cohen et al., 2014). College-level courses were offered as an extension of the local high school. Eventually, under the urging of then-president of the University of Chicago, William Rainey Harper, students were offered an opportunity to earn an associates degree (Sims et al., 2020). Harper was influenced by former University of Michigan president, Henry P. Tappan, who in 1852, introduced a plan to delay high school graduate entrance to higher education; under the belief that general education ought to be an extension of high schools and upper-level research should be reserved for colleges and universities (Handel, 2013). Several university presidents such as Harper, Richard Henry Jesse, David Starr Jordan, William Watts Folwell, and Alexis Lange agreed with the idea of delayed entry to universities, allowing only the best and brightest students to matriculate through (Handel, 2013; Jain et al., 2020). Transfer, then, was to serve as a

means of matriculating academically-prepared students, while vocational tracks would serve less-academically prepared students; if they did not drop out altogether (Cohen et al., 2014).

Cohen et al. (2014) acknowledge the deliberate diversion of students to vocational tracks, as well the intentional creation of a gap between HWIs and community colleges, however, they do not articulate what kind of students were impacted the most. According to Sims et al. (2020), the transfer function—and community colleges overall—were designed to be an academic buffer that benefited the elite, decreasing access to the baccalaureate degree for non-Whites and low-income students. Junior colleges satisfied the ambitions of the working class while also fulfilling elite's desires to have fewer students gaining access to the ivory towers (Sims et al., 2020). Sims et al. (2020) argument is defended by an earlier, national study on student transfer, in which Knoell and Medsker (1965) describe junior college students as underachieving, undecided, incompetent, and/or too poor to go to college anywhere else. Their qualitative study revealed students were taking longer to complete their junior college degree than students who began their collegiate study at an HWI. Lastly, upon transfer, students were being admitted to state universities with less-intense admission standards. They further concluded junior colleges were not adequately preparing students for HWIs. Troubling also was that Knoell and Medsker (1965) offered no critique of their homogeneous sampling, which included no non-white perspectives or narratives. HWI admission and tuition policies were already creating barriers for students to continue their education. HWI policies were also creating “Whiter” HWIs as junior colleges were becoming increasingly Black and Brown. Hence, it is not surprising that a thorough critique was not forthcoming.

From 1901 through the 1960's, community colleges operated largely without any governmental accountability (Parnell, 1985). The transfer function was seen as a new shift, a

demonstration of effective collaboration among high schools, colleges, and HWIs (Kintzer, 1996) offering community members the possibility of earning a baccalaureate degree. It was the option to transfer that made community colleges, by their mere existence, appear to be a national response to equitable education. In 1954, the groundbreaking *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision finally enabled racially-minoritized students to access higher education. Consequently, this Supreme Court decision increased racially-minoritized student enrollment at community colleges through the 1980s, and among other historically underserved groups (Beach, 2012; Jain et al., 2020). Community colleges were then viewed as equitable beacons of hope to rural masses who, whether they would acquire the social mobility education promised or not, at least had a chance to obtain a degree or credential.

In the 1960's, federal scrutiny over higher education began to grow and severely limit federal financial resources going towards HWIs (Beach, 2012). This federal oversight required and encouraged HWIs and community colleges to produce measurable student outcomes to continue receiving federal funds. Thus, institutions became more reliant on private funding through donors and student tuition (Giroux, 2014). Some scholars (Cohen et al., 2014) viewed increased federal scrutiny as a benefit since more students were attending college than graduating. The overarching goal, of course, was acquiring a degree so federal monitoring of degree progression and completion was championed (Cohen et al., 2014). Other scholars argued the gap between degree intent and degree completion, especially among Black students, was due to community college complicity in diverting students from degree continuation; thereby making the transfer function intentionally dysfunctional (Beach, 2012; Clark, 1960). This idea of dissuading community college students from continuing onto an HWI was called "cooling out," (Beach, 2012; Clark, 1960).

“Cooling out” is a term coined by Clark (1960), who studied the effects of the community college through a “means-ends analysis” (Clark, 1960, p. 569). Such an approach examines the disassociation that occurs between culturally-informed pursuits (e.g., the American dream) and the institutions’ response to said pursuits. The “cooling out” process dissuades students from transferring and instead diverts them to vocational and certificate programs by emphasizing student scholastic deficiencies (Clark, 1960). Clark (1980) revisited his original position, puzzled by the “use and potential abuse” (p. 25) of the term “cooling out” when used to suggest community colleges are intentionally dissuading racially minoritized and low-income students the most. He defended his analysis which demonstrated a flaw in community colleges operationally; however, he disagreed with scholars who argued “cooling out” had inequitable impacts on certain groups (Clark, 1980). Conversely, many low-income students dropped out of community colleges during the first year of their enrollment; the majority of whom were racialized minorities (Beach, 2012). Furthermore, White and Black students enroll in community colleges with similar aspirations to transfer, but White students transfer more (Wood et al., 2011; Camardelle et al., 2022). Subsequently, these analyses suggest the aspirations of racially minoritized students are being negatively impacted pre-transfer (Beach, 2012).

As noted earlier, transfer is a primary function of community colleges as Clark (1960) argued. It is thus essential to dive deeper into the discussions and key scholarship focused on transfer outcomes (Bahr et al., 2013; Beach, 2012; Laanan & Jain, 2017; Sims et al., 2020; Sullivan, 2017), transfer policy (Chase et al., 2014), and transfer student experiences (Herrera & Jain, 2013; Laanan, 2007; Townsend & Wilson, 2006).

Transfer Policy

The presence or absence of articulation agreements, also considered transfer policies, has been inconclusively attributed to transfer breakdowns. “Articulation”, in this context, is the moving of a student’s credits from one institution to another (Cohen et al., 2014). Strong articulation agreements create an easier and more transparent pathway for transfer students, thus leading to the increased enrollment of transfer students at HWIs (Cohen et al., 2014; Jain et al., 2020). Such agreements are argued as being a state policy issue since racially minoritized students stand to benefit the most from articulation agreements (Jain et al., 2020). More so because the majority of community college enrollees are racially minoritized students (Jain et al., 2020).

There are mixed results concerning whether articulation agreements help more students transfer. Anderson et al. (2006), for example, conducted a quantitative analysis to determine if more students transfer at schools where a state-mandated articulation agreement existed. Unlike previous studies on articulation agreements which sought to identify the presence of articulation agreements in states, Anderson et al. (2006) wanted to ascertain the extent to which articulation agreements were effective. Ideally, articulation agreements aid in increasing transfer rates: a non-unanimously defined term generally determined by the number of students who actually transfer out of a community college divided by the number of students qualified to transfer (Laanan & Sanchez, 1996). Transfer rates can be affected by a number of institutional and student factors, although a large barrier to transfer, as well as degree completion, is the loss of credits during the transfer process, as well as confusion in navigating through it. Ideally, articulation agreements aid in preventing or limiting this service gap. Surprisingly, however, Anderson et al. (2006)

found no evidence supporting an increased likelihood of transfer in states that had mandated articulation agreements (p. 277).

In light of the preceding issues, partnerships and policies need to be established with high schools and/or with HWIs which will require cooperation among several parties (Kintzer & Wattenbarger, 1985). Even then though, the efficacy of articulation agreements leading to transfer increases is somewhat unclear. In their report on articulation and transfer agreements, Kintzer and Wattenbarger (1985) studied policies and coordinated articulation efforts in individual states. In establishing the context of transfer and articulation, they highlight that in the early years of community colleges, agreements to facilitate transfer depended largely on demand in the area to do so (p. 21). This observation is particularly intriguing because if transfer was the mission of community colleges from the outset, why would transfer policies be established only if requested? Subsequently, this ambiguity casts doubt on if the stated goal of community colleges was accurate. According to Kintzner and Wattenbarger (1985), research since the 1960's strongly emphasized the need for statewide coordination of transfers; however, it took more than ten years to see formal action: first in Florida and followed by Illinois (p. 21). Following the trend, that emerged in the 1970s, articulation agreements were coordinated and led by either the state or by institutions (Kintzner & Wattenbarger, 1985); with California's Master Plan for Higher Education 1968-1975 becoming a trailblazing, state-wide articulation plan (Kintzer, 1996). At the time of their report, additional trends in agreements began to emerge, including agreements among schools and businesses, the military, as well as proprietary schools (Kintzner & Wattenbarger, 1985, p. 58).

Ten years later, Kintzer (1996) noted that the articulation trend still lacked full commitment from institutions and policymakers. Ignash and Townsend (2001) found that the

combination of articulation agreements and additional interpersonal, as well as institutional factors, can increase the transfer rates of diverse populations.

Transfer Outcomes

Several authors further criticize community colleges based on the outcomes for minoritized, low-income, and first-generation students (Beach, 2012; Chase et al., 2014; Jain et al., 2011; Jain et al., 2020; Laanan & Jain, 2017). Work by Herrera and Jain (2013), Laanan and Jain (2017), and Jain et al., (2020) call for shifts not just in how transfer is studied, but also in how the responsibility for transfer student outcomes is shared. Where Kintzer and Wattenbarger (1985) cogently contend that community colleges ought to better educate and prepare students for the transfer process, others argue (Jain et al., 2011; Jain et al., 2020; Laanan & Jain, 2017) that while community colleges do play a role, HWIs need to improve at recruiting, receiving, and supporting transfer students.

Using a critical race theory (CRT) framework, Jain et al. (2011) argue for a mutual, shared responsibility between institutions, i.e., community colleges should have a transfer-sending culture and HWIs should have a transfer-receptive one. CRT allows for recognition of race, racism, and whiteness operating in the systems and foundations of higher education (Jain et al., 2011). To minimize or ignore the exclusionary history and climate of many institutions is to ignore transfer student capital: a concept which honors the skills and know-how that transfer students bring to their new institutions (Laanan et al., 2010; Laanan & Jain, 2017). Excluding how whiteness impacts higher education systems and environments can continue to normalize the absence of Black and Latinx students in the transfer process (Jain et al., 2011; Laanan & Jain, 2017). In a similar manner, institutional responsibility and accountability are often glossed over Parnell (1985). These widespread discriminatory beliefs and systems frequently cast transfer

students and their needs as inconsequential (Jain et al. (2011). Moreover, such myopic views often place many racially minoritized transfer students at a far-reaching disadvantage; thereby, further contributing to formidable adjustment, retention, and matriculation barriers. Proceeding further, Laanan and Jain (2017) recognized that while “transfer” has been studied through a critical lens, using qualitative methods; a new model for studying transfer students acknowledging students’ strengths, pre-and post-transfer environments, as well as their outcomes, was necessary to fully understand their experiences.

Chase et al., (2014) also critically examined the inequities within “transfer,” however, instead of focusing on institutional environments and programs, they centered their research on seven state transfer policies using critical policy analysis (CPA). CPA debunks the development of policy as an objective simple process, void of personal biases (Chase et al., 2014). Conversely, CPA examines how race, class and gender influence policies and how those policies are used to uphold power. Similar to CRT, CPA acknowledges that race is socially constructed, and that racism is upheld by particular institutions (Chase et al., 2014). In reviewing state legislation for seven states from 2009, concerning vertical transfer policy, they found that six of seven reviewed states utilized “color-blind” policies. These did not, however, account for systemic racism and how racialized, minoritized, gendered, and low-socioeconomic status students experience, move through, and/or are barred from transferring. None of the states reported transfer rates by race or ethnicity. Additionally, six of the seven states had created a “common core” curriculum that only included vertical transfer as a means of transferring to another institution (Chase et al., 2014). Three states did use race as performance indicators for associates degree completion, although different racial and ethnic groups were not acknowledged. In particular, they were all lumped together in a singular “students of color”

category (Chase et al., 2014, p. 690). A very surprising finding was California's low score for measuring their transfer effectiveness by race, being that California has state-wide transfer legislation in place. Similarly, Anderson et al. (2006) questioned if articulation agreements led to an increased probability of vertical transfer (p. 264), building on the work of Ignash and Townsend's (2001) analysis of articulation agreements six years prior.

Post-Transfer Experiences

Additional literature on "transfer" has focused on student experiences pre-and-post process. In their call for a transfer-receptive culture, Jain et al. (2011; 2020), as well as Laanan and Jain (2017), emphasized the need for programming specific to transfer students, indicating most orientations for transfer students are often re-formatted freshman orientations. In particular, these lack information depth and fail to engender a sense of community that transfer students typically need. In terms of research designs, quantitative studies have evaluated transfer experiences through an academic performance lens. In contrast, qualitative studies have focused on student interviews, focus groups, and open-ended survey responses to reveal how well transfer students were prepared for transfer; how they adapted and integrated into their HWI; and how their characteristics (e.g., race, major, GPA, and prior community college involvement) impacted their experiences (Bahr et al., 2013).

Many of these qualitative studies relied on Tinto's (1975) student integration model, Tinto's theory of student retention, Astin's (1984) theory of involvement, or some combination of these theoretical frameworks. Neither Tinto (1975) or Astin (1984), however, conducted studies in community college contexts and many have criticized their frameworks as being largely or solely applicable for White, cisgender students (Jain et al., 2020; Sims et al., 2020). The preceding frameworks also rely largely on student self-efficacy rather than institutional

factors and responsibilities. Scholars who have built upon their frameworks, such as Townsend and Wilson's (2006), examined factors that helped community college transfer students be successful at HWIs. While their findings (Townsend & Wilson, 2006) revealed transfer students struggled to socially integrate and to connect meaningfully with faculty, these did not include the experiences or narratives of Black students. Their study also did not critically examine what was happening institution-wide that could have been impacting transfer student post-transfer experiences. Although they defended the need for staff to support transfer students, Tinto and Astin's frameworks provided no critical lens to develop institution-wide solutions.

Responding to the need for a framework specifically for transfer student involvement, Laanan (2007) created the Laanan-Transfer Student's Questionnaire (L-TSQ) ©. This questionnaire was created using Astin's (1984) student involvement theory, Oberg's (1960) culture shock concept, and the concept of quality of effort by Pace (1979, cited in Laanan, 2007). The goal of the questionnaire was to ascertain what factors (pre-and-post transfer) helped foster a positive adjustment, academically and socially, for transfer students. Laanan also sought to uncover factors which were most influential in shaping students' diverse experiences. The studies by Townsend and Wilson (2006), as well as Laanan (2007), revealed additional information about transfer student experiences at an HWI from a more student-centered lens. In particular, the preceding approach, is helpful to understand what HWIs and community colleges can do programmatically and systemically to support transfer students.

As Laanan (2007) states, "it is what the student does once he/she arrives [at the HWI] that will determine the extent to which a successful adjustment experience will be achieved," (p. 55). Jain et al. (2020) disagree, arguing transfer outcome solutions that are truly student-centered need to be focused on institutionalized supports. Jain et al., (2020) posit that Laanan's

assertion is a deficit perspective (Valencia, 1997) of transfer students. Deficit thinking shifts the blame from the structural deficiencies of an organization to individuals impacted by the institution's fault avoidance (Valencia, 1997). It is the mindset embodied by some scholars, practitioners, policymakers, and/or educators housed within institutions that associates problematic outcomes, trends, and data with individuals and entire populations; thereby, scapegoating students as inherently deficient (Valencia, 1997). Although the outward expression of genetic disposition is no longer socially acceptable (when stated so overtly), the deficit-thinking model aligns with the same racist ideologies that defend "natural" inadequacies of low-income and historically marginalized students (Valencia, 1997). Labelling these students as "at-risk" removes institutional responsibility, as though the problem was too great to be effectively addressed overtime.

Using a sociological lens, Tinto's (1975) model holds that students will be successful if they take on the identity of a student and integrate into the culture as well as the environment of the institution (Bensimon, 2007). Bensimon (2007) laments that Tinto's model does not consider race, class, power, gender, or how the intersections of identities and the institution itself would impede students' abilities or interest in assimilating Astin's model removes institutional responsibility as well. His theory on student involvement emphasizes the need for students to initiate involvement in campus activities to be successful. Not surprisingly, the model provides an impetus for measuring student motivation and frequency of involvement levels (Astin, 1984). Astin further contends the degree to which students are involved on campus reveals their level of investment in the learning process and thus, commitment to, and likelihood of, being successful (Astin, 1984). His model is also limited, however, in that it does not critique the racial climate of particular institutions nor consider how racial climates may impact, to some degree, student

involvement. Conversely, the emphasis is on student actions, decision-making, perceived abilities and/or inabilities, as well as overall student behavior (Astin, 1984). Such a myopic view is faulty since it minimizes and ignores the role that many institutions play in decreasing student transfer rates and degree completion.

Transfer and Race

Arguing against the use of colorblind theories like Tinto and Astin, other scholars (Castro & Cortez, 2017; Crisp & Nuñez, 2014; Herrera & Jain, 2013; Nuñez & Elizondo, 2013; Pérez & Ceja, 2010) have examined transfer through the lens of race and ethnicity. Scholars such as Pérez and Ceja (2010), as well as Nuñez and Elizondo (2013), studied the specific transfer experiences of Mexican and Latinx students. Collectively, their line of inquiry defends the transfer capital of racially minoritized students and challenges institutions to view transfer students as assets, instead of tuition dollar burdens (Jain et al., 2020); thereby, lessening the tendency to overlook them. By highlighting the experiences and capital of Latinx students, these scholars demonstrate how their interactions in an HWI differ from White transfer students; how institutional agents (Bensimon, 2007) do and need to support them; and how institutional spaces need to be inclusive of Latinx students. Bensimon (2007) also noted the role that institutional agents play in transfer student success; in particular, focusing on racially minoritized and low-socioeconomic transfer students. In her presidential address at the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE), Bensimon (2007) emphasized that institutional agents shape transfer student environments and experiences along a continuum of positive to negative degrees, with some extent of consciousness.

Black Transfer Students

Vertical transfer is an educational opportunity that ought to be creating a better pathway to degree attainment and closing the transfer gap for Black students; however, it has not accomplished the preceding goal. In Fall 2019, 41% of undergraduate students in the United States were enrolled in a community college, 43% of which were Black (American Association of Community Colleges, 2021b). Eighty percent of all undergraduate community college students indicated they wanted to transfer to an HWI, but only 31% did so within six years (American Association of Community Colleges, 2021b). Disaggregated by race, in 2018, only 27% of Black community college students actually transferred within six years, compared to 41% of White students. Transfer inequity is thus heavily impacting baccalaureate attainment for Black students. At a time when more students are going to community colleges, the majority being Black and Latinx (Shapiro et al., 2019), over 31 million students are still leaving college without earning a degree (Shapiro et al., 2019). In 2014, the national completion gap between Black and White student's overall degree completion was 25% (Shapiro et al., 2019). Shapiro et al. (2019) further noted that only 1 in 12 Black transfer students completed their bachelors degree in six years; compared to 1 in 5 White students. While the function and availability of transfer holds promise for increasing degree completion, the current racial transfer gap (Crisp & Nuñez, 2014) positions transfer as both a solution for and barrier to equitable outcomes.

The pandemic of 2020 (Thometz, 2020) has only worsened this problematical situation (Sedmak, 2021). Black community college students were less likely to transfer than their White peers pre-pandemic (Camardelle et al., 2022). Since 2020, transfer rates for Black students has fallen by -14.2% compared to -15.5% for White students. The decline represents not merely a

lower Black student enrollment in higher education institutions, but also an increase in the Black degree attainment gap compared to White peers (Miller, 2020).

One of the major gaps in transfer literature is the scholarship available on Black student transfer experiences. A growing body of researchers has examined the intersections of transfer and race (Hern et al., 2019; Jain et al., 2011; 2020). Additional research has explored Latinx transfer student experiences (Castro & Cortez, 2017; Crisp & Nuñez, 2014; Herrera & Jain, 2013; Jain et al., 2020; Nuñez & Elizondo, 2013). There is, however, scant research being done on Black transfer students specifically. Well-known scholars such as Harper et al. (2009), Harper (2013) as well as Strayhorn and Terrell (2012) critique and study Black student experiences at HWIs, however, these studies do not exclusively highlight Black transfer student experiences. Being so, Laanan and Jain (2017) advocate the increase of studies focusing on racially-minoritized transfer student experiences.

Studying the experiences of Black transfer students, through their own voices, offers opportunity to better understand how to support them (McCall & Castles, 2020; Townsend & Wilson, 2006; Walker & Okpala, 2017). Transfer students are a diverse group, thus requiring institutions to have a better understanding of what different transfer populations may need (Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012; Walker & Okpala, 2017). Regarding Black transfer students, researchers have conducted different qualitative studies to understand more about their post-transfer and pre-transfer experiences (Cooper & Hawkins, 2014; McCall & Castles, 2020; Walker & Okpala, 2017; Wilson, 2014). Cooper and Hawkins (2014), for instance, utilized critical race theory to examine how race and racism were impacting the experiences of Black male transfer student athletes. In their qualitative study, participants perceived that their HWI environments were exclusionary toward Black students (Cooper & Hawkins, 2014).

Subsequently, these students transferred to a Historically Black College (also known as HBCU) to perceive that their racial identity was accepted (Cooper & Hawkins, 2014). Black participants in Wilson's (2014) study, however, had relatively positive experiences at their HWI. These participants recommended other Black transfer students remain focused and commit to connecting with a diverse network post-transfer (Wilson, 2014). Comparably, Black participants in McCall and Castles' (2020) study also had positive perceptions about their HWI experiences. The majority of their participants was able to connect with White peers and develop relationships upon becoming involved on their campus (McCall & Castles, 2020). The differences in participant perceptions about their experiences demonstrates the need for additional research to enrich understanding about which supports Black transfer students may need.

Theoretical Framework

Rendón's (1994) validation theory serves as the theoretical framework for this study. Validation is defined as the "intentional, proactive affirmation of students by in-and-out of class agents to validate students as creators of knowledge, as valuable members of the college learning community" (Linares Rendón & Muñoz, 2011, p. 12). When historically underserved (also referred to as "non-traditional") students are validated, it increases their involvement on campus, and the likelihood of their retention and academic success (Linares Rendón & Muñoz, 2011; Rendón, 1994). Black students are an underserved population in higher education (Rendón, 2002). Underserved students are those who are not considered to be the "traditional", middle-to-high income students who attend a university directly after high school. While "traditional" college students are usually in their late teens to early twenties, from families with collegiate backgrounds, and do not struggle with the transition into or through college, Black students are often "non-traditional" (Rendón, 2002). "Nontraditional" students are those whose family

members have usually not been to college; who do not have many faculty and staff on their campuses that represent their identities; come from low-income, working-class backgrounds; and struggle to see themselves in college or completing a bachelors degree (Rendón, 2002). They may be diverted from continuing their education (Clark, 1960), typically have to work while in school, and often are not validated on college campuses (Rendón, 2002). Data collected by Carter (2016), however, reflected that “nontraditional” student populations made up 74% of the 2011-2012 national undergraduate enrollment data. Although slightly dated, “nontraditional” students are now in the majority while “traditional” students are in the minority. Moreover, to continue referring to Black students and other “nontraditional” students as such sends the psychological message that these students are not a normal or expected member of higher education (Gulley, 2016). “Historically underserved” is a term that captures the demographics and characteristics of “non-traditional” students. It also recognizes that though these students have historically faced systemic barriers to and through educational pathways (Green, 2006).

There are two primary types of validation: academic and interpersonal. Both types are necessary to help historically underserved students matriculate successfully through their academic journey (Linares Rendón & Muñoz, 2011; Rendón, 1994). Academic validation occurs in the classroom with faculty members who help students embrace their potential to be successful; validate the knowledge that students bring into classroom; and who actively reach out to students, offering assistance and encouragement through conversation and in assignment feedback (Linares Rendón & Muñoz, 2011).

Interpersonal validation occurs in and outside of the classroom, with faculty and with peers or other members of their social networks (Linares Rendón & Muñoz, 2011). This kind of validation helps students develop personally and socially adjust to the campus. Academic and

interpersonal validation thus affirm who students' individualities. As Rendón (1994) and her colleagues observed, historically underserved students attributed their persistence to the academic and interpersonal validation they received from faculty, staff, peers and family members (Linares Rendón & Muñoz, 2011; Rendón, 1994).

Validation theory is an asset-based model that centers the voices and experiences of historically underserved students (Linares Rendón & Muñoz, 2011; Rendón, 1994). Whereas critical race theory accounts for the impact and prevalence of racism at institutions, it does not provide a framework for examining what types of academic and interpersonal validation support Black transfer student academic goal achievement. Rendón's (1994) validation theory defends that HWIs are largely invalidating and hostile towards Black and other historically underserved students (Linares Rendón & Muñoz, 2011). Validation is a means by which faculty, staff, families and peers can counter the false narratives Black students perceive about their academic and cultural deficiencies. Thus, when Black students are academically and culturally validated, their likelihood to persist and achieve their academic goals increases.

Several studies have relied on validation theory to better understand the experiences and outcomes of historically underserved populations (Linares Rendón & Muñoz, 2011). This body of research includes studies focusing on transfer students and community college students (Linares Rendón & Muñoz, 2011). In their review of scholarship that employed validation as a theoretical framework, Linares Rendón and Muñoz (2011) identified research that demonstrated the importance of low-income, first-generation students receiving validation from a network of institutional agents, peers, and/or family. While the present study does not focus on low-income, first-generation students, it does include historically underserved students (Black students). This study also focuses on transfer students who, studies have shown, can feel unwelcomed and not

included post-transfer (Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Transfer students can benefit from validation at HWIs as validation helps students feel like an integral part of the learning community (Linares Rendón & Muñoz, 2011; Rendón, 1994). This perspective is especially significant for Black transfer students as racially minoritized students do not have the same experiences in HWIs as their White peers (Taylor & Jain, 2017).

Few doctoral studies have employed validation theory to study transfer student experiences (Dandridge-Rice, 2002; Towers, 2020). Towers' (2020) explored what forms of validation transfer students attributed to their graduation success, however, her sampling included only White, liberal arts students. Dandridge-Rice (2002) focused specifically on the experiences of Black vertical transfer students at HWIs to understand factors which influenced their persistence. Her findings reinforce the need for HWI faculty and staff to be informed about how to validate Black transfer students due to several incidences of invalidation that participants shared (Dandridge-Rice, 2002). Transfer students have expressed they want support, resources, and experiences offered to them post-transfer specific to their transfer journey (Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Validation theory offers a heuristic framework for understanding what institutions can provide in response to specific needs of Black transfer students; thereby, helping them with achieving their academic potential and goals.

Although Tinto's work (1975; 1993) is most often used to examine the persistence of students, I wanted to apply a less frequently applied theory to add diversity to the scholarship on transfer students. Dowd et al. (2013) had similar sentiments. In their study on transfer access, Dowd et al. (2013) utilized psychological attachment theory and the concept of institutional agents to understand the important role faculty and staff play in the success of low-income, first-generation transfer students. Although a key study, psychological attachment theory focuses

solely on validation from institutional members. I wanted to expand prior research by examining how peers and family members impacted Black transfer students' experiences as well, which validation theory encompassed. Regarding critical race theory, Jain et al. (2020) used it to discuss how historically underserved students experience transfer differently, as well as the responsibilities that community colleges and HWIs have to support them. While critical race theory accounts for the impact and prevalence of racism at institutions, it does not provide a framework best suited to examine which academic and interpersonal supports were affirming Black transfer students.

Summary

Chapter two provided an overview of the history of community colleges and the literature available on transfer. A limited amount of literature is available regarding transfer students' post-transfer experiences. Far less also has been reported about Black transfer student experiences. This chapter included a review of literature on transfer policy, transfer outcomes, post-transfer experiences, and Black transfer student experiences. The preceding overview provides a contextual understanding to support the purpose of this research.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

This phenomenological study sought to understand how Black vertical transfer students experienced interpersonal and academic validation at HWIs. A qualitative design was chosen to give voice to the lived experiences of Black vertical transfer students, enabling them to express how they made sense of their experiences at HWIs. Drawing from participant voices often provides a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Saldaña, 2013). Rendón's (1994) Validation theory served as the theoretical framework for data analysis. In the remainder of this chapter, the rationale for this study is revisited and the use of qualitative research justified. The process of participant selection, data collection and analysis, is also outlined in this chapter, including visual aids developed to display data and inform findings.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study were:

1. How do Black vertical transfer students experience academic validation at an HWI?
2. How do Black vertical transfer students experience interpersonal validation at an HWI?

Researcher Positionality and Assumptions

I am a Black, first-generation, vertical transfer student that graduated from an HWI. I worked at a community college for five years. It was my interactions with students there that deeply informed my interest in this topic. Studying the literature on transfer has strongly influenced me to examine community colleges in far more critical ways than previously. The work of Herrera and Jain (2013) altered my perception of community colleges the most, not only concerning what community colleges are now, but what they could and should be; particularly for Black students.

Experientially, much of my professional career has been spent working with “non-traditional” students including adult, low-income, and/or racialized students. This work has shaped much of my interest in this topic, as well as my assumptions about the experiences of racialized students at HWIs. While the research supports that Black students are having less than positive experiences at HWIs (Jain et al., 2011), through observation and advocacy efforts, I have reached a similar conclusion. Prior to learning about validation theory (Rendón, 1994), I began to see how the initiated outreach efforts from myself and other colleagues seemed to have a positive impact on the experiences of Black students. Many of these students later transferred to an HWI. Thus, I approached this research with the assumption that HWIs were not welcoming in and of themselves. From observation, however, there were people residing in Black students’ networks who helped them feel welcome and academically capable. Adding to this positionality were comments I heard expressed during a transfer student panel at a community college. Latinx and Black transfer students shared that although they had been heavily involved on our community college’s campus, they were now isolated and anti-social at their HWI. They further noted how large institutions were often intimidating. Equally problematic was that peers at the HWI already had formed friendship groups that many transfers could not easily join.

Before enrolling in a doctoral program, these sentiments stayed with me as I would consider what role the community college could have played in helping these students better prepare for their HWI. I also questioned, however, what was occurring, as well as missing, at the HWI that could have supported these students. Conversations and personal interactions with students ultimately shaped my zeal for this study and interview questions posed. Details about the interview protocol are discussed later in this chapter.

Research Design

A qualitative research design was used to collect and analyze data. Qualitative research allows for a deep understanding of “the meaning individuals ascribe to a social or human problem,” (Creswell, 2014, p. 32). To understand phenomena, both its context and how people make meaning of it, qualitative research creates space for examining multiple lived experiences and the many ways in which those experiences are interpreted (Merriam, 2002). Prior to the rising popularity and academic authority of qualitative research, quantitative research, particularly post positivism, was the dominant form of research (Kim, 2016).

Positivism emerged during the early 19th century as science, technological advances and industry boomed in the Western parts of the world (Kim, 2016). The crux of this paradigm, championed by Auguste Comte, was that ways of knowing outside of qualitative methods, such as human intuition, stories, mysticism, and the like, were inferior and unreliable (Kim et al., 2016). The academy and some Western governments backed positivism, preferring and amplifying policies, agendas, as well as movements that were deemed to be “scientifically based research” (Kim, 2016, p. 3). Positivism attempts to apply a simply answers and remedies where human complexity and context fails to fit in a perfectly prescriptive box. As Kim (2016) states, humans “cannot be understood by testable observation, general principles, and standardized knowledge” (p. 5). Qualitative research, then, expands the inquiry by analyzing and questioning how individuals make meaning from phenomena (Creswell, 2014; Kim, 2016).

Since the goal of this study is to understand how Black vertical transfer students are experiencing validation at HWIs, I employed a qualitative research design to enable participants to speak for themselves about their experiences. In particular, I relied on semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions; a common approach for many qualitative studies

(Creswell, 2014). Qualitative studies do not offer generalized solutions, rather such studies seek to create a richer understanding of an experience (Creswell, 2014). This research seeks to add to the understanding of how Black vertical transfer students are navigating at HWIs. Ideally, then, this research will help better inform practitioners, peers, and Black families about the complexities of being a Black vertical transfer student and what support ought to look like.

Phenomenology focuses on learning about the human experience in the world and deems every experience as worthy of inquiry (Creswell, 2014; Adams & van Manen, 2008). Rooted in both psychology and philosophy, the goal of phenomenological research is to understand how humans assign meaning to phenomena (Creswell, 2014). Husserl is considered to be the founding father of phenomenology (Groenewald, 2004). He argued that humans could not be studied solely traditional scientific means due in part to their consciousness (Groenewald, 2004). Proceeding further, objects could not exist separately and human experiences then can become a reliable form of data (Groenewald, 2014). Phenomenologists thus seek to describe phenomena, rather than explain it or provide absolute solutions (Groenewald, 2014). Given the role of human conscious in shaping meaning, phenomenology holds that researchers cannot interact with the research objectively (Hammersley, 2000, cited in Groenewald, 2014, p. 45). Researchers, then, must bracket their beliefs before data collection to diminish the influence of biases during interviews and analysis (Creswell, 2014).

Study Participants and Ethical Considerations

Creswell (2014) states that for qualitative interviews, ideally six to eight interviewees should be selected. The scope of this study was limited to vertical transfer students who identified as Black or African-American. As this study examined how Black vertical transfer students navigated their post-transfer experiences at an HWI, it was important that race be a

salient identity for students. This realization would allow me to identify if the Black transfer students had transfer experiences that differed from non-racialized transfer students as Jain et al. (2011) found. Only Black vertical transfer students, who had transferred within the past 6 years and were at least 18 years old, were included in the study. These selection criteria were utilized to help ensure students could recall their community college experience, their transition from the community college to an HWI experience, and had been enrolled at an HWI for at least a year. Enrollment, for at least a year at an HWI, ideally would allow for a diverse pool of Black vertical transfers to participate in the study; thereby, offering a wide array of perspectives representing the diversity of Black vertical transfer students.

Snowball sampling was used to identify students which requires the researcher to identify the best cases to be included in the study (Leavy, 2017, pp. 75-80). To identify and select participants, I contacted colleagues who I knew had close relationships with Black community college students due to their roles at a community college. The demographic diversity of participants was similar to the population diversity that mirrored by the diversity of students involved in the Transition to College Project (Rendón, 1994) that led to the creation of validation theory.

Of the nine students who agreed to be contacted about the study, eight agreed to participate. Of these eight volunteers, seven were included in the study. The eighth participant was excluded from the study because he disclosed that he did not identify as Black and did not care about racial identity. Since his racial identity was not salient to him, he was excluded from the study.

The institutional review board (IRB) was founded in 1974 after Congress authorized the National Research Act (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). This Act, and the consequential formation of the

IRB, were designated to protect human participants in scientific research. As noted earlier, IRB approval was granted before proceeding with the study. An Informed Consent form was created for all interviewees to review and sign before participating. All participants could also discontinue their voluntary participation in the study at any time (Creswell, 2014). While the data gathered is kept private and confidential, with participant names and key identifiers not included in this final report, all were provided an opportunity to review key findings, along with two professional colleagues (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018; Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). These steps were used to check for assumptions and accuracy (Creswell, 2014).

During the initial outreach, I explained that I wanted to interview participants for 1-1.5 hours to understand how Black vertical transfer students experienced validation at their HWI. Once participants agreed to be interviewed, we scheduled a 1-1.5 hour Zoom call. All the participants chose a code name that was used for the study, including the labeling of all interviews and transcriptions. This procedure added an additional layer of security and protection of their anonymity so participants could be as candid as possible. All participants were sent a password-protected Zoom meeting link participant agreement that needed to be read and signed before the planned interview date and time (see Appendix A). Participants were informed, during the initial outreach, that they could discontinue participation at any time. All participants received a \$5.00 gift card to Amazon or Starbucks, including the prospective participant who was excluded. Subsequently, all returned agreements were then saved in a password-protected external drive. All documents and data pertinent to this study will be retained by the author for at least 3 years.

Qualitative Data Collection Methods

Data was collected through one-on-one, virtual interviews with participants. The interview protocol included twelve open-ended interview questions written and prepared by the researcher. Appendix C shows the interview question matrix developed to demonstrate how each question aligned with my primary research questions (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). This matrix also illustrates what information I hoped to acquire from each interview question. The first two questions were designed to help build rapport with participants, as none of them had known me well prior to the interview (Glesne, 2014). In addition, the second question revealed how their beliefs about college and their capacities changed over time. Validation processes often result in underserved students accepting themselves as creators of knowledge and contributors to the learning process (Rendón, 1994; Linares Rendón & Muñoz, 2011). Thus, the second interview question, compared to the additional interview questions about validation experiences, helped identify how validation may have impacted the shift in their confidence levels. Questions three through twelve were all created for participants to describe their experiences with validation, or invalidation, and how they made sense of those experiences. A colleague, who has been working in the transfer student field for over twenty years, reviewed and approved the interview protocol before participants were contacted.

Data Analysis

The data collection process concluded once no new data emerged from participants (Miles et al., 2020). For the first cycle, I employed in-vivo coding, which captures key points and themes by writing down participants' direct quotes (Miles et al., 2020). All interviews were transcribed from audio recordings and then read several times. Rather than approaching the data with an a priori theory, an inductive approach was used, allowing patterns to emerge while

transcribing the interviews (Creswell, 2014). This technique aligns with the constructivist worldview, which seeks to “make sense of the meanings others have about the world” (Creswell, 2014, p. 8). During transcription, I highlighted key phrases and memoed in the margins regarding the document codes, questions, and similarities between other interviews. Quotes that described student emotions and perceptions about their transfer experiences, HWI environment, and references to different people that impacted their experience were singled out. After the initial read, I read through each interview again, using a different color pen to memo any new observations. In a separate document, I created a chart that listed the research questions in one column on the left and the coded names of each participant in columns to the right. Direct quotes that corresponded with each question were then listed in rows. This strategy allowed me to review responses to questions side-by-side. Codes, which are short phrases that summarize similarities in the data, were then created in an additional column (Saldaña, 2013). Codes were then organized into patterns based on similarities, frequency, and differences in the data (Hatch, 2022, Saldaña, 2013). A codebook was created to describe and keep track of identified codes and patterns (Saldaña, 2013). This document was modified several times. Saldaña (2013) recommends that a transition process be utilized, between first and second cycle coding, so researchers can be clear about the analysis and the direction of their study moving forward.

Pattern coding was used during the second cycle of coding. In qualitative analysis, pattern coding serves the purpose of condensing a large quantity of data into smaller amounts for better analysis (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). It also aids the analysis process through the data collection process, allowing researchers the cognitive opportunity to identify what similarities and differences are beginning to emerge (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019; Miles et al., 2020). Pattern codes identify themes, explanations, relationships, and concepts (Miles et al., 2020). Returning to

the generated lists of codes, I created a network display of pattern codes that connected to similar codes (Miles et al., 2020). Pattern codes, with lines illustrated, revealed how patterns matched my theoretical framework. After identifying phrases and concept patterns that were the most frequent among participants, I created analytic memos for each pattern; qualifying each one by listing direct quotes from each participant (Miles et al., 2020). Analytic memos allow researchers to report on their findings with brief descriptions about conclusions being developed and the rationale to support them (Miles et al., 2020). Another network display was then developed to show the if-then relationships between the data and the connections to the theoretical framework. During the creation of the second network display, the impact of participant's community college experiences on their post-transfer experiences became apparent.

Trustworthiness/Validity

The validity of the data was measured using triangulation, an examination of outliers, and feedback from the research participants (Miles et al., 2020). Triangulation requires that at least three different measures are employed to assess how well patterns match (Miles et al., 2020). This was done with the use of data collected through individual, one-on-one interviews with participants of diverse majors and backgrounds. I checked for multiple, matching references from participants across genders and validation experiences. This process revealed common, positive experiences with academic and interpersonal validation pre-transfer among all participants. It also revealed the strong influence of peers and families upon participants experiences; as well as the expressed interest by all students in having their families being involved in the transfer and overall academic process.

Outlier cases were examined, rather than dismissed, as such cases offer researchers an opportunity to test the generality of proposed conclusions and assess researcher biases (Miles et

al., 2020). For instance, in this study, Thad (assigned “name”) was an outlier case. He shared similarities with his peers concerning validating experiences at the community college. He was the only one, however, who spoke at length about validating experiences from faculty at his HWI. JB, Mark, and Future (all assigned names) had validating experiences at their HWI as well. In contrast though, they attributed much of their validation to peer relationships.

To evaluate why Thad’s experiences were so markedly different, at the beginning of the interview, I examined his responses to questions about his values and college-going decision. Thad shared that as early as elementary school, he wanted to go to college; viewing sports as an avenue to higher education, not as a means to play professionally. Although he is a first-generation student, he advocated to have his needs met in community college and at the HWI.

To further assess validity level, all participants received a final report of the findings and were asked: if they agreed the summary accurately reflected their experiences (Miles et al., 2020). Also known as “member checking,” gaining feedback from participants in the study requires the researcher to rely on the judgement and evaluation of those who lived through the phenomenon (Miles et al., 2020).

Ethical Issues

The institutional review board (IRB) was founded in 1974 after Congress authorized the National Research Act (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). This Act, and the consequential formation of the IRB, were designated to protect human participants in scientific research. As noted earlier, IRB approval was granted before proceeding with the study. An Informed Consent form was created for all interviewees to review and sign before participating. All participants could also discontinue their voluntary participation in the study at any time (Creswell, 2014). While the data gathered is kept private and confidential, with participant names and key identifiers not included

in this final report, all were provided an opportunity to review key findings, along with two professional colleagues (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018; Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). These steps were used to check for assumptions and accuracy (Creswell, 2014).

Summary

The third chapter summarized the methods and designs of this qualitative study. Research design, my positionality, limitations and delimitations, ethical considerations, as well as validity measures were thoroughly described. This chapter also included the research questions and rationale for each interview question that was created so that readers could see the interview protocol.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand how academic and interpersonal validation impacts the post-transfer experiences of Black students. Results of the data analysis revealed three emergent themes which included: invalidating HWI experiences, HWI peer validation, and pre-transfer validation experiences. Nine subcategories were also identified which included: 1) the absence of HWI faculty relationships; 2) White peer exclusion and campus discomfort; 3) Black transfer students initiating community; 4) peers as motivators; 5) peers as empathic; 6) peers as co-community creators; 7) community college faculty and staff connections; 8) internalized capacity; and 9) family validation. This chapter reveals the recurrent themes from the research after in-vivo and pattern coding of the interviews were complete. These results were also verified with the participants for accuracy in the representation of their collective experiences.

Participant Demographics

To identify participants in the study, snowball sampling was conducted. Participants were connected with me through two Black colleagues that agreed to contact Black transfer students they knew. Interviews were conducted one-on-one through Zoom virtual meeting technology. The audio from each interview was exported and transcribed by the researcher. Only audio was kept to protect the identity of participants as. As an additional means of protection, each participant was also only referred to by their self-selected code name during the interviews.

Participant demographics are reported in Table 1. This chart was created using participant social categories to provide an overview of relevant data (Miles et al., 2020). Seven of the eight participants identified as Black. The eighth participant was excluded from the study as Black racial saliency was a limitation of the study. This was due to research that states racially

minoritized students have different transfer experiences than their White transfer peers (Bensimon & Dowd, 2009; Castro & Cortez, 2017; Jain et al., 2011). To better understand how Black transfer students were experiencing validation at their HWIs, their racial identity needed to be important to them.

Three participants identified as female and four participants identified as male. Each of the participants had been enrolled at a community college for at least two years before transferring to an HWI. All of the students were enrolled in either the community college or the HWI during the COVID-19 pandemic. One participant was still enrolled in the community college when the Governor issued the executive order for all residents of this midwestern state to remain at home (Thometz, 2020). Only three participants mentioned the pandemic and how it impacted their post-transfer experiences. Three participants were still enrolled at an HWI when interviewed. Although not asked during the interviews, all the participants self-identified if they were first-generation college students; that is, their parent(s) did not attend college or complete a college degree. Three participants were first-generation students. Additionally, five of the seven participants completed their associates degree before transferring to their HWI. See Table 1.

Table 1: Demographics and Attributes Table

Name	Racial Identity	Gender	HWI Grad Year	Years at CC	Years at HWI	Total Enrollment Years	1 st Gen
Pink	Black	Female	2021	3	3	6	No
Burgundy1394	Black	Female	2022	2	3	5	Yes
Future RDH	Black	Female	2023	3	3	6 (<i>in progress</i>)	No
Mark	Black	Male	2024	2	1	3 (<i>in progress</i>)	No
JB	Black	Male	2021	6.5	2	8.5	No
Thad	Black	Male	2023	3	1.5	4.5 (<i>in progress</i>)	Yes
Future	Black	Male	2021	3	3.5	6.5	Yes

**All participants were between the ages of 18 and 25 at the time of this study*

Participant Narratives

Pink is a female Black transfer student who was enrolled at a community college for three years. She completed her associates degree before transferring to an HWI to obtain a Bachelor of Arts degree in education. Her baccalaureate degree was completed in 2021 which was three years after she transferred to the HWI. She had been actively involved at the community college, however, she was not involved at the HWI. Both of her parents attended college and instilled in her a value for education and family. Her older sister also attended and completed college which was influential for her as well. When asked about her racial identity, Pink shared that she identified as Black because she felt that term “Black” encompassed the collective experiences of Black people around the world. Race, and her understanding of racism, were a salient part of her identity and perspective about her experiences. She was one of three students who shared invalidating experiences at the HWI and she attributed these negative experiences to racism. Initially, when asked about her experience at her HWI, Pink only alluded to the adverse events. She admitted she was struggling to say something positive. After encouraging her to elaborate, irrespective of whether it was positive, she then shared an experience during clinical hours for her degree:

I experienced racism in one of the schools that I was in and I was telling my [HWI] professor about it and how I didn't want to be there because for comfortability...and it's just so hard explaining racism to White people because sometimes they don't see it as racism because in their mind...and I don't mean to finger point someone else, but it seems that in their minds that racism flat out means, “ Oh I don't like Black people, I don't like Hispanic people,” but there's more indirect racism, how you treat other people without explicitly stating those terms. So, I was trying to explain that and my advisors

who were, like, over the education program were doing everything in their power to not make me change [clinical sites].

During the time of the interview, Pink had already graduated and entered the work force. She also stated the interview provided a sense of release which was also visible in her body language during the interview. In particular, she began the interview somewhat rigidly and answered questions very formally. By the end of the interview, however, she had relaxed on camera, laughed more, and used more expressive hand gestures.

RDH identified as a Black female. Her faith in God was important to her. She completed her Associates degree before transferring to an HWI, where she enrolled in a cohort-model health baccalaureate program. RDH was set to graduate in Fall of 2022 from her HWI. Both her parents, as well as her older sister, attended college and earned degrees. She was involved on the community college campus, yet did not initially join any organizations when she transferred. When asked about her values, she did not specifically cite family as a value, however, she referenced her family throughout her interview. For example, she emphasized how much she valued their support through difficult situations.

Similar to Pink, RDH encountered invalidating experiences with faculty and peers which she attributed to racism. She shared that since high school, she was not interested in having many friends and went to her HWI “strictly on business.” She later joined a student organization for Black women; however, in part due to the ways her White peers influenced her to feel like she did not belong. She said, “if [my White peers] would just interact with me normally I wouldn’t have to seek, you know, like refuge in a Black organization just to feel a bit, a sense of normalcy.” RDH also described how her peers would use slang terms when talking with her, or not interact with her at all. She then shared how it was often her attempting to build relationships

with her White peers. Unfortunately though, she was often excluded from study sessions and group meetings. Thus, while she did not intend to join an organization when she transferred, she eventually joined a race-based organization triggered by her invalidating experiences with peers.

Burgundy1394 identified as a Black female who valued family. Her mother did not attend college, but her older sister did. She attended the community college for two years before completing her associates and transferring to an HWI. Her Bachelors degree was completed in 2022, three years post-transfer. When asked about influential friends in her life, she shared that her friends were majority non-Black because she got “picked on by all the Black kids.” She attended a few high schools in a midwestern state and had the same experiences with being teased by Black students at each location. She said, “they would make fun of me because I had really good hair, or it was always something and I just didn’t mix well, so I didn’t feel comfortable with them so I would migrate somewhere else.” These experiences seemed to still impact her relationships with Black peers as she seemed surprised by a friendship she had formed with a Black colleague from her current job. Describing her friend, Burgundy1394 shared:

She is an African-American woman too and over the year that we’ve known each other I actually enjoy spending a lot of time with her. Because we have different backgrounds even though she identifies as Black too, not African-American, like we have different backgrounds and I actually enjoy like, kind of having those conversations that I can have with her that I can’t have with like some of my other friends. So I actually enjoy that. I feel like that was probably something missing.

Although Burgundy1394 had negative experiences with Black peers in high school, she still identified as Black and did join an organization for Black students while at the community

college. She did not become involved at the HWI post-transfer, yet, she did form friendships with colleagues who were enrolled in the same adult-cohort business program. All of the participants spoke to how their families encouraged them to enroll in college. Burgundy1394 also highlighted the role her fiancé played in her transfer decision. Specifically, he promised her they would become engaged after she completed her Bachelors degree. His poignant promise served as her initial motivation to continue her education.

Mark is a Black male athlete who attended the same community college his mother was employed by. Her employment afforded him a large discount on tuition which influenced his enrollment decision. He also joined an athletic team while at the community college. Instead of completing his associates degree first, however, Mark decided to transfer to an HWI to play on a new athletic team. He had the benefit of transferring with a student who he identified as his best friend: a Black male who was also an athlete. They both then joined the same team at the HWI.

Mark was at the community college for two years before transferring to the HWI. He had been enrolled for a year before taking a break due to financial limits. He intended to re-enroll and finish his degree by 2024. Of all participants, Mark had been enrolled in both the community college and the HWI for the least amount of time. Post-transfer, Mark had validating experiences with professors and peers, many of whom were fellow teammates. He did share that he also identified as an introvert which made the initial process of connecting with peers at the HWI difficult. There was also a period of time, post-transfer, where his mental health suffered due to discomfort.

JB described himself as a “man of faith” before elaborating on his Black racial identity. He spoke at length about how his faith influenced his academic and life journey. His faith seemed to influence his perspective about invalidating experiences he encountered at the

community college and HWI. JB had a very difficult high school experience academically, graduating with a GPA 2.0/4.0. He enrolled in the community college since it was the only college he could access due to his grades. By the time he graduated with his associates, 6.5 years later, JB had a 3.8 GPA; was on the Dean's List; and was involved in several student organizations. He attributed much of his success to his mother's influence and validating experiences with Black faculty at the community college. After transferring, JB completed his bachelors degree in 2 years. Although he was interested in being socially active at the HWI, the COVID-19 pandemic greatly limited his ability to connect with peers during his last year of study. He graduated from the HWI in 2021. Lastly, JB did not identify as a first-generation student.

Thad was another participant who expressed his faith as integral to his identity. He described himself as a Black male who was a "follower of Christ." He also described himself as a "people person". Although he was a first-generation college student, Thad was very comfortable with navigating unknown academic situations. He encountered difficulties with initially enrolling in the community college, but relied on his own research skills and relationships with coaches from high school to later enrollment. He was enrolled at the community college for three years before completing his associates degree and transferring to an HWI. His last year at the community college was impacted by COVID-19. Although he had hoped to transfer to an HWI to play basketball, COVID-19 adversely influenced his ability to play and to record footage necessary for recruiting agents to review. Within a month of graduating from the community college, Thad enrolled in a program at an HWI that was recommended by a peer. At the time of the interview, he had been enrolled at the HWI for 1.5 years. While at the community college, he was engaged in student organizations and sports. At

the HWI though, much of his involvement included interactions with faculty and developing new social networks with peers in his cohort.

Future said he is a “young Black man” who valued family and selflessness. These were values he learned from his mother, father, and older sisters. He was a part of a student organization while at the community college. Future decided to transfer before his associates degree was completed since he felt that “it was time for me to leave” and he “wanted to be around more like-minded people.” Part of his expressed interest in transferring to an HWI was to become heavily involved on the campus in Black student organizations. He, and his best friends from high school, transferred at the same time and attended the same HWI. He completed his bachelors degree three years after transferring. While other participants shared they had difficulty connecting with peers on campus, Future did not. He intentionally sought out Black student leaders and readily attended events for campus freshmen. Future did not speak extensively about faculty that he connected with at the HWI. He did share, however, that there was Black faculty at the community college he connected with, forming a type of bond. The majority of his validating experiences involved interactions with his peers.

Emergent Themes from the Data

After interviews were transcribed, I used in-vivo and pattern coding, as well as a network display to identify emergent themes in the data. The coding process revealed four emergent themes and nine sub-categories addressing the research questions. Reiterating the research questions, those are:

1. How do Black vertical transfer students experience academic validation at an HWI?
2. How do Black vertical transfer students experience interpersonal validation at an HWI?

Analysis of emergent themes and sub-categories follows.

Invalidating HWI Experiences

One of the major themes was “invalidating HWI experiences” which included the absence of meaningful relationships with faculty, White peer exclusion, and transfer students initiating community. Rendón (1994) states that invalidation occurs: when institutions expect students to become involved on their own; when faculty either withhold information or present themselves to be the sole authority in the class; when faculty and students remain divided, lacking meaningful relationships; when students are afraid they may not pass a class; and when cliques are allowed to exist inside classrooms. Participants experienced a separation between faculty and students, fear of failure, and some also had to deal with cliques in their classes.

Absence of HWI Faculty Relationships

Many of the participants did not have meaningful relationships with faculty at the HWI. Six of the seven participants revealed this absence when I asked them to compare their HWI experiences with their community college experiences. Participants also revealed minimal faculty relationships in response to questions about their experiences with invalidation at the HWI and what advice they would offer to faculty and staff at an HWI. Pink and RDH experienced racist interactions with faculty members. When recalling a negative experience she had while doing clinical hours, Pink shared that her teachers were “doing everything in their power to not make me change [sites],” which influenced her to feel dismissed. There were also problematic classroom discussions around race that Pink said her teachers did not address. An example follows:

And, you know, in your classes we talk about our experiences in our clinicals and I just had classmates look at me crazy and my professors just totally dismissed it so I didn't have the best experience at [my HWI].

RDH had negative experiences with faculty members in class that she attributed to racism. RDH also commented that the White faculty were a “tightly woven web where just, you can’t make too much of a difference.”

I’ve experienced, like, from multiple professors...it’s like the same, I guess rejection, humiliation. So like I mentioned before I am in school for a [health major] so for example, like embarrassing you in front of your patient, you know, like certain things that are just in general a no-go. Everything’s supposed to be educational but um, making you feel uncomfortable, saying and doing things, um, saying you did things that you know you did not do-RDH

Pink and RDH shared that they would not recommend their institutions in part due to the adverse interactions with faculty. Mark, JB, Burgundy1394, and Future did not have close relationships with faculty as well, albeit for varied reasons. Burgundy1394 said “it wasn’t comfortable for me to reach out to my teachers and ask for additional help.” When asked what advice she would offer to faculty and staff at an HWI, she said, “just be a little bit more involved and understanding of other people coming into their classes or coming into their schooling um, and take time to get to know them.” Future, JB, and Mark suggested similar advice for HWI faculty:

I would say faculty, just go up to [students] even more, um, whether that’s introducing yourself. Sometimes you might have to do something where you pull a student that you know and have them come talk to the student that they don’t know-Future

So I always feel like it’s kind of nice where you can kind of reach out to individuals early on and kind of talk to them-JB

Push [students] to go to organizations. Make sure they know what organizations are there and available and be a supporter of that, of them going to organizations rather than just leaving [students] alone and seeing what they do-Mark

Mark and JB spoke at length about interactions they had with faculty. They did describe these as being focused on academic matters, not personal ones. Mark's interaction with a faculty member influenced him to believe that faculty "were about their work." JB shared that the HWI environment at large felt like "business as usual." He did have an invalidating experience with a faculty member; however, unlike RDH and Pink, he did not attribute this to negativity.

I struggled and I remember when he told me you should probably take a break and just go to work. So to me, I took that, I'm like okay, Like I'm gonna prove this guy wrong and I remember I passed the class but when I graduated I messaged him with my diploma. He was like, 'oh wow, congratulations.' Like, he's like, 'you proved me wrong.' ...I think he was trying to challenge me in a way it was like he was trying to make me feel like you know, like you can do better than this, so it was almost like tough love and which I kind of appreciate.-JB

Mark was not encouraged to quit school like JB, however, he did have an interaction with a faculty member that he said "made me realize that I needed to focus, really, like this is on me."

Thad was an outlier in the data as he connected well with faculty, staff, and students at the HWI. He shared that he was surprised by his ability to feel comfortable at the HWI which he described as a Christian school. Thad had two advisors who initiated outreach to him every few weeks. One would check on him academically and the other ascertained his mental state and emotional well-being. He also enjoyed being encouraged to talk about faith in class with faculty

and peers. This support helped him to recommend that other Black transfer students be open to connecting with non-Black people at their HWI. Thad stated:

I'd tell [other Black transfer students] don't necessarily make, like, a judgment against people like or an unfair standard. I think like that's, especially being a minority or being a student in any minority or—and I'm talking about in terms too of like gender equality as well—like yeah, don't hold an unfair standard because like people will surprise you if anything.

White Peer Exclusion & Campus Discomfort

The presence of cliques in the classroom is a form of invalidation that does not cast students as valuable members of the community (Rendón, 1994). Community college students, and those who transfer, are considered to be “non-traditional” in higher education (Rendón, 2002; Linares Rendón & Muñoz, 2011). These students often do not find it easy to be involved on campuses (Rendón, 1994). While RDH, Pink, Mark and Future did touch on race and how this impacted their experiences, only Pink and RDH spoke directly to the invalidating experiences with White peers in their cohorts. See the following illustrations:

I didn't really have a lot of peers. I just had classmates-Pink

I would invite [White peers] to hang out and they would always give me an excuse so I started doing the same thing when it came to working together in school-Pink

When it came to like going out for like a girl's day or something, I was never invited for stuff like that so...-Pink

If they would just interact with me normally I wouldn't have to seek you know like refuge in a Black organization just to feel a bit, sense of normalcy-RDH

And like they have never seen a Black person before so they don't even know how to come up with common phrases to sound normal or to approach me so what do they do? They didn't approach me at all like they wouldn't talk to me. It was always me having to be forward you know?-RDH

Pink then shared that she was on campus during protests in response to the murder of George Floyd (Associated Press, 2022). At that time, she saw racist graffiti on the Black Student Center. She did not, however, comment that these insults impacted her negatively; nor did she tell anyone on staff what she witnessed. When asked why, she said "this was after I talked to my professors about my experience in my clinicals so I just felt at that point I was tired of like explaining racism to White people." Similarly, Mark shared that he did witness local residents displaying President Trump flags and Confederate flags near campus; however, he was not bothered by the sight:

I was like oh, um that's interesting and then like it was a couple of trucks I mean [my best friend] saw the gas station by our campus, like this group of truckers with Confederate flags. We was like, 'oh, it's like that?' but I mean nothing bad happened with that side of, that's over there. It's not comfortable, but you know that's what it is-Mark

Future focused the majority of his interest and time into connecting with Black peers and recommended that other Black transfer students do the same.

Just kind of be social and don't be scared to speak to anyone um, king of anyone Black I would say...just be vocal about good and bad things. Voice how you feel and try not to go through things alone-Future

Although he did not share any specific moments of exclusion, his advice to Black students, as well as faculty and staff, suggests that he was aware of the difficult experiences Black students

faced at his HWI. His advice to faculty and staff included the need to do things that were specifically for Black students because there were “things” on campus that were not for Black students.

...and just as much as possible just kind of doing more things that are specific for us. You know there's a lot of things that go on that aren't for us so if there's a, when there are things that are for us it just helps us feel that we do belong here-Future

JB shared that the campus environment felt like all business.

I kind of felt like at [the HWI], it was like a lot of pressure to get this nice internship so I can get this nice job and be able to be successful you know or make a lot of money so that's where I kind of felt it was just like, oh yeah, we're just here to just get a job make a lot of money but it was never really like feeling like oh if you're dealing with any sort of hardship we're here for you-JB

Black transfer students initiating community

Invalidating college environments place the expectation on students to become involved rather than expecting the campus will initiate outreach or help to facilitate connections (Rendón, 1994). A majority of participants initiated their inclusion in communities already established at their HWIs. For participants not able to gain access to peer communities at their HWI, they relied on networks they established before transferring. Mark, Future, Thad, and JB intentionally connected with peers on their campuses. Future transferred with plans to become involved with “like-minded” people at his HWI. He believed that because he was a transfer student and not a traditional HWI freshman, it was his responsibility to connect with his peers.

If you're a traditional freshman then you might get more of a push from like faculty and whatnot but if you're just a transfer you know, you basically transfer as an

upperclassman. You're kind of just there now so it's almost like you don't get that, you know, it's like if you don't know then you won't know. You'll be the person who just goes to class and goes home unless you kind of make the choice to go out there and get involved-Future

Mark had a similar experience. Although he identified as an introvert, he realized soon after arriving to his HWI, that he would have to be more outgoing than he anticipated.

In the beginning it was hard. I'm a very introverted person so like going out to do things especially on the college campus is a little odd I was to say, but it was experience I really hadn't had to have before. Before, my friends were at school and so they grew up with me and then track at my junior college; they were just there. So having to go out to do that was uh, I didn't know I was very alone at first...so it was, it was hard so I had to push through that, I had to push through that real bad-Mark

Excluding Mark, the participants had been involved in student organizations at their community college. Mark was an athlete, so he did not join any student organizations. Post-transfer, JB, Pink, RDH, and Future reached out to Black student organizations. Of these four participants, all but Pink joined a Black student organization. Pink did not because she said the location where many of the Black student organizations were housed was often closed when she attempted to visit them. Although RDH had been involved in a Black student organization at her community college, she did not initially have plans to join an organization at the HWI. She eventually, however, joined a Black women's organization on her campus out of need.

I didn't really want to get involved in the organizations [at the HWI]. I felt like it was useful at that time [at the community college] and I felt like I wouldn't need it at the university but um I was clearly wrong because I didn't know I was going to face the

things that I was going to face so who knows maybe I wouldn't need an organization if I was in [another university].-RDH

When asked what advice they would recommend to Black transfer students, five of the participants recommended students join organizations. Even Mark and Burgundy1394, who did not join student organizations at the HWI, made this suggestion:

Get in more organizations um if you're an athlete as I definitely understand how hard it is just because it's time consuming and you're tired but try to get in as many organizations as you can if you're like allowed to-Mark

I would say probably join like groups because that's the only way you're going to know like who's going to really support you and who's going to have the same ideas and goals as you-Burgundy1394

I do suggest that you find a student organization that represents the values that you have as a person whether that be a Christian organization um something that reflects your heritage that way you can have a sense of belonging and somebody that will come through for you when you do when you need somebody-RDH

Thad and Pink were the only participants who spoke of specific HWI programs that assisted them upon arrival. Pink said there was a program specifically for transfer students on her campus. In particular, advisors would reach out through phone calls and emails to keep transfer students informed about campus events and activities.

They would just call to check on us. It would be random phone calls or emails or survey like did you find where this building is or this path, just stuff to help us be more engaged with the community so stuff like that.-Pink

Thad also had a campus support system assigned to him, although it was related to his degree program, not him being a transfer student. Hence, excepting these two participants, none of the other transfer students spoke of any HWI resources, faculty, or staff that initiated outreach to them.

Peer Validation at the HWI

The second major theme that emerged from the data was the validation participants experienced from peers at the HWI. Out-of-class experiences have been found to be as important as what occurs inside of classroom (Rendón, 1994). Thus, interpersonal validation can help students feel capable of learning in the environment and can lead to students being involved on their campuses (Barnett, 2011; Linares Rendón & Muñoz, 2011). For the participants in this study, peers played a very important role in their experiences at their HWI. Specifically, peers served as motivators, empathes, and co-community creators. Participants who were unable to connect with communities at their HWI relied on peer networks they established before transferring. With the exception of Thad who did experience academic validation from faculty and staff, all other participants sought and received support from their peers while at their HWIs. When I asked Future about HWI faculty who helped him feel affirmed, Future responded that he believed that faculty were not concerned about transfer students feeling validated or included on the campus. He stated that instead of faculty helping students be involved, peers performed this function:

In terms of in terms of professors I don't think that they're uh worried about that too much. Yeah, I would say most of that push to get involved and comfort. I think we as students kind of do that for each other-Future

Peers as Motivators

Peers were able to motivate participants to finish their academic studies. JB shared in detail how meeting students at a Black student organization motivated him academically.

A lot of the kids were at the school [in the Black organization] and they were very dedicated and you know um working and maintaining their school grades so I learned from them and I remember where I was working 40 hours a week and I was taking five classes and I was like yeah like if he could do it I could do it too so that was like this person doing this?! Like there's no excuse why I can't do it and just from that alone I think it helped me um tremendously-JB

Mark also shared, two of his teammates helped him to feel positive about his ability to be successful at the college. For instance, when Mark was trying to adjust to the differences between the community college and his HWI, teammates offered advice for how to navigate through his feelings. A teammate offered:

So he's like just focus in and you'll get used to it you know focusing on what your work and what you want to get out of um coming here-Mark

Burgundy1394 did not make many new connections at her campus, however, she did connect with a colleague from work who was enrolled in the same program. Her co-worker became a peer she could share experiences with, and this co-worker also served as competition which further motivated Burgundy1394. Continuing further:

So my other friend who was doing the class with me, she was the one who graduated from the cohort with me um, she actually finished like a month before me because I did end up taking a break but it was more of like getting across that finish line. Um just the reassurance that like once we do this, like, we know at the beginning, I didn't think like a

degree would get me anything. It's just a piece of paper in my mind right. In the beginning. Now that I've gone and got my associates and like I'm going through I'm working with [my job] like you can see that more doors are opening up so I'm like okay I need to get this degree, I *need* to get this degree so just constantly like communicating with like my little small circle that I have like that helped with, you know, getting across the finish line-Burgundy1394

RDH did not establish connections with peers at her HWI, but she did have a network of peers she met at her community college. She remained in contact with these peers and their accomplishments motivated her.

I guess the friends that I have now um are more like the women, they have characteristics that I would like to have so I, for example, have a married friend. I would like to be a married woman, you know. I have a friend that graduated college, I'm about to graduate college. And they all pray for me and encourage me to get closer to God and when I'm off the right, when I'm off track they kind of like just bring me back in-RDH

Thad was motivated by his peers as well, although he shared that he always seeks to connect with people for a purpose beyond just social interactions. He was enrolled in an adult program and spoke to how he enjoyed the format more than being “a traditional student on campus;” in particular, the peers he has been able to connect with having similar interests and passions. Thad continued:

I started developing relationships with them and I'm seeing too like at [the HWI] because they're in business as well, like, they're starting their own businesses in school and they have their own things running outside of school and I'm like oh man! Like we bouncing ideas off each other and stuff like that too.

I had a lady in my other class she was like she was like 59, 60 years old finishing her degree at [the HWI]. And she was an African-American lady and she was like I'm just doing this so my daughter can see me finish school. So then she'll try to go to school and she was like I'm trying to get [my daughter] in this program so it's like, I'm like man she breaking her own generational curse right there like and not letting her age dictate like, you know, her outcome or um trying to inspire so like yeah that has been so interesting.

While at the HWI, Thad initiated reaching out to the college president. I asked what or who helped him navigate the campus to which he responded, "I'm always that person. I'm like I want to talk to the boss like even though you're not the boss [referring to the president], I still want to talk to the boss." Similar to JB, Thad shared that "I've always noticed that from being younger. It's like I want to listen to older people and get on their wisdom." JB did not say that he wanted older people around him, however, he did state that he valued intelligent people. Regarding his high school experiences, he said, "I always wanted to associates myself with people that were a lot smarter so I can be able to learn from them."

Both Thad and JB found value in connecting with people who they believed possessed something they did not have in similar, intellectual measure. Additionally, JB and Thad, as well as RDH (assigned name), identified a strong faith in God. JB and RDH, however, did not speak to academically validating experiences as Thad did. Based on the data, Thad attended an HWI that connected with his personal values of faith. His institution attended to him holistically, offering wraparound supports with individual outreach and engaging his faith in the classroom. He was also able to connect with like-minded peers who shared similar business interests as well as his faith. The inclusion of Thad's faith at his institution seems to have been a contributing factor to his unique experience compared to the others. To test for the value of like-minded

peers, I examined the responses of all participants and found all of the participants spoke of valuing peers that shared similar ways of thinking.

Future eventually joined a fraternity at his HWI but prior to joining, he valued the hope that fraternity brothers would inspire in him and others. After joining, his fraternity brothers offered him accountability to stay focused on his academic goals:

I think [the fraternity members] were always uh really positive and influential in terms of uh, you know, just giving hope that we can all succeed, uh and then within, once joining my fraternity, uh that put me in an environment of, you know, that took my net [*sic*] of accountability even higher-Future

Peers As Empathic

Participants valued having peers who were empathic. Since they were having similar academic experiences, participants enjoyed having peers who could understand how they were feeling and what they were going through while at the HWI. Burgundy1394, for example, reached out to her colleague, enrolled in the same program, to vent and to ask questions.

I did have one friend who was working with me who was actually going through the same program as me and it was nice to have her, you know, have someone I can vent to about either the classes or you know if I need someone to like review my papers or something-Burgundy1394

Similarly, RDH found validation with “minority” peers who were experiencing racism in the same department. She did not say she formed close connections with them. These peers, however, did share their experiences with RDH and provided evidence some of the teachers were treating racially minoritized students differently than White peers.

Like we [Black students] have stories that are mirrored to experiences that we've had and so I know that there is um past evidence of other minority students not passing licensing [needed to advance professionally]-RDH

JB and Thad also appreciated having peers who understood their academic experience. JB connected with peers at the gym as a form of destressing. Conversely, Thad noticed that in his academic program, many of the adults in the cohort were racially minoritized. He described the presence of diverse peers as a “hidden gem” of the program. They stated respectively:

I would go to the gym so I met a lot of people that are similar to me it was just like oh yeah we go to the gym to cope with our problems-JB

A hidden gem of being in an adult program is the crowd is older which okay, cool, we might be at different points in our life but I noticed though too in the adult program it's more it's more and mainly minority students...because like oh we're all struggling even though we're at different areas. So that's been very revealing and that's made it feel like home where I'm like oh, I can relate to these students in my class, even though they're older in the adult program-Thad

Within his cohort, Thad was able to connect with a specific student who also worked for the college. This student/staff member offered Thad understanding, advice, and his home to visit.

He's been amazing because it's like he has like an apartment in the building. They pay for, like, him to live there as well, and he has like an extra bedroom. But, like, if something going on at my home or something, you know, he'll be like ‘hey, come over, let's talk’ and then he knows what I'm going through because he's a student as well-Thad

Peers as Co-Community Creators

Future, Mark, and Thad spoke of how peers either invited them into the campus community, or helped them sense being part of the campus. They also shared that peers provided navigational support, shared resources, and helped them to connect to networks on campus. Future said that his ability to find resources and staff on campus was directly related to the support he received from his peers:

I'm then now reaching out to, you know, faculty for what they can bring. But it doesn't even happen if I don't run into those student leaders first-Future

I'm finding out about these important people who work for the school through students who are part of [student organizations]-Future

Mark's teammates helped him understand the community surrounding the college and encouraged him to join campus activities. He knew a few teammates before transferring to the HWI and these peers offered advice before Mark arrived.

But my friends they made sure, because they had gone away already, like, 'yeah you need this this and this and this is how something's gonna be. Like you need to get acclimated,' and stuff like that. So my friends really taught me and also told me, they showed me the way, how it is-Mark

Pink said many of her peers were just classmates, not friends, but she did connect well with another Black peer in her cohort. The two would remind each other of assignment due dates and study together. Neither Burgundy1394 or RDH had peers who served as co-community creators. JB did have groups of peers he connected with through student organizations and the gym; however, he did not specifically say how these students helped him beyond providing motivation and understanding. While every participant did not have a peer community they were a part of,

all participants valued having a connection with at least one peer as they navigated their transfer experiences. A majority of the participants recommended that Black transfer students join student organizations on their campuses so that they had a like-minded community.

Pre-Transfer Validation Experiences

This study sought to understand how Black transfer students experienced academic and interpersonal validation at their HWIs. Although the focus was on post-transfer validation, what also emerged from the data was the validation that participants experienced pre-transfer. One of the key elements of validation requires that institutional agents initiate outreach and connection with students (Rendón, 1994; Linares Rendón & Muñoz, 2011). With the exception of Thad, six of the participants did not experience academic validation at their HWIs. Three participants experienced interpersonal validation with peers at their HWI, although four of the participants did not. All of the participants, however, spoke of interpersonal and academic validation they experienced pre-transfer. In particular, participants spoke enthusiastically of their community college experiences. At the HWI, many of the participants noted peers who validated them pre-transfer; though participants also alluded to faculty and family who validated them.

Community College Faculty and Staff Connections

Participants identified a faculty or staff member they were able to connect with personally. Some of these were faculty who connected with them in the classroom, while other participants formed bonds with student advisors and counselors at the college. Concerning the faculty relationships with students, participants shared that faculty initiated outreach which is a key element of academic validation (Rendón, 1994). For instance, Pink said that her time at the community college was the best years of her college experience:

So my best college years were honestly at [the community college]. I made the most of it. I did organizations. I did clubs and organizations. Had a lot of friends. My guidance counselors were amazing.

Continuing further, Pink met a Black, female counselor in the hallway at her community college. After one conversation, Pink began to meet with this counselor more frequently. She also connected with a Black, male faculty member. She considered both the counselor and faculty member to be her “backbone” while at the college.

They were like my backbone, both of them. Both of them. I would not have been able to make it. Mentally [Black counselor] kept me on my books and [Black faculty member] showed me clubs and organizations are pretty cool so, that’s what I did.-Pink

Future and Mark reflected on faculty and staff members who kept them motivated and accountable while enrolled at the community college. Future said that the support received from staff helped him, and other students, feel like they could “do” college.

It was not much [Black faculty]. There was a few though that kept our spirits up and kept us accountable and, you know, just kind of give us that push that we're like meant to be doing [college] even if it didn't feel like it...I think we slowly began to feel like that this is what we were meant to do.

Mark appreciated faculty members that helped him think positively and seemed to care about him, not merely his work. He indicated a faculty member who was always positive during their interactions. He also had a boss who was considerate when he became sick during work hours.

Every time I talk to him it was just positive. I was like I was ready to [leave school and] do some work. Like he's like, ‘yeah this sucks but like you know you got to get through it

and it's going to be better in the end.' And he really motivated me in that it wasn't even like anything specific, it was just the positivity of what he was saying, you know-Mark Mark further noted: she was my boss at my student aide position and it was just very easy to work with her. You know, it was really, I was like sometimes I felt sick she was like you can go home just do what you need to do to be okay. That means a lot to me.-
Mark

Regarding JB, there were a few Black men at the community college that he described as being “inspirational.” One of the Black faculty members taught a class JB took. Rather than leaving immediately when class was over, JB stayed to talk with the professor. This professor, and other faculty, talked with JB about life. He thus perceived that many of the faculty and staff at the community college were willing to make time for him.

[The community college] has always been home to me because I think the people I got to meet and the way I was able to grow from my time at [the community college] it was like home. Like it was one of those things where I met, I knew a majority of the teachers [and] the counselors and they were always very welcoming; very open door. You can always, you know a lot of times you know if they weren't busy they always make time for you to give you advice-JB

Burgundy1394 also valued staff members who would listen to her and offered her advice. It was because of an invitation from a faculty member that she joined a student organization on campus. She also confirmed she was invited into the community at her college by this faculty member as well.

[Black faculty member] had the club going for the Black student union. And he would just tell me like come after school. Come after your classes and um it was nice to get to

know other black people since I had a really bad experience. Getting to know other Black students there who were kind of going through the same thing that I was going through. Different goals, but still going through what I was going through and then I became [a leader in the organization]. So it was nice to plan events and get to know everybody, so it was, it was heartfelt and there's connections going on that I could appreciate.-

Burgundy1394

RDH was also closely connected to a staff member who helped her be involved in a club at the community college. She said the staff member “reaffirmed my abilities.” She also shared that faculty at the community college “took the time to get to know you.”

Internalized Capacity

Many participants entered their community college with uncertainty about what they wanted to do academically. Some were unsure about their ability to do well in college or at a university; thus, the community college served as a “practice” arena for the university. By the time students transferred, however, they had clarity about their academic focus and confidence in their abilities. Future said he went to a community college because he was unclear about his plans after high school and “didn’t want to make a huge jump” to a university. Burgundy1394 and RDH shared similar thoughts:

So I was like okay I really don't have any real plans. Let's just go to a university. Let's just go to [the community college] because that was like the only thing that I knew that was close and convenient—Burgundy1394

I wasn’t ready to like go away from home [and] it was like a safety net-RDH

Although Burgundy1394 began community college without definitive plans, she was motivated by the promise of an engagement from her then-boyfriend. Subsequently, though, she shared in

her interview that after completing her associates degree, she was no longer motivated by his engagement promise. Instead, she discerned the value of furthering her education and appreciated the arduous work she had completed thus far.

But it was more than just an engagement, after I got my associates, because like I worked hard for this, now I want to see it all the way through so I can have a better opportunity.-

Burgundy 1394

JB went to a community college primarily since he did not have many options due to his grades in high school. Thad and Mark entered community college with plans to enroll in their athletic program; yet, neither enrolled with a specific academic focus in mind. Pink did not mention feeling any lack of confidence or clarity about community college. Her parents told her before college, she had to complete a bachelors degree. She began at the community college level only because it was affordable and would allow her the opportunity to work while going to school.

I asked participants specifically why they chose to transfer to an HWI. Future, RDH, Burgundy1394, Pink, and JB shared throughout their interviews about the impact of their community college experiences. Future transferred because he now wanted “a bigger challenge” and he believed that “I could make a bigger impact at [the HWI].” RDH said she transferred when she had finally determined her major. She also stated that she learned how to speak up for herself at the community college:

I'm very like timid you know and introverted. So I'm not disrespectful but there are times where even adults will try and overstep with your being, you know, 18, 19, 20. Or even now me being 24, and I know I can disagree with somebody without being disrespectful. But for me to instantly be silenced you know? I can now know that, you know, my voice is powerful... I learned that community college-RDH

Like RDH, JB became more confident about his identity. He also improved academically.

Although he entered the community college with a 1.8/4.0 GPA, he graduated with a 3.8/4.0 GPA and was on the Dean's List.

Just going to [the community college] was one of those places I felt it helped me um be able to learn or relearn-JB

I think at the end of the day you have to be yourself and be true to yourself. And I think that was one thing that I learned from [the community college]-JB

Thad described his experience at a community college as “hard to replicate” because of the “energy” he experienced while there. This feeling was due to connections he made with peers and staff. Thad's responses during the interview, however, did not suggest he internalized his ability to be academically successful at the community college. Thad *entered* the community college already convinced that he wanted to go to college, although he was unclear about his academic degree. It was not until *after* he transferred that he chose a major. Compared to the other participants, Thad and Pink were already certain about their academic ability based on their responses to interview questions.

Family as Validation

Validation theory (Rendón, 1994) posits that academic and interpersonal validation can help racially minoritized students succeed in college. Interpersonal validation can come from faculty, staff, peers, and/or family. A commonality among participants was the validation they received from their families before transferring. Participants' parents encouraged or mandated they attend college due in part to valuing higher education. Validation theory (Rendón, 1994) emphasizes that one of the six, necessary elements of validation, is that it is an ongoing process throughout the entirety of the college years. Participants in this study all had family members

who validated their ability to be successful in college before enrollment, pre-transfer, as well as post-transfer. Participants valued support from their families. Support included money, advice, check-ins, and physically showing up to their campus when needed. JB developed a love for education due to his mother. As he shared, if it was not for her, he was not sure how he would have remained in school:

But you know a lot of...there was people who discarded me but my mom was, she was always there for me. She supported me. I think if it wasn't for her, I probably would have not found it in me to keep going to school-JB

Future, RDH, and Pink all had parents or siblings who encouraged them to enroll in college.

My family just always wanted me to be the best me possible. So they just kind of pushed that idea of college and then I just ran with it-Future

My sister graduated as a nurse from community college so that was a big, you know influence right there. Me being 17 and like you know my parents wanting me close to home; not ready for me to go away you know just to like help myself like mature a little bit-RDH

My mom has a Bachelors degree, my dad has a master's degree, so I knew one of my parents' expectations [was] the minimum I had to have was a Bachelors, even if I started at [the community college]. So, yes, it was something that was talked about heavily in my house-Pink

Thad was encouraged by his family to go to college, albeit not directly. Rather, it was seeing his family struggle financially that encouraged Thad to go to college.

I would always see how like much they struggled, or they had really hard jobs that they didn't really actually love. So that impacted me being like well I want to make a means

for myself. And I want to um, very early I was like I wanna take this further and like break the generational curse in a sense-Thad

Thad entered college with a belief in his academic abilities, but his family also played a major role in his pursuit of education.

Burgundy1394 was encouraged by her mother to go to college. Her mother said she had to choose between going to the military, getting a job, or going to college. Burgundy1394 chose college; however, it was Burgundy1394's fiancé that validated her academic acumen the most. Her fiancé was enrolled in college as well, albeit in a different school and program. He regularly provided support and encouragement to her.

When I do feel like I'm going to get ready to give up or I don't want to continue he's always like let's do this. Like he was going to school for his masters um so like he's going through classes as well. And he's like well I haven't given up like you don't have to give up either. Like you can still do this so just having him be there and supporting me. And us going through that together was pretty good too-Burgundy1394

When asked what advice they would offer to Black families to support Black transfer students, Thad stated:

just listening if they are capable of doing it or giving me advice. if [they can't] I can't even ask that out of them and it'll be unfair to me. So it's just give me what you can, if you do care about me-Thad

Burgundy1394 shared similar sentiments about the support Black families should offer, even if they are not sure how to help.

So if going to school is something for them, even if you don't know like, there's Facebook boards for mothers and stuff. There's different groups that you can be a part of to make

sure you can be supportive even if you don't know how to. Then, you can try to for your children-Burgundy1394

Of the participants who initially questioned their ability to do well in college, they still initiated enrollment in college due primarily to the validation from their families. Throughout their academic journeys, participants still wanted to receive validation and support from them.

Summary

This chapter provided a demographic profile of each of the participants, as well as brief narratives from them. Emergent themes and sub-categories were shared and supported using direct quotes from participants. After analyzing the data, emergent themes included invalidating HWI experiences, peer validation at the HWI, and pre-transfer validation experiences. A majority of the participants spoke more enthusiastically about their pre-transfer experiences, providing examples of academic and interpersonal validation from peers, faculty, staff, and/or family members. HWI experiences were largely non-personal with faculty and staff, although some participants did find community with peers. The next chapter will provide my interpretations of the data, limitations of the study, and implications for practice, interpersonal relationships, and future research.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

This chapter provides a summary of this research: key themes and subcategories that emerged; the implications and limitations of this study; recommendations for practice and interpersonal relationships; and offers recommendations for further research.

Summary of the Study

Using validation theory (Rendón, 1994) as a theoretical framework, the purpose of this study was to understand how Black vertical transfer students experience academic and interpersonal validation at HWIs. This study places Black transfer student voices at the center of the research, highlighting their experiences; rather than merely their academic outcomes.

A qualitative research design was utilized which included one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with seven participants who identified as Black, vertical transfer students. They also transferred to an HWI in the Midwest within the past six years. An eighth participant was not included in the study as he disclosed that he did not identify as Black, nor did he care about race. After analyzing data collected with in-vivo and pattern coding, three themes and nine sub-categories emerged. These themes and sub-categories include:

- 1) invalidating HWI experiences (the absence of HWI faculty relationships, White peer exclusion and campus discomfort, Black transfer students initiating community)
- 2) HWI peer validation (peers as motivators, peers as empathic, peers as co-community creators) and
- 3) pre-transfer validation experiences; (internalized capacity, community college faculty and staff connections, family validation).

Two research questions guided this study:

1. How do Black vertical transfer students experience academic validation at an HWI?

2. How do Black vertical transfer students experience interpersonal validation at an HWI?

This chapter identifies implications from the emergent themes and sub-categories in the data, the study's limitations, recommendations for practice and interpersonal relationships, as well as offers recommendations for further research.

Findings from the Study

Transfer students frequently find it difficult to encounter community and be successful post-transfer (Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Black students often feel ostracized on HWI campuses (Harper, 2013; McFeeters, 2006). Studies have shown, however, that Black students are able to persist at HWIs and accomplish their academic goals when they have supports such as interpersonal relationships with faculty (Bonner, 2010) and peers (Harper, 2013). Scant academic scholarship has highlighted Black transfer student experiences at HWIs. Using validation theory (Rendón, 1994) as a theoretical framework, this study increases understanding about the nature of in-and-out of class relationships impacting Black transfer students specifically.

HWI Academic Invalidation

Although validation is paramount for racialized students, all but one Black transfer student experienced academic invalidation at the HWIs. Invalidating experiences included exclusion from peers and faculty, racially hostile classrooms, cold and competitive classroom environments, and/or the lack of initiated outreach from faculty and peers. These adverse events are in concert with research by McFeeters (2006). In that study, Black transfer students had difficulty transitioning to and through their HWIs, due in large part, to the hostility from some faculty and the overall, unwelcoming campus climate.

Two participants, Pink and RDH, spoke of racially hostile classroom environments and intentional exclusion by many White peers. Pink, for example, was able to connect with the only

additional Black peer in her cohort. RDH indicated that she relied on the peer network she established at her community college, but that she did converse with other racialized students about her experiences. At the time of the interview, Pink had already graduated and RDH was set to graduate in the Fall of 2022. Although both were able to accomplish their academic goals, the invalidating experiences with their peers and faculty negatively convinced them to believe that post-transfer experiences for other Black students would be difficult. When asked about advice she would offer to Black transfer students, Pink said:

the key is just to have perseverance because if you fall victim to people trying to bring you down or just having to force people to see the value in you, like you will, you're aiming to be someone else rather than just living your truth and meeting your goals-Pink

Similarly, RDH resolved that Black transfer students needed to understand that the HWI experience "is not exactly what they think it's going to be, but to just keep going because there is something that you want to achieve."

The absence of interpersonal connections with faculty at the HWIs is related to research by Rendón (1994) and Linares Rendón & Muñoz (2011) who describe these gaps as academic and interpersonal invalidation. In such campus environments, Rendón (1994) found the following: there is a divide between faculty and students; students fear failing the class(es); due in part, to negative perceptions; the general climate of the campus is cold; and there is an expectation that students become involved in campus activities on their own. Six of the seven participants noticed a difference between their HWI campus and their community college. JB, for example, said his HWI campus "felt like you, you know, just to get ready to work. Everything is just business as usual." Future voiced a similar issue. When asked about how faculty validated him at the HWI, Future said that he did not feel like faculty were concerned

about validating students. Reflecting on the experiences of the participants, HWI faculty, staff, and in some cases, peers are not concerned about transfer students; much less Black transfer students. Participants also had no transfer specific support programs available to them. Were it not for their own initiative, or the outreach of their peers, participants would have gone through their post-transfer experiences on campus alone.

HWI Peer Validation

Interpersonal validation from peers occurred for six of the participants. For the seventh participant, she relied on interpersonal validation from peers connected with pre-transfer; thus, demonstrating the importance of validation from peers for participants. Interpersonal validation included peers serving as empathes, motivators, and co-community creators. Participants' ability to create or join communities at their HWIs connects with Rendón (1994), Linares Rendón and Muñoz (2011), as well as Harper's (2013) research. Rendón (1994) as well as Linares Rendón and Muñoz's (2011) research stated that when non-traditional students, whom include community college and racialized students, are validated, they are then able to socially adjust relatively well on college campuses. Harper's (2013) research further found that Black students were often supported by the agency of their Black peers at HWIs. Thad, Mark, JB, Pink, Burgundy1934, Future, and RDH all had at least one peer who helped them navigate through their post-transfer experiences. While Harper (2013) emphasized the role that Black peers at HWIs play in supporting their Black peers, Mark and Thad believed Black transfer students should connect with all peers; regardless of race. This viewpoint was a surprise as I did not expect participants to encourage connections with non-Black peers.

Mark and Thad also identified as athletes which suggests they could have been more accustomed to developing meaningful relationships with diverse peers. The primary connections

Mark made at his HWI were with his teammates or their friends. While enrolled at the community college, he also shared that all his friends were athletes. Thad played basketball in high school and college. In addition to being an athlete, Thad shared that he had always been curious about people and sought wisdom from others at a very young age; irrespective of race. These contributing factors could have influenced Mark and Thad's recommendations to Black transfer students.

While participants did not express unanimously whether they needed to be solely connected to Black peers on campus, all of them valued having a connection with at least one peer who could understand their academic experiences. Participants thus valued peers with the same current, collegiate experiences; however, they did not talk about wanting or needing to connect with other Black transfer students specifically. Future and RDH recognized that as Black transfer students, their experiences were different than students who began their studies at the HWI; although neither of them sought to identify other Black transfer students on campus. Future, for instance, merely wanted to connect with Black students in general. While RDH joined a Black women's organization after being excluded from her program cohort. Participants viewed, then, transfer as something they *did*, not an identity they possessed. Instead, their identities as Black college students were more salient for participants. The preceding self-images were expressed by: their membership in Black student organizations on campus; their recommendation to other Black transfer students to join student organizations; and their relationships formed on campus.

Pre-Transfer Validation

Participants' ability to initiate connections on their own and persist, suggested they had been validated academically and interpersonally before they transferred. This conclusion was

supported by all participants sharing at-length about the academic and interpersonal experiences they had pre-transfer at their community colleges. As noted previously, validation often acts as a catalyst for students to recognize their own academic potential and skills; thereby internalizing their ability to be successful (Rendón, 1994). Further support is evident when considering the transformation between when students first enrolled at their community colleges and when they transferred out. Five of the seven participants spoke on how the community college was their choice because it was practical, safe, and a space for figuring out what they wanted to do academically. By the time they transferred, these students had clarity about their academic future and how the HWI would serve them. For example, Burgundy1394 enrolled in the community college as an alternative to obtaining a job immediately after high school graduation. Her mother had told her she either needed to go to school, get a job, or join the military. While her studies at the community college began as an alternative to the workforce or military, she said that by the time she completed her associates degree, she was proud of the work she accomplished. Although she was initially inspired to continue her education due to a marital proposal after graduation, she later aspired to earn her bachelors degree due to her increasing self-confidence and promising academic skill set; both of which were nurtured at the community college.

Validation experiences pre-transfer included meaningful relationships with faculty and staff that initiated outreach. These also included relationships with peers and family members who were still involved in students' post-transfer experiences. Staff and faculty, at the community colleges, initiated outreach with students in and outside of the classroom; sharing personal stories or advice. They also encouraged students to become involved in student organizations on campus. Additionally, peers provided validation for participants by helping to connect them with resources and preparation for transfer. For example, RDH relied on her pre-

transfer peers for support at her HWI; while Mark, Future, and Thad said their peers affected their transfer school decisions. As mentioned earlier, the majority of participants did not connect with faculty and/or staff at their HWI as they did at their community colleges; however, they placed a strong value on the relationships they developed pre-transfer. Participants described their community colleges as feeling like “home” and a “community” versus their HWI, which offered very little validation. It seems reasonable to conclude, then, there is a correlation between validation that participants experienced pre-transfer and their ability to navigate at their HWIs; absent the initiated support and care they received at community colleges.

Family was an integral part of interpersonal validation participants experienced pre-transfer. When asked about what advice participants would offer to Black families, all participants spoke of wanting support from their families by any means. Thad, for instance, who had the most positive post-transfer experience, recognized his family did not understand his college experience. Although his experience was positive, he still acknowledged that college was difficult and comments from his family lacked informed understanding and appreciation. In response to what advice he would offer to Black families, he stated: “just give me what you can if you do care about me.” His comment expresses what many of the participants shared noting support was desired and expected in any form from family. Throughout the interviews, participants spoke of advice they received from family pre- and post-transfer: transfer support that came in the form of transportation, and helping students pack; parents providing their physical presence on campus when needed; and the role families played in participants enrolling in college at the outset. As one example, referring to his mother, JB said, “I think if it wasn’t for her I probably would have not found it in me to keep going to school.” Burgundy1934 also shared that her fiancé encouraged her a great deal, not only to finish her associates degree, but

then obtain her bachelors degree. He reinforced how having degrees would favorably shape their future family.

Ample research identifies the important role of interpersonal relationships with peers and faculty/staff for racialized and underserved populations' success (Pérez & Ceja, 2010; Nuñez & Elizondo, 2013; Rendón, 1994; 2002; Linares Rendón & Muñoz, 2011). Validation from families, however, was equally as important and impactful as validation from peers and faculty/staff to the study's participants. Lukszo and Hayes' (2020) concur by reporting families and peers served as critical supports for transfer students.

Implications of the Study

This study's findings provide several implications for institutions, families, students, and faculty. Practical implications include increased enrollment and retention of Black transfer students at HWIs, as well as decreasing the racial transfer equity gap for Black students. Due to decreased post-high school enrollment in colleges (Kilgore, 2022), HWIs and other institutional types find value in transfer students due in part to their tuition dollars, as well as racial and socioeconomic diversity (Acosta et al., 2021). In 2020, 6.2 million students were enrolled in community colleges, of which 2.5 million, or 40%, were Black (American Association of Community Colleges, 2022). In 2021-2022, vertical transfer enrollment overall decreased by 9.7% which represents a loss of 86,000 transfer students (National Student Clearinghouse Resource Center, 2022). Between 2020 and 2021, Black vertical transfer student enrollment at universities fell by -16.4%, a total of 54,800 students (National Student Clearinghouse Resource Center, 2022). This reduction means that HWIs lost tuition dollars from 54,800 Black transfer students. It also indicates that 54,800 Black transfer students who intended to earn at least a bachelors degree were not able to accomplish their goals. Such a decline also reveals that the

transfer enrollment gap between White and Black transfer students is growing wider, increasing transfer inequities for Black students (American Association of Community Colleges, 2021b). It seems reasonable to conclude that HWIs cannot afford to provide insufficient support for Black transfer students. This study has identified some strategies for how HWIs can connect with Black transfer students and help them navigate their HWI. Furthermore, a deeper understanding of Black transfer student experiences at HWIs, such that this research provides, can create opportunities for HWIs to develop transfer support that is identity conscious. As the results indicated, Black transfer students valued their racial identity. Subsequently, if Black vertical transfer students' tuition dollars matter, so should their needs for successful campus transition and academic achievements.

Chiles (2017) cogently advocates that colleges should adopt and implement five additional strategies designed to help Black and Latinx students. Although the recommendations do not specifically address Black transfer students, these could easily be adapted for them. Those are: 1) cast student failure as an institutional issue; 2) encourage students to form study groups and peer support networks; 3) devote adequate resources, campus-wide, addressing Black and Latino student needs as well as concerns; 4) alter the mindsets of many faculty so their academic expectations become higher for Black and Latino students; and 5) recruit and maintain a strong, vibrant group of academic counselors well-suited to Black and Latinx student populations.

Further exacerbating the plight of Black students, transfers in particular, are: 1) undergraduate curricula that is poorly associated with job placement in their respective fields of study; and 2) the staggering amount of student loan debt borne by these students. Proceeding further, it is also paramount to acknowledge that a key metric has changed at the community college level; thereby, squarely placing the onus on HWIs and other universities. At least 10

years ago, many community college administrators and trustees realized there was a strong disconnect between four-year institutions' curricular requirements and subsequent, effective job placement. In a recent survey of 1,000 college students, for example, two findings are highly salient: 1) there is an increasing correlation between undergraduate curricula and future jobs; and 2) nearly 75% of 4-year college graduates are working in positions unrelated to their undergraduate majors (Butts, 2023).

The former finding should be substantially tempered, however, since no correlation coefficients are reported. Moreover, without the preceding information, it is also not possible to gauge the magnitude of the "increase." Regarding the latter finding, it is abysmal and frankly, unacceptable. Universities would thus do well to be innovative and consult with local, as well as national, employers to ascertain prospective employee skill expectations. One relatively economical and convenient strategy would be to hold focus groups where select employers evaluate the strength of the relationship between academic preparation---such as undergraduate majors---and desirable job skills. To minimize travel and time constraints, these meetings could be conducted via ZOOM calls or Goggle Meets.

In light of the preceding curricular relevancy issue, many community colleges have developed on-campus Centers for job placement and college opportunities. Typically, these Centers offer a wide range of job search and preparation services. One exemplar is Naugatuck Valley Community College (NVCC) located in Danbury, CT. Their initial web page states the following: "We educate and fortify students and alumni toward achieving their goals. We will help you learn the skills to evaluate career options, locate internships and jobs, write an effective resume and prepare for interviews," (Naugatuck Valley Community College, 2023). Their Center for job placement and college opportunities thus provides a wide range of services including: 1)

preparing for job fairs; 2) resume/cover letter workshops; 3) interview skills; 4) nonverbal communication workshops; and 5) online interviewing and teleconferencing techniques workshops (Naugatuck Valley Community College, 2023).

As noted earlier in this section, many Black students, transfers, and families carry an often smothering amount of student loan debt. In 2019, for instance, the median loan balance held by Black families was \$34,000 dollars (USA Facts, 2023). In light of the economic constraints, many Black transfer students likely face, it is reasonable to suggest the preceding debt amount is much higher; more so given the current, high inflation level.

Drawing from the 2016 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, Camardelle et al., (2022) report the median household incomes for Black and White Community College students as \$24,044 and \$39,385 respectively. This difference is approximately 64% more income for White Community College students. Hence, many Black community college students face overwhelming odds to repay student loans, while also meeting other financial obligations. Reinforcing how problematical this income disparity is, Camardelle et al., (2022) further note the 2016 study above reports the average amount borrowed, by Black Community College students, at \$22,203 dollars. Comparing that number to the median income amount, \$24,044 dollars above, and the size of the problem increases exponentially. In partial response to heavily burdensome student loan amounts, the Biden administration has attempted to expand a loan forgiveness initiative and champion legislation to make two years of college tuition-free (Douglas-Gabriel, 2022).

Recommendations for Practice, Interpersonal Relationships, and Leadership

The goal of this study was to learn how Black vertical transfer students experience academic and interpersonal validation at their HWIs. In doing so, I hoped to understand more

about what supports Black vertical transfer students were using to successfully navigate at HWIs. Recommendations in this section reflect advice that participants shared and my observations about the themes that emerged from the data. Collectively, the students and I provide recommendations for institutional and faculty practice, interpersonal relationships, as well as further research.

Institutional and Faculty Practice

All participants recommended that faculty at HWIs initiate connections with Black transfer students. This endeavor would require that faculty become personally acquainted with such students---often in external classroom activities or organizations---thereby helping Black transfer students better connect with fellow students. Many universities already have developed orientation programs that occur prior to the academic year. These programs are very aware that first-year retention of all students is paramount to successful matriculation. As Black transfer students typically have distinct challenges, compared to traditional four-year students, programming can, and should be, tailored to best address key obstacles. Indeed, higher education institutions can provide support for transfer students through targeted programming that is also inclusive of their racial identities. HWIs should also plan to reach out to Black transfer students, helping with campus navigation and fostering connections with other Black students. Lastly, this study's participants also recommended that community college faculty and staff better prepare them for transfer. In particular, by focusing more on diverse campus environments and situations they may face.

Interpersonal Relationships

All participants valued the relationships they had with their families and peers. They looked to these relationships for financial support, refuge, advice, empathy, and motivation.

These relationships also influenced participants' college enrollment and transfer decisions. Participants recommended that families continue to offer support to transfer students throughout their experiences: emotionally, financially, and mentally, as their academic journeys can be highly stressful. While it is tempting to suggest families merely inquire about their transfer student's, or students' needs, such an approach could easily backfire. For instance, there are often issues arising from student self-reliance, independence, and reciprocity needs. Family members attuned to these potential conflicts (e.g., balancing providing assistance with student self-reliance) can better address student(s)' particular psychological and material needs. One possible strategy is to be proactive by having meaningful conversations; well prior to class enrollment and/or moving to campus housing.

At this juncture, it is prudent to outline what such interpersonal exchanges could encompass. Family members, for example, such as parents, grandparents, older siblings, and/or extended relatives could be involved. Several support strategies could then be collaboratively developed and agreed upon. Perhaps the first area to consider would be financial support and helping to create a working budget. At the minimum, an effective budget would identify fixed and salient variable costs, as well as income. Some fixed costs could include: 1) housing; 2) tuition; 3) campus bus/shuttle pass fees; 4) computer/printer purchases; and/or 5) textbook purchase/rental costs. Variable costs might be: 1) on-campus meals; 2) copying charges; 3) library fees; 4) printer cartridges; and/or 5) flash drives. The preceding lists are not exhaustive; however, they do provide a working template addressing key expenditures.

The other essential part of any budget is income. In this context, its sources could be scholarships, work-study pay, part-time earnings, and/or family financial assistance. Although some would not view scholarships as "income," it is included here; as ideally, such funds could

be used to help meet tuition, housing, textbook, and classroom supply expenditures. Working together through this process, family members and students could then make informed decisions concerning strategies to address income levels and expenses.

Concerning social support provision, many students and family members can establish and employ regular communication channels to elicit and mobilize their support networks. These means of communication could range from texting, emails, phone calls, to ZOOM or Google Meets calls. By having ongoing interactions, a stronger emotional bond should be there between the participants.

There is, of course, no perfect or “tried and true” way to manage the myriad challenges Black transfer students and their families currently confront or are likely to encounter during academic journeys. As Camardelle et al., (2022) lament, “access to opportunity does not necessarily mean equity in enrollment, graduation, transfer, debt, and earnings outcomes” (p. 15). Notwithstanding the lack of a panacea, some of the many obstacles are more likely to be successfully negotiated when there is collaborative budget planning and ongoing social support from varied sources. Conflicts flowing from competing needs---self-reliance versus seeking assistance for example---can also be better managed. This study’s results clearly demonstrate the vital role social support plays in Black transfer student lives (see also Baker, 2013).

As noted earlier, social support and attention to their academic journeys were deemed helpful. This finding is in concert with Baker’s (2013) research. The present study also reveals Black peers played an influential role in how Black transfer students navigated the many twists, turns, and byways at HWIs. It is not the sole responsibility of Black students to help Black transfer students at HWIs, however, it is beneficial when Black students intentionally connect with other Black peers; especially when that Black peer is a transfer student. Leaders of Black

student organizations should reach out to Black transfer students, helping them understand how membership can provide refuge during difficult HWI experiences. These organizations can also help to facilitate connections with validating faculty and staff at the campus.

Leadership

Campus administrators need to understand that the transfer experience is neither trend nor monolithic, and often includes racially diverse students (Jain et al., 2020). Community colleges are a critical access point to higher education for Black students, thus it is imperative that support for transfer students at universities be prioritized (Jain et al., 2020). Administrators should advocate for the creation of a transfer-receptive culture at the university (Jain et al., 2020). In transfer receptive cultures, transfer students are seen as assets at the institution, the transfer experience is normalized, and intentional supports are provided that are both specific to the transfer experience and race-conscious (Jain et al., 2020). Articulation agreements are important, but university leaders also need to consider the institutional culture that transfer students are entering.

Instead of expecting Black transfer students to develop relationships with faculty and peers on their own, such that occurred with participants in this study, university administration should develop an intentional, race-conscious, pipeline for transfer student support. A transfer-receptive pipeline would include a transfer student orientation and staff offering pro-active outreach to transfer students to connect them with identity-conscious student organizations, diverse faculty, and events on campus. Additional events could include transfer family days and sibling days to help transfer families connect with faculty, staff, and feel welcome on the campus. Sessions could educate families on academic rigor, how to help their student be successful, and understanding what transfer students might experience at the university. Family

days and transfer orientations also offer an opportunity for faculty and staff to connect proactively with transfer students, encouraging them to participate in campus resource and organizations. Sibling days, such as Sibling Weekend at Illinois State University (2023) offer an opportunity to help the siblings of transfer students feel a sense of familiarity and comfort with the campus, thereby encouraging their future transfer journeys. Considering the racial and socioeconomic demographic of transfer students, Jain et al. (2020) also suggest that specific scholarships be benchmarked for transfer students at universities. Additionally, administrators can advocate for the collection and review of racially disaggregated data on transfer student success metrics (Jain et al., 2020). Such data would offer insights on Black transfer student successes, gaps in outcomes based on gender, income, the community college they transferred from, and help to inform how the institution could provide additional support.

Future Research Recommendations

Family played a substantial role in the transfer experiences of Black transfer students. Future studies could focus specifically on what Black families do to validate their students post-transfer. Participants also spoke a lot about the influence of their mothers. This finding was not fully explored, however future studies could specifically explore how Black mothers validate Black transfer students. All of the participants attended their HWIs for a period of time during the COVID-19 pandemic. This should lead to studies that explore how COVID-19 specifically impacted Black transfer student experiences, as well as how validation opportunities were influenced by the pandemic.

These recommendations reflect the advice participants offered to Black families, other Black transfer students, faculty, and their community colleges when asked. I also provide recommendations that place more expectations on HWIs to provide support for Black transfer

students. This viewpoint aligns with validation theory and research on Black student experiences at HWIs.

Summary

This qualitative study was designed to understand how Black vertical transfer students experience academic and interpersonal validation at their HWIs. Participants identified as Black and had transferred from a community college within the past six years. Findings from this research add to the small amount of literature about Black transfer student experiences; specifically, with the anticipatory hope that more critical research will develop. HWI invalidation, HWI peer validation, and pre-transfer validation were the emergent themes in the study. These findings highlight the importance of and need for validation at HWIs, as well as how important Black families and peers are to Black transfer student experiences. While Black transfer students relied on themselves and their own social networks to navigate their HWIs, more can, and should be, done that lightens the transition burdens of many Black transfer students, thereby increasing the likelihood of current and future academic achievements.

REFERENCES

- Acosta, A., Johnson, E., Fishman, R., & Whistle, W. (2021, Feb 10). *The impact of Covid-19 on transfer*. New America. <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/edcentral/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-transfer/>
- Adams, C., & van Manen, M. (2008). Phenomenology. *The SAGE encyclopedia of qualitative research methods*, 2, 614-619.
- Allen, W. (1992). The color of success: African-American college student outcomes at predominantly White and Historically Black public colleges and universities. *Harvard Educational Review*, 62(1), 26-44. <https://doi.10.17763/haer62.1.wv5627665007v701>
- American Association of Community Colleges (2021a, January 21). *Equity transfer initiative aims to increase completion for minority students* [Press release]. <https://www.aacc.nche.edu/2021/01/21/equity-transfer-initiative-aims-to-increase-completion-for-minority-students/>
- American Association of Community Colleges (2021b). *Fast facts 2021*. <https://www.aacc.nche.edu/research-trends/fast-facts/>
- American Association of Community Colleges (2022). *Fast Facts 2022*. <https://www.aacc.nche.edu/research-trends/fast-facts/>
- Associated Press. (2022, October 23). Timeline of events since George Floyd's arrest and murder. *AP News*. <https://apnews.com/article/death-of-george-floyd-minneapolis-police-reform-d109eb0d3094119ddbcb560676467f19>
- Anderson, G., Sun, J. C., & Alfonso, M. (2006). Effectiveness of statewide articulation agreements on the probability of transfer: A preliminary policy analysis. *The Review of Higher Education*, 29(3), 261-291. <https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2006.0001>

- Astin, A.W. (1984). Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education. *Journal of College Student Development*, 40(5), 297-308.
- Bahr, P. R., Toth, C. T., Thirolf, K., & Masse, J. C. (2013). A review and critique of the literature on community college students' transition process and outcomes in four-year institutions. In J. C. Smart & M. B. Paulsen (Eds.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research* (Vol. 28). (pp. 459-511). Springer Science & Business Media.
- Baker, C. N. (2013). Social support and success in higher education: The influence of on-campus support on African American and Latino Students. *The Urban Review*, 45, 632-650.
- Barnett, E. A. (2011). Validation experiences and persistence among community college students. *The Review of Higher Education*, 34(2), 193-230.
<https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2010.0019>
- Beach, J. (2012). *Gateway to opportunity? A history of the community college in the United States*. Stylus Publishing.
https://read.amazon.com/?asin=B015YFJ7FY&ref_=kwl_kr_iv_rec_26
- Bensimon, E. M. (2007). The underestimated significance of practitioner knowledge in the scholarship on student success. *Review of Higher Education*, 30, 441-469.
- Bensimon, E.M. & Dowd, A. (2009). Dimensions of the transfer choice gap: experiences of Latina and Latino students who navigated transfer pathways. *Harvard Educational Review*, 79(4), 632-659. <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.79.4.05w66u23662k1444>
- Bloomberg, L. D., & Volpe, M. (2018). *Completing your qualitative dissertation: A road map from beginning to end*. SAGE publications.

- Bonner II, F.A. (2010). Focusing on achievement: African-American student persistence in the academy. In Strayhorn, T.L. & Terrel, M.C. (Eds.) *The evolving challenges of Black college students* (pp. 66-84). Stylus Publishing.
https://read.amazon.com/?asin=B015YFJ7XG&ref_=kwl_kr_iv_rec_3
- Butts, M. (2023, January 22). Question of the Day: What percentage of college graduates work in their field of study? *Next Gen Personal Finance*. <https://www.ngpf.org/blog/question-of-the-day/qod-what-percent-of-college-graduates-end-up-working-in-the-field-of-their-major/>
- Camardelle, A., Kennedy III, B., and Nalley, J. (2022). The state of Black students at community colleges. *Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies*. <https://jointcenter.org/the-state-of-black-students-at-community-colleges/>
- Carter, J. (2016, Oct 3). *The term 'nontraditional student' is extinct*. Higher Ed Dive.
<https://www.highereddive.com/news/the-term-nontraditional-student-is-extinct/427467/>
- Castillo-Montoya, M. (2016). Preparing for interview research: The interview protocol refinement framework. *The Qualitative Report*, 21(5), 811-831.
- Castro, E. L., & Cortez, E. (2017). Exploring the lived experiences and intersectionalities of Mexican community college transfer students: Qualitative insights toward expanding a transfer receptive culture. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 41(2), 77-92. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2016.1158672>
- Cepeda, R., Buelow, M.T., Jagers, S.S., & Rivera, M. (2016). "Like a freshman who didn't get a freshman orientation": How transfer student capital, social support, and self-efficacy intertwine in the Transfer Student Experience. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12(767395).
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.767395>

- Chase, M.M., Dowd, A.C. & Bensimon, E.M. (2014). Transfer equity for “minoritized” students: A critical policy analysis of seven states. *Educational Policy*, 28(5), 669-717.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904812468227>
- Chiles, N. (2017, May). Five things colleges need to do to help black and Latino students. The Hechinger Report, 1-7. <https://hechingerreport.org/five-things-american-colleges-need-help-black-latino-students/>
- Clark, B.R. (1960). The “cooling out” function in higher education. *American Journal of Sociology*, 65(6), 569-576.
- Clark, B.R. (1980). The “cooling out” function revisited. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 8(4), 15-32.
- Cohen, A. M., Brawer, F. B., Pazich, L.B. & Kisker, C.B. (2014). *The American community college* (6th ed.). John Wiley & Sons.
- Cooper, J. N., & Hawkins, B. (2014). The transfer effect: A critical race theory examination of Black male transfer student athletes’ experiences. *Journal of Intercollegiate Sport*, 7(1), 80-104. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jis.2013-0033>
- Creswell, J.W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed). SAGE.
- Crisp, G., & Nora, A. (2010). Hispanic student success: Factors influencing the persistence and transfer decisions of Latino community college students enrolled in developmental education. *Research in Higher Education*, 51(2), 175-194.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-009-9151-x>

- Crisp, G. & Nuñez, A.M. (2014). Understanding the racial transfer gap: modeling underrepresented minority and nonminority students' pathways from two-to four-year institutions. *The Review of Higher Education*, 37(3). 291-320. <https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2014.0017>.
- Dandridge-Rice, R. (2002). The applicability of Rendón's model of validation with African American community college students (Order No. 1415443). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (305426460). <https://go.openathens.net/redirector/illinoisstate.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/applicability-rendóns-model-validation-with/docview/305426460/se-2>
- Douglas-Gabriel, D. (2022, March 5). *Tuition-free college movement gains momentum, despite Biden's stalled plan*. Washington Post. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2022/03/05/tuition-free-college-states/>
- Dowd, A. (2007). Community colleges as gateways and gatekeepers: Moving beyond the access “saga” toward outcome equity. *Harvard Educational Review*, 77(4), 407-419. <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.77.4.1233g31741157227>
- Dowd, A., Pak, J.H., and Bensimon, E.M. (2013). The role of institutional agents in promoting transfer access. *Educational Policy Analysis*, 21(15), 1-38. <https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.v21n15.2013>
- Giroux, H. (2014). *Neoliberalism's war on higher education*. Haymarket Books.
- Glesn, C. (2014). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction (5th ed.)*. Pearson.
- Green, D. (2006). Historically underserved students: What we know, what we still need to know. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 135, 21-28. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.244>

- Groenewald, T. (2004). A phenomenological research design illustrated. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 3(1), 42-55. <https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690400300104>
- Gulley, N.Y. (2016, Aug 5). The myth of the nontraditional student. *Inside Higher Ed*. <https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2016/08/05/defining-students-nontraditional-inaccurate-and-damaging-essay>
- Handel, S.J. (2013). *Recurring trends and persistent themes: A brief history of transfer*. College Board. <https://secure-media.collegeboard.org/digitalServices/pdf/advocacy/policycenter/recurring-trends-persistent-themes-history-transfer-brief.pdf>
- Harper, S.R. (2013). Am I my brother's teacher? Black undergraduates, racial socialization, and peer pedagogies in predominantly white postsecondary institutions. *Review of Research in Education*, 37, 183-211. <https://doi.10.3102/0091732X12471300>
- Harper, S.R., Patton, L.D., & Wooden, O.S. (2009). Access and equity for African American students in higher education: A critical race historical analysis of policy efforts. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 80(4), 389-414. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jhe.0.0052>
- Hern, L., McKay, R., & Brown, S. (2019). "We need community": Assessing the impact of faculty, advising, campus social life, and racial formation on the transfer student experience at a diverse island campus. *Journal of Applied Social Science*, 13(2), 115-138. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/27098723>
- Herrera, A., & Jain, D. (2013). Building a transfer-receptive culture at four-year institutions. *New Directions for Higher Education*, 162, 51-59. doi:10.1002/he.20056

- Ignash, J. M., & Townsend, B. K. (2001). Statewide transfer and articulation policies: Current practices and emerging issues. In B. K. Townsend & S. B. Twombly (Eds.), *Community colleges: Policy in the future context* (pp. 449-483). Westport, CT: Ablex Publishing.
- Illinois State University. (2023). Sibling weekend. <https://alumni.illinoisstate.edu/events/sibling/>
- Jain, D., Herrera, A., Bernal, S., & Solorzano, D. (2011) Critical race theory and the transfer function: Introducing a transfer receptive culture. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 35(3), 252-266. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2011.526525>
- Jain, D., Bernal, S., Lucero, I., Herrera, A., & Solorzano, D (2016). Toward a critical race perspective of transfer: An exploration of a transfer receptive culture. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 40(12), 1013-1024. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2016.1213674>
- Jain, D., Melendez, N. S., & Herrera, A. R. (2020). *Power to the transfer: Critical race theory and a transfer receptive culture*. MSU Press.
- Kilgore, W. (2022, Jan 28). Jan. 2022: Recruitment and retainment, the role of race and gender, and types of transfer. *American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers*. <https://www.aacrao.org/research-publications/research/eye-on-research-blog/article/eye-on-research/2022/01/28/Jan.2022---recruitment-and-retainment-the-role-of-race-and-gender-and-types-of-transfer>
- Kim, J.H. (2016). *Understanding narrative inquiry: The crafting and analysis of stories as research*. SAGE Publications.
- Kintzer, F. C. (1996). A historical and futuristic perspective of articulation and transfer in the United States. In T. Rifkin (Ed.), *Transfer and articulation: Improving policies to meet new needs* (pp. 33-14). Jossey-Bass Pub.

- Kintzer, F. C., & Wattenbarger, J. L. (1985). *The articulation/transfer phenomenon: Patterns and directions*. American Association of Community and Junior Colleges.
<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED257539>
- Knoell, D. M., & Medsker, L. L. (1965). *From junior to senior college: A national study of the transfer student*. American Council on Education.
- Kraemer, B. A. (1995). Factors affecting Hispanic student transfer behavior. *Research in Higher Education*, 36(3), 303-322. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40196153>
- Laanan, F.S. (2007). Studying transfer students: Pt II: dimensions of transfer students' adjustment. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 31(1), 37-59.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10668920600859947>
- Laanan, F. S., & Jain, D. (2017). Advancing a new critical framework for transfer student research: Implications for institutional research. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, 2016(170), 9-21. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ir.20181>
- Laanan, F.S. & Sanchez, J.R. (1996). New ways of conceptualizing transfer rate definitions. In *Transfer and articulation: Improving policies to meet new needs*. Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Laanan, F. S., Starobin, S. S., & Eggleston, L. E. (2010). Adjustment of community college students at a four-year university: Role and relevance of transfer student capital for student retention. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 12(2), 175–209. <https://doi.org/10.2190/CS.12.2.d>
- Leavy, P. (2017). *Research Design: Quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, and arts-based and community-based participatory research approaches*. The Guilford Press.

- Lester, J., Brown Leonard, J., & Mathias, D. (2013). Transfer student engagement: Blurring of social and academic engagement. *Community College Review*, 41(3), 202–222.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0091552113496141>
- Linares Rendón, L. I. & Muñoz, S. M. (2011). Revisiting validation theory: Theoretical foundations, applications, and extensions. *Enrollment Management Journal*, 2(1), 12-33.
- Lukszo, C.M. & Hayes, S. (2020). Facilitating transfer student success: Exploring sources of transfer student capital. *Community College Review*, 48(1), 31-54.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0091552119876017>
- McCall, D.J. & Castles, J. (2020). A place for me? African-American transfer student involvement on the campus of a predominantly white institution in the Midwest. *Journal of Black Studies*, 51(6), 587-610. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021934720926501>
- McFeeters, B.B. (2006). Challenges and supports of student-to-student interactions. In Strayhorn, T.L. & Terrel, M.C. (Eds.). *The evolving challenges of Black college students* (pp. 66-84). Stylus Publishing.
https://read.amazon.com/?asin=B015YFJ7XG&ref_=kwl_kr_iv_rec_3
- Merriam, S.B. (2002). *Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussion and analysis*. Jossey-Bass.
- Miles, M.B., Huberman, A.M., & Saldaña, J. (2020). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook*. SAGE.
- Miller, B. (2020). It's time to worry about college enrollment declines among Black students. *Center for American Progress*. <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-postsecondary/reports/2020/09/28/490838/time-worry-college-enrollment-declines-among-black-students/>

National Center for Education Statistics (2019). Undergraduate Enrollment.

<https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cha>

National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2022). Transfer, mobility and progress.

[https://nscresearchcenter.org/transfer-mobility-and-](https://nscresearchcenter.org/transfer-mobility-and-progress/?gclid=Cj0KCQiAi8KfBhCuARIsADp-A56YgH9N-CYw4XNu52PcMUHnc831QC9qz42TmJhPGaEH7d9GjyJrNLlAaAoePEALw_wcB)

[progress/?gclid=Cj0KCQiAi8KfBhCuARIsADp-A56YgH9N-](https://nscresearchcenter.org/transfer-mobility-and-progress/?gclid=Cj0KCQiAi8KfBhCuARIsADp-A56YgH9N-CYw4XNu52PcMUHnc831QC9qz42TmJhPGaEH7d9GjyJrNLlAaAoePEALw_wcB)

[CYw4XNu52PcMUHnc831QC9qz42TmJhPGaEH7d9GjyJrNLlAaAoePEALw_wcB](https://nscresearchcenter.org/transfer-mobility-and-progress/?gclid=Cj0KCQiAi8KfBhCuARIsADp-A56YgH9N-CYw4XNu52PcMUHnc831QC9qz42TmJhPGaEH7d9GjyJrNLlAaAoePEALw_wcB)

Naugatuck Valley Community College. (2023). Center for job placement and college

opportunities. [https://nv.edu/Student-Resources/Career-and-Transfer-Resources/Center-](https://nv.edu/Student-Resources/Career-and-Transfer-Resources/Center-for-Job-Placement-College-Opportunities)

[for-Job-Placement-College-Opportunities](https://nv.edu/Student-Resources/Career-and-Transfer-Resources/Center-for-Job-Placement-College-Opportunities)

NSC Blog. (2021, October 20). Bucking the trend: How some institutions grew their transfer enrollment amid a pandemic. *National Student Clearinghouse*.

<https://www.studentclearinghouse.org/nsblog/bucking-the-trend-how-some-institutions-grew-their-transfer-enrollment-amid-a-pandemic/>

Nuñez, A. M. & Elizondo, D. (2013). Closing the Latino/a transfer gap: Creating pathways to the baccalaureate. *PERSPECTIVAS: Issues in Higher Education Policy and Practice*, 2, 1–15.

Oberg, K. (1960). Culture shock: Adjustment to new cultural environments. *Practical*

Anthropology, 7, 177–182. <https://doi.org/10.1177/009182966000700405>

Parnell, D. (1985). *The neglected majority*. Community College Press.

<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED262843>

Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (1991). *How college affects students: Findings and insights from twenty years of research*. Jossey-Bass Inc.

- Pérez, P.A. & Ceja, M. (2010). Building a Latina/o student transfer culture: Best practices and outcomes in transfer to universities. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 9(1), 6-21.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1538192709350073>
- Rendón, L. I. (1994). Validating culturally diverse students: Toward a new model of learning and student development. *Innovative Higher Education*, 19(1), 33-51.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/bf01191156>
- Rendón, L. I. (2002). Community college Puente: a validating model of education. *Educational Policy*, 16(4), 642-667. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904802016004010>
- Rendón, L.I. (2006). Reconceptualizing success for underserved students in higher education. *National Postsecondary Education Cooperative*. <http://hdl.handle.net/10919/89206>
- Rendón, L.I. & Valadez, J.R. (1993). Qualitative indicators of Hispanic student transfer. *Community College Review*, 20(4), 27-37. <https://doi.org/10.1177/009155219302000404>
- Roberts, C. and Hyatt, L. (2019). *The dissertation journey*. Corwin.
- Robertson, P.F. & Frier, T. (1996). The role of the state in transfer and articulation. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 96. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.36819969604>
- Saldaña, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. SAGE.
- Sedmak, T. (2021, Aug 31). Transfer student disparities grow across racial and ethnic lines during the pandemic. *National Student Clearinghouse*.
<https://www.studentclearinghouse.org/blog/transfer-student-disparities-grow-across-racial-and-ethnic-lines-during-the-pandemic/>

- Shapiro, D., Dundar, A., Huie, F., Wakhungu, P., Bhimdiwala, A., & Wilson, S. (2019). Completing college: A state-level view of student completion rates (Signature Report No. 16a). Herndon, VA: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.
https://nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/NSCSignatureReport16_StateSupp.pdf
- Sims, J. J., Wallace, J., Hotep, L. O., Taylor-Mendoza, J., & Conaway, T. (2020). *Minding the obligation gap in community colleges and beyond: Theory and practice in achieving educational equity*. Peter Lang.
- Strayhorn, T. L., & Terrell, M. C. (2012). *The evolving challenges of Black college students: New insights for policy, practice, and research*. Stylus Publishing, LLC.
https://read.amazon.com/?asin=B015YFJ7XG&ref_=kwl_kr_iv_rec_3
- Suarez, A.L. (2003). Forward transfer: Strengthening the educational pipeline for Latino community college students. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 27(2), 95-117. <https://doi.org/10.1080/713838110>
- Sullivan, P. (2017). *Economic inequality, neoliberalism, and the American community college*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Taylor, J.L. & Jain, D. (2017). The multiple dimensions of transfer: Examining the transfer function in American higher education. *Community College Review*, 45(4), 273-293.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0091552117725177>
- Thometz, K. (2020, Mar 20). *Gov. Pritzker issues stay-at-home order through April 7 as COVID-19 cases climb*. WTTW News. <https://news.wttw.com/2020/03/20/gov-pritzker-issues-stay-home-order-through-april-7-covid-19-cases-climb>
- Tinto, V. (1975). Dropout from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research. *Review of Educational Research*, 45(1), 89-125.

- Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition* (2nd ed.). University of Chicago Press.
- Tobolowsky, B.F. & Cox, B.E. (2016). Rationalizing neglect: An institutional response to transfer students. *The Journal of Higher Education*. 83(3), 389-410.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2012.11777249>
- Towers, K. (2020). Exploring Validation and Expectations Among Community College Transfer Students (Order No. 27836764). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (2425572135).
<https://go.openathens.net/redirector/illinoisstate.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/exploring-validation-expectations-among-community/docview/2425572135/se-2>
- Townsend, B.K. & Wilson, K. (2006). “A handhold for a little bit”: Factors facilitating the success of community college transfer students to a large research university. *Journal of College Student Development*, 47(4), pp. 439-456. <https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2006.0052>.
- USA Facts. (2023). *What are the outcomes of the education system? How much did COVID-19 disrupt learning?* https://usafacts.org/state-of-the-union/education/?utm_source=google&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=ND-Education-Childcare&gclid=CjwKCAjwzuqgBhAcEiwAdj5dRtsyk60qf_66FmAdDqbk_liq19Cf_bwS5Yi9OWzg8VWv3bUtMZJvXxoCsyUQAvD_BwE%20ACCESSED%203-22-2023
- Valencia, R.R. (1997). *The evolution of deficit thinking: Educational thought and practice*. The Falmer Press.

Walker, K.Y. & Okpala, C. (2017) Exploring community college students' transfer experiences and perceptions and what they believe administration can do to improve their experiences. *The Journal of Continuing Higher Education*, 65(1), 35-44, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07377363.2017.1274618>

Wilson, D. (2014). Follow me to the baccalaureate: Reflections and advice from African American community college transfer student journeys. *Community College Enterprise*, 20(2), 72-84. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021934720926501>

Wood, J.L, Nevarez, C. & Hilton, A. (2011). Creating a culture of transfer. *Making Connections*, 13(1), 54-61. <https://doi.org/10.5555/maco.13.1.d301727408552584>

APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Illinois State University
Educational Administration and Foundations

Principal Investigator: Dr. Mohamed Nur-Awaleh, 309-738-5155, manuraw@ilstu.edu
Co-Principal Investigator: Brittany Barber, 224-245-6555, bmjone4@ilstu.edu

Title of Study

BLACK TRANSFER COLLEGE STUDENT EXPERIENCES SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC VALIDATION AT HISTORICALLY WHITE BACCALAUREATE-GRANTING INSTITUTIONS

Introduction

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Brittany Barber, Illinois State University. The purpose of this study is to explore how Black transfer students describe their post-transfer experience at a historically white baccalaureate-granting institution (BGI) and how they have academically and socially integrated at their BGI. This study is not funded by Illinois State University. Please know that before contacting you, I received consent from an advisor and/or one of your peers who referred you to participate in this study. Please read the explanation carefully below to determine if you would like to participate in this study.

Why are you being asked?

You have been asked to participate because you identify as Black/African-American and; attended a community college with the intent of transferring completed credits to a baccalaureate-granting institution; completed at least 12 credits at a community college and; transferred from a community college to a baccalaureate-granting institution within the past six years; are currently attending a baccalaureate-granting institution and/or completed a bachelors degree from a baccalaureate-granting institution within six years of transferring from a community college. Should you withdraw or graduate from courses or the baccalaureate-granting institution during the research process, you are still eligible to participate in the study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You will not be penalized if you choose to skip parts of the study, not participate, or withdraw from the study at any time.

What would you do?

If you choose to participate in this study, you are expected to participate in an audio-recorded, one-on-one, virtual interview via Zoom discussing your transfer experience at your baccalaureate-granting institution. Post-interview, you may be contacted again for additional clarity on answers provided to ensure accuracy. You will also be granted opportunity to review the final research and findings before final submission. In total, your involvement in this study will last approximately 1-1.5 hours (a max of 90 minutes) for the interview and up to 1 hour if a post-interview follow up is necessary to gain clarity on answers provided in the initial interview. Participants will get to review the final transcript and findings to ensure accuracy.

Duration

Participation in the study consists of a one-on-one, virtual interview via Zoom that should last no more than 1.5 hours (a max of 90 minutes). Only the audio recording of this interview will be kept. Should you agree, a follow up video-recorded interview may occur to gain additional clarity on answers shared in the initial email. You are free to decline a follow-up interview.

Are any risks expected?

We do not anticipate any risks beyond those that would occur in everyday life. There is also the risk of a breach of confidentiality. To reduce any unforeseen risks, all information collected from participants will be coded with a unique name, as chosen by the participant and all collected data i.e. interviews, audio recordings, will be housed on a password-protected. To further reduce and manage any discomfort, all participants can discontinue their participation in the study at any time with no penalty. Participants can discontinue participation in the study pre-interview, during interviews, or any time after the interview concludes by either verbally stating they wish to discontinue or emailing the researcher to discontinue participation. There are no financial costs to the participant for being a part of this research.

Will your information be protected?

We will use all reasonable efforts to keep any provided personal information confidential. All participants will be able to select a code name as their identifier. Only the researcher and participant will know the actual name that corresponds to interview answers and participant. As a participant, you will be asked to choose a coded name of your choice for all audio recordings. This coded name will remain the same for all audio recordings.

Information that may identify you or potentially lead to reidentification will not be released to individuals that are not on the research team. All interviews and audio recordings will be kept on a password-protected external drive. Participants will get to review the final report before it is sent for final submission to the dissertation committee and publishing. The final report will be disseminated via individual emails to each participant, allowing opportunity for review of their answers to ensure accuracy of answers and researchers interpretation of answers. If the research is shared in a conference or during other scholarly or professional presentations, names and specific identifiers associated with names will remain confidential, utilizing the code names that participants chose at the beginning of the study.

However, when required by law or university policy, identifying information (including your signed consent form) may be seen or copied by authorized individuals.

Could your responses be used for other research?

Your data, even if deidentified, will not be used in other research projects. You are ineligible to participate if you are currently within the European Economic Area.

Will you receive anything for participating?

By participating in at least 1-1.5-hour long interview, you will be offered a \$5 Amazon virtual gift card. Cards will be distributed to the email address you provide. No additional compensation will be offered in the event of a follow up interview for clarification of information. The IRS may consider these payments to be taxable compensation. Recipients of a research participant incentive payment may want to consult with their personal tax advisor for advice regarding the participant's situation. Any participant also has the opportunity to participate in the study without accepting the research incentive payment.

Who will benefit from this study?

Participants will experience the benefit sharing the stories of their post-transfer experiences to add to the literature and understanding of the diverse Black student experiences in higher education. Additionally, findings can impact scholarly conversations and institutional practices regarding Black transfer students. The direct participant benefit is the opportunity to have your experiences heard and validated.

Whom do you contact if you have any questions?

If you have any questions about the research pre, during, or post study involvement or wish to withdraw from the study, contact Dr. Mohamed Nur-Awaleh, principal investigator and committee chair at 309-438-5155 or Brittany Barber, co-principal investigator at 224-245-6555.

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, contact the Illinois State University Research Ethics & Compliance Office at (309) 438-5527 or IRB@ilstu.edu.

Documentation of Consent

Sign below if you are 18 or older and willing to participate in this study.

Signature _____ Date _____

Preferred e-mail

Address: _____

Your signature below indicates that you agree to be recorded.

Signature _____ Date _____

You can print this form for your records.

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Research Questions

1. How are Black vertical transfer students interpersonally affirmed at HWIs?
2. How are Black vertical transfer students academically affirmed at HWIs?

To ensure that students understand what was being asked of them in the questions, the word “affirm” is being used instead of “validation.” Sub-questions will be used if additional clarity or longer response is needed.

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about how you identify yourself
 - a) How would you describe your racial identity and why?
 - b) What are some important values you have?
 - c) Tell me about your family and how they impacted your identity and values
 - d) Tell me about the friends you grew up. Which friends, if any, were most influential in your life and why?
2. Tell me about your college-going decision
 - a) How did your family or school impact your decision to go to college?
 - b) Why did you want to go to a community college?
 - c) How did your friends support your decision to go to college?
 - d) Were there any people in your life that discouraged you from going to college? How did that make you feel and what caused you to pursue college anyway?
 - e) What and/or who impacted your decision to transfer to this particular HWI?
3. What has your experience been like at an HWI?
 - a) How did your family help/support you with the transition to an HWI?
 - b) How do you feel being at an HWI compared to being at a community college?
 - c) What kind of resources have been most helpful to you on campus and why?
 - d) How has faculty positively or negatively helped you adjust at the HWI?
 - e) How have peers at the HWI helped you positively or negatively adjust at the HWI?
 - f) Are there relationships you have formed in or outside of class that have helped you feel positive about your ability to be successful at an HWI?
 - g) Are there experiences you've had at the HWI in and outside the class that have made you feel like you couldn't be successful at an HWI?
4. Prior to transferring to an HWI, who in your community college or social network helped you feel affirmed as a student?
 - a) What kind of conversations did people have with you or support was offered to help you feel affirmed?
 - b) Are there any faculty members that stand out as affirming you in or outside the classroom?
 - c) Are there any peers that stand out as affirming you socially?
5. After transferring to an HWI, who in your college or social network helped you feel affirmed as a student?

- a) What kind of conversations did people have with you or support was offered to help you feel affirmed?
- 6. What kind of resources does your HWI offer to support you?
 - d) What kind of resources are in place to support transfer students?
 - e) What kind of resources are in place to support Black students?
 - f) What kind of resources are in place to support Black transfer students?
- 7. When you got to your HWI, describe to me what it was like connecting with peers on campus?
 - a) What sort of activities and events and organizations did you connect with?
 - b) In what way did Black peers attempt to connect with you?
 - c) Were there any peer experiences that made you question if you belonged at the HWI?
- 8. What advice would you offer to Black transfer students to help them feel affirmed in their transfer experience?
- 9. What advice would you offer to faculty and staff at an HWI to help them affirm and support Black transfer students?
- 10. What advice would you offer to faculty and staff at a community college to help them affirm and support Black transfer students?
- 11. What advice would you offer to Black families to support their student during their transfer experience?
- 12. Is there anything else concerning your experience, positive or negative, that you feel is important for me to understand about affirming and supporting transfer students?

APPENDIX C: RESEARCH QUESTIONS/INTERVIEW QUESTIONS MATRIX

Interview Questions	Purpose	Q1:	Q2:
<p>1. Tell me about how you identify yourself</p> <p>a) How would you describe your racial identity and why?</p> <p>b) What are some important values you have?</p> <p>c) Tell me about your family and how they impacted your identity and values</p> <p>d) Tell me about the friends you grew up. Which friends, if any, were most influential in your life and why?</p>	<p>Assist in building rapport to get participants comfortable talking with me (Glesn, 2014).</p>	x	
<p>2. Tell me about your college-going decision</p> <p>a) How did your family or school impact your decision to go to college?</p> <p>b) Why did you want to go to a community college?</p> <p>c) How did your friends support your decision to go to college?</p> <p>d) Were there any people in your life that discouraged you from going to college? How did that make you feel and what caused you to pursue college anyway?</p> <p>e) What and/or who impacted your decision to transfer to this particular HWI?</p>	<p>Assist in building rapport to get participants comfortable talking with me (Glesn, 2014). Also wanted to examine beliefs about college and capacity pre and post transfer to better examine correlation of validation/invalidation experiences. Validation leads to student accepting self as creator of knowledge and contributor to the learning process (Rendón, 1994; Rendón & Muñoz, 2011)</p>	x	
<p>3. What has your experience been like at an HWI?</p> <p>a) How did your family help/support you with the transition to an HWI?</p> <p>b) How do you feel being at an HWI compared to being at a community college?</p> <p>c) What kind of resources have been most helpful to you on campus and why?</p> <p>d) How has faculty positively or negatively helped you adjust at the HWI?</p>	<p>Asked to learn about validation and invalidation experiences</p>		x

<p>e) How have peers at the HWI helped you positively or negatively adjust at the HWI?</p> <p>f) Are there relationships you have formed in or outside of class that have helped you feel positive about your ability to be successful at an HWI?</p> <p>g) Are there experiences you've had at the HWI in and outside the class that have made you feel like you couldn't be successful at an HWI?</p>			
<p>4. Prior to transferring to an HWI, who in your community college or social network helped you feel affirmed as a student?</p> <p>a) What kind of conversations did people have with you or support was offered to help you feel affirmed?</p> <p>b) Are there any faculty members that stand out as affirming you in or outside the classroom?</p> <p>c) Are there any peers that stand out as affirming you socially?</p>	<p>Asked to learn about validation and invalidation experiences</p>	<p>x</p>	
<p>5. After transferring to an HWI, who in your college or social network helped you feel affirmed as a student?</p> <p>a) What kind of conversations did people have with you or support was offered to help you feel affirmed?</p>	<p>Asked to learn about validation and invalidation experiences</p>	<p>x</p>	
<p>6. What kind of resources does your HWI offer to support you?</p> <p>d) What kind of resources are in place to support transfer students?</p> <p>e) What kind of resources are in place to support Black students?</p> <p>f) What kind of resources are in place to support Black transfer students?</p>	<p>Asked to learn about validation and invalidation experiences. Also wanted to know if there were any transfer or identity conscious resources students were relying on for validation.</p>		<p>x</p>
<p>7. When you got to your HWI, describe to me what it was like connecting with peers on campus</p> <p>a) What sort of activities and events and organizations did you connect with?</p>	<p>Asked to learn about validation and invalidation experiences</p>		<p>x</p>

<p>b) In what way did Black peers attempt to connect with you?</p> <p>c) Were there any peer experiences that made you question if you belonged at the HWI?</p>			
<p>8. What advice would you offer to Black transfer students to help them feel affirmed in their transfer experience?</p>	<p>Asked to learn about how students made meaning out of their experience overall</p>	<p>x</p>	
<p>9. What advice would you offer to faculty and staff at an HWI to help them affirm and support Black transfer students?</p>	<p>Asked to learn about how students made meaning out of their experience overall</p>		<p>x</p>
<p>10. What advice would you offer to faculty and staff at a community college to help them affirm and support Black transfer students?</p>	<p>Asked to learn about how students made meaning out of their experience overall</p>		<p>x</p>
<p>11. What advice would you offer to Black families to support their student during their transfer experience?</p>	<p>Asked to learn about how students made meaning out of their experience overall</p>	<p>x</p>	
<p>12. Is there anything else concerning your experience, positive or negative, that you feel is important for me to understand about affirming and supporting transfer students?</p>	<p>Asked to learn about how students made meaning out of their experience overall</p>	<p>x</p>	