

Black Women Attending Predominantly White Institutions: Fostering Their Academic Success Using African American Motherwork Strategies

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The number of African American women attending predominantly White institutions (PWIs) is continuing to increase; however, understanding of the factors related to their academic success at these institutions is underdeveloped. An area that provides a launching pad for better understanding the lived experiences of these young women is rooted in the relationship between racial factors and adjustment to college. Applying an intersectional analysis demonstrates that gendered racial socialization and racial-gender identity development are instrumental to understanding African American women's academic success. We propose that a particular set of strategies conceptualized as *African American motherwork*—found among suburban, middle-class mothers with young daughters attending predominantly White schools—can help student affairs personnel, educators, and researchers better understand the academic success of some African American women attending PWIs of higher education. We offer suggestions for how PWIs can better support the academic success of these young women by understanding and adapting aspects of African American motherwork.

INTRODUCTION

African American women continue to increase their level of enrollment at four-year institutions (Strayhorn, 2011), yet there is a paucity of literature concerning the factors associated with their academic success at these institutions (see Chavous & Cogburn, 2007 for further discussion). How can their conceptions of self, personal histories and interactions with social systems and structures help scholars and practitioners to better understand their academic success at predominantly White, post-secondary institutions? Answering this question requires a holistic framework, one which attempts to examine the individual as an amalgamation of her experiences, situated within larger sociohistorical contexts. The African American woman undergraduate student attending a predominantly White institution (PWI) is a being composed of and transformed by her intersecting social identities and the global narratives and counternarratives that imbue race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and numerous other social constructs with real meaning. To situate, understand, and give voice to her experiences, an intersectional analysis is required. Dill and Zambrana (2009) note that such an analysis:

provides a critical analytic lens to interrogate racial, ethnic, class, physical ability, age, sexuality, and gender disparities and to contest existing ways of looking at these structures of inequality...[by combining] advocacy, analysis, theorizing and pedagogy—basic components essential to the production of knowledge as well as the pursuit of social justice and equality. (p. 1)

To identify, understand, and explicate the factors contributing to the academic success of African American women attending PWIs, researchers are charged to situate their experiences and voices within the context of racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, and other interlocking systems of oppression (Collins, 1997).

One area of research which we believe holds great promise for undertaking such an endeavor deals with the relationship between racial factors and Black students' adjustment to college. Anglin and Wade (2007) reported that factors, such as racial socialization, contributed to Black college students' academic adjustment and that racial identity and racial socialization can predict academic adjustment. Healthy academic adjustment may lead to academic success as Anglin and Wade note that it "may improve the ability of these students to make it through to the end and graduate" (p. 214). Although their study did not specifically investigate gender differences, it does provide a direction for future research: Mixed-methods examinations of gendered racial socialization, racial-gender identity development, and African American women and girls' academic success.

It is our purpose to discuss how an intersectional analysis of racial socialization and racial identity development might contribute to our understanding of the factors associated with African American women's academic success at PWIs. We assert that gendered racial socialization, which influences one's development of a racial-gender identity, is instrumental to understanding African American women's academic success. In particular, we propose that a particular set of strategies conceptualized as *African American motherwork*—found among suburban, middle-class mothers with young daughters attending predominantly white schools—can help scholars and practitioners better understand the academic success of some African American women attending predominantly White institutions in higher education contexts. We believe that delineating these strategies—the ways in which they function, and their implications

for academic success on a college campus—can help post-secondary institutions “[center] the experiences of people of color in higher education and student affairs contexts [by requiring] a rethinking of programs, policies, organizational structures, rituals, and routines from the perspective of students from racially marginalized groups” (Jones & Abes, 2013, p. 144). In this article, we present a case for the importance of utilizing an intersectional analytic frame; discuss gendered racial socialization and racial-gender identity; describe the impact attending a PWI has on African American women; describe African American motherwork in the primary school context; and conclude with lessons PWIs of higher education can learn from motherwork in support of African American women’s academic success.

THE CASE FOR AN INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS

Dill and Zambrana (2009) suggest that an intersectional analysis:

Explores and unpacks relations of domination and subordination, privilege and agency, in the structural arrangements through which various services, resources, and other social rewards are delivered; in the interpersonal experiences of individuals and groups; in the practices that characterize and sustain bureaucratic hierarchies; and in the ideas, images, symbols and ideologies that shape social consciousness. (p. 5)

Because the educational institution reproduces the racial order and gender and class hierarchies, the “goals of using an intersectional approach are dismantling structural inequalities and promoting social justice” (Jones & Abes, 2013, p. 136); therefore, a strong case can be made for its use in understanding, and giving voice to, the experiences of Black women attending PWIs. Fostering the academic success of Black women requires effectively disassembling these systems of inequality by understanding how they function at the macrolevel and microlevel; an intersectional analysis allows one to begin to do this.

Institutions of higher education often view phenomena through singular lenses (e.g., examining African American student attrition with no regard to gender or class); however, an intersectional analysis provides more veracity because of its greater complexity (i.e., examining an issue through a matrix of multiple identities). Improving the academic success of Black women and girls necessitates understanding the impact of intersecting social locations on student experiences within a sociohistorical context. Such an inquiry also requires an institution to examine its *own house* in an effort to illuminate its complicity in perpetuating racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, and so forth, which together undermines the academic success of its Black women students. An intersectional approach can accomplish this seemingly daunting task because, as Weber pointed out, it:

operates on two levels: at the individual level, it reveals the way the intermeshing of these systems [i.e., privilege, oppression, inequality, agency, etc.] creates a broad range of opportunities for the expression and performance of individual identities. At the societal/structural level, it reveals the ways systems of power are implicated in the development, and maintenance of inequalities and social injustice. (as cited in Dill & Zambrana, 2009, p. 4)

Diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives—to be effective—must address the microlevel interactions and macrolevel processes that an intersectional analysis illuminates, as a means for fostering social justice.

RACIAL SOCIALIZATION AND RACIAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT AS GENDERED PROCESSES

Racial Socialization

Parents influence the racial identity development of their children through the process of racial socialization. This practice of transmitting messages regarding the meaning and significance of race and racial stratification, managing intergroup and intragroup relations, and personal and group identity (Lesane-Brown, 2006) is common for African American parents, but even more so for mothers as they are the ones to spearhead the socialization process (Harris & Graham, 2007; Thomas & King, 2007). Racial socialization is a gendered process as mothers transmit different types of messages to their daughters than they do to their sons. Boys and girls receive different socialization messages: Boys are socialized to overcome racial barriers (e.g., preparing for discrimination and prejudice) while girls are socialized to develop racial pride (through emphasizing group unity, learning about heritage, etc.; Brown, Linver, Evans & DeGennaro, 2009; Dotterer, McHale & Crouter, 2009; Hill, 2001; Thomas & King, 2007).

Exploring Gendered Racial Socialization

It is not surprising that racial socialization is a gendered process. If Black women are the bedrock of the community, then Black girls must be socialized to carry that mantle. Collins (1997) wrote that, “Black daughters are raised...to anticipate carrying heavy responsibilities in their families and communities because these skills are essential for their own survival as well as for the survival of those for whom they will eventually be responsible” (p. 270). In order to successfully carry that mantle they must have instilled in them a sense of racial pride so that they can aid the development and continuation of the community; for it is racial pride that encourages educational attainment and achievement in order to *uplift the race*. Chavous and Cogburn (2007) assert that “gender systems in many African American communities provide women with a unique set of resources that are important for generating interest and success in school” (p. 29). Assisting Black girls to prepare to take on such vital responsibilities requires that mothers teach their daughters “how to survive interlocking structures of race, class, and gender oppression while rejecting and transcending those very same structures” (Collins, 1997, p. 271). It is interesting to note that while Black mothers are preparing their daughters to be strong, independent, and confident in order to take on role-specific responsibilities, they are—at the same time—socializing them into alternative gender roles (Buckley & Carter, 2005).

Racial Identity Development

A person’s identification with a racial group has personal, interpersonal, and sociological implications. Omi and Winant (2008) suggest that “[a]ny claim to a racial identity necessarily connects the claimant to others making similar claims and to the sociohistorical system in which that identity acquires meaning” (p. 1567). A global sociopolitical system rooted in racism and

racial oppression is the catalyst for the racialization of African Americans and the subsequent development of a racial identity. To wit, the “primary function of an internalized racial identity is to protect individuals from the psychological harm that results from living in a racist society” (Dotterer et al., 2009, p. 64).

There exist various theories, models and assessments dedicated to investigating racial identity development. However, William Cross’s (1971) Nigrescence model is foundational to the field of Black identity development and gave rise to later theories and models. *Nigrescence*—a French word meaning the “process of becoming Black”—postulates that there are five stages that a person goes through to develop a Black identity. In stage 1—termed *Pre-encounter*—the person reflects an identity shaped by the dominant group and is ignorant of his/her real racial identity. Stage 2 is known as the *Encounter* stage and is so named because the person has a personal experience that requires them to question their identity, making the person open to exploring their truer identity. In the *Immersion-Emersion* stage, the individual is attempting to throw off the old identity and actively acquire the new, truer identity. The first phase of this stage involves “immersion into a total Black frame of reference, the second phase (Emersion) represents emergence from the dead-end, racist, oversimplified aspects of Immersion” (Cross, 1991, p. 50). Stage 4 is the *Internalization* stage and stage 5 is called *Internalization-Commitment*. During either of these last two stages the individual becomes secure in their racial identity and feels connected to their ancestry and the larger Black community. In 2001 Cross expanded his Nigrescence theory. The 2001 model is called NT-E or expanded Nigrescence theory. In this manifestation, according to Simmons, Worrell and Berry (2008),

Black racial identity is defined as a multidimensional set of attitudes which fall under three worldviews: Pre-encounter [reflecting the attitudes of Assimilation, Miseducation, and Self-hatred], Immersion-Emersion [reflecting Intense Black Involvement and Anti-White attitudes], and Internalization [reflecting the attitudes of Afrocentricity, Biculturalist, Multiculturalist Racial, and Multiculturalist Inclusive]. (pp. 262-263)

Mothers of daughters attending PWIs must wonder how to promote a healthy, positive racial-gender identity in their child while navigating an institution that perpetuates the racial order and gender hierarchy (Tatum, 2004). Understanding how mothers promote a positive racial-gender identity is important as such an identity is associated with “positive psychological outcomes, such as an increased tolerance of frustration, a stronger sense of purpose, enhanced school performance, and greater security in self” (Thompson, 2001, p. 156).

Racial-Gender Identity Development

Unfortunately, studies of racial identity development have yet to adequately take gender into account, neither have studies of gender identity development adequately taken race into account. Existing theories and models of racial and gender identity development often seem to operate in a vacuum. Adequate consideration is not given to race as being gendered nor gender as being raced. Some researchers (e.g., Bailey-Fakhoury, 2013; Hesse-Biber, Livingstone, Ramirez, Barko, & Johnson, 2010; Lipford Sanders & Bradley, 2005; Stewart, 2009; Thomas, Hoxha, & Hacker, 2013) are calling for a more multidimensional conceptualization and measurement of racial-gender identity that also takes the class construct into consideration. What

Thomas and colleagues (2013) found through their focus group study of the gendered racial identity development of African American young women, highlights the importance of constructing an intersectional formulation of race-gender identity:

What emerged from the focus groups was the role that familial and peer socialization played in countering distal influences of stereotypical roles and media images...results suggest that the importance of self-determination and overcoming stereotypical roles based on socialization messages seemed to provide an outlet for positive identity development for girls. (p. 93)

It is our hope that this article helps to push this burgeoning conversation of reconceptualization further.

BLACK WOMEN ATTENDING PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS

As we have argued, there are serious gaps in the knowledge base when it comes to African American women attending PWIs and the factors related to their academic success. What we do know about African American women attending PWIs comes from studies often investigating African American students generally or students of color as a monolith. Although this knowledge is insightful and important, it only approximates a Black woman's lived experience, whereas we seek to put the Black woman's experience at the center, as the subject, not simply as an object or by-product. The knowledge that has been derived from these studies about Black women attending PWIs provides some context for researchers seeking to identify factors associated with their academic success.

In PWIs, Black students tread in territory “consciously or half-consciously [thought of as] *white places*” (Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996, p. 51). These physical spaces (e.g., classrooms, cafeterias, libraries, playgrounds, etc.) become racialized, establishing who belongs, and where, and who controls the space. This exercise in racial demarcation is played out through everyday microaggressions (e.g., avoidance, exclusion, being told one speaks well, exposure to stereotypic images in media, etc.) or subtle actions of discrimination (Deitch, Barsky, Butz, Chan, Brief, & Bradley, 2003; Masko, 2005; McCabe, 2009; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007). Previous research demonstrates quite convincingly the troubling psychological, physiological, academic, and social effects—associated with racial tokenism, racial microaggressions, and racial battle fatigue—of inhabiting environments where one is *the only one* or *only one of a few* (Chavous, Harris, Rivas, Helaire, & Green, 2004; Jackson & Stewart, 2003; Kelly, 2007; Mc Donald & Wingfield, 2009; Tatum, 2004; Williams, Neighbors, & Jackson, 2003).

African American girls reared in race-conscious families internalize a positive racial identity and demonstrate resilience in white educational settings that work to undermine that racial socialization (Tatum, 2004). Black women attending PWIs have been found to have a broad perspective of racial identity and are able to see how social class intersects to inform their global identity (Baber, 2012; Stewart 2009). Additionally, informal support systems, like those found in residential communities, further foster the development of a multifaceted racial-gender identity in these young women while assisting them to contest one-dimensional representations of their identity (Baber, 2012). Hesse-Biber and colleagues (2010) suggested that Black young women attending PWIs who:

had a self-concept with a contingency of self-worth associated with a Black cultural identity...[or with a] cultural identity of diversity...demonstrated an increased level of racial identity that allowed them to have an increased sense of self-esteem and body image satisfaction. (p. 708).

It appears that young Black women with a strong racial identity are more likely to have high self-esteem and beauty ideals which are related to possessing a positive body image. However, Black women attending PWIs report significantly lower life satisfaction and less cultural congruity or “fit between students’ personal values and the values of the environment in which they operate” (Constantine & Watt, 2002, p. 185) than their counterparts at historically Black colleges and universities. Additionally, young Black women at PWIs struggle with social isolation and limited prospects for dating (Ariza & Berkey, 2009; Henry, 2008).

AFRICAN AMERICAN MOTHERWORK STRATEGIES IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOL SETTING AND THE LESSONS PWIS CAN LEARN TO SUPPORT BLACK WOMEN’S ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Suburban, middle-class Black mothers with young daughters attending predominantly White schools foster their daughters’ academic success by employing a particular set of strategies representing one dimension of Collins’ *motherwork* phenomenon (Bailey-Fakhoury, 2013). African American motherwork offers “emotional care for children and [provides] for their physical survival... [while also endowing] Black women with a base of self-actualization, status in the Black community, and a reason for social activism” (Collins, 1997, p. 266). In the Black community, motherwork extends beyond one’s blood family into the larger community making Black mothers “community othermothers,” charged with aiding in the development of the Black community (Collins, 1997, p. 269). Therefore, motherwork is the “reproductive labor” that women of color engage in to ensure the survival of family, community, and self (Collins, 1994, p. 52). A mixed-methods study conducted in suburban metropolitan Detroit identified three strategies—*presence, imaging, and code-switching*—mothers use to promote a positive racial-gender identity and to foster the academic success of their daughters attending a predominantly White school:

Presence consists of the keen awareness of one’s aesthetic presentation and the role it plays as mothers advocate for their daughters; maintaining visibility in the school and at school functions; and being strategic in interactions with school personnel to gain leverage that will benefit daughters. Imaging consists of mothers working hard to teach and show their daughters how to embrace their phenotypic features through the use of role models, home décor, and other consumables. Code-switching helps daughters navigate various cultural milieux with dexterity. (Bailey-Fakhoury, 2013, p. 206)

The mixed-methods design of the study was pivotal to applying an intersectional framework (Griffin & Museus, 2011). The use of surveys and focus groups provided a more veracious analysis and interpretation of the data as they were analyzed using a sociopsychological orientation (White, 2009) that rests upon the intersections perspective and the social-cognitive learning theory.

We intend to demonstrate that African American motherwork provides an important foundation that may benefit daughters as they transition to predominantly White, post-secondary institutions. To counter the negative and pejorative messages and images a young girl attending a predominantly White school might receive, mothers work hard to instill a positive racial-gender identity. Mother's racial-gender identity, the gendered racial socialization messages that she transmits, and her support provides a strong basis for the young girl—a foundation which appears to contribute to her academic success at a PWI (Anglin & Wade, 2007; Baber, 2012; Chavous & Cogburn, 2007; Lipford Sanders & Bradley, 2005; and Thomas et al., 2013). PWIs will be well-served by understanding how African American motherwork strategies at the elementary level might influence academic success at the postsecondary level. To be clear, we do not believe PWIs can replicate the motherwork strategies; however, we do believe that PWIs have a responsibility to be responsive to the needs of this segment of their student body, which has been historically ignored and made invisible. Motherwork strategies provide one vehicle for responding to the needs of African American women students. We offer these suggestions in an effort to help PWIs truly move closer to fulfilling the mission of developing students who are able to realize their full human potential. Applying the findings of Bailey-Fakhoury's (2013) study, we further discuss each strategy and propose what PWIs can learn from these strategies to support their Black women students.

Presence: Aesthetic, Visible, and Strategic

As mothers seek to encourage their daughters' academic success, they are cognizant of their aesthetic presentation and demeanor when interacting with teachers, administrators, and fellow parents. Mothers are keenly aware of their physical appearance and how it can hinder or bolster their use of presence as they advocate for their daughters. Mothers shared that they felt the need to carry themselves in the best light as they may be *the* African American/Black person by which White neighbors, parents, or teachers would judge all other African Americans/Blacks. Aesthetic presentation also encompasses annunciation, tone of voice, and the awareness of gestures used. Mothers feel that it is important to represent themselves and their daughters well when in the public sphere. Not only is it important for these women, it also seems they believe that it is vitally important for their daughters' self-concept and self-image. These mothers work hard to shatter the stereotypes and caricatures of Black women that prevail in American society, whether one resides in suburbia or in an urban center. Mothers are very aware of how instrumental their aesthetic presentation of themselves is at allowing them to fully exercise the two additional aspects of presence (Bailey-Fakhoury, 2013).

Presence also entails attending school functions and strategically engaging teachers and administrators to the daughter's benefit. For mothers, being visibly present in the elementary schools of their daughters and using presence to instigate tactical interactions are paramount. These two aspects of presence allow mothers to flex social capital that will ultimately help their daughters. As mothers seek to rear their daughters with a positive racial-gender identity in a predominantly White school setting, they are exercising social capital, which can provide access that leads to optimal outcomes for their daughters. While flexing social capital, mothers are simultaneously becoming adept at amassing and transmitting cultural capital or the "high-status linguistic and cultural competencies (e.g., values, preferences, tastes) that students inherit from their parents and other 'cultural brokers' such as siblings, peers, and 'institutional agents'" (Strayhorn, 2010, p. 309). The aesthetic presentation of self allows mothers to more effectively

use their visibility and the interactions they deliberately create with school personnel. When encountering personnel, especially their daughters' teachers, mothers view these encounters as opportunities to gain leverage to be used to benefit their daughters, in some fashion, either at present or sometime in the future. Interactions with teachers may be used to elicit information that not all parents are privy to, to assess what supplies or additional things the classroom teacher needs/desires, or to forge an open line of communication between the mother and the teacher. In these instances the mothers seek to do what they deem necessary to give their daughters an advantage in a setting where they may be disadvantaged because of their race and/or gender (Bailey-Fakhoury, 2013).

Lessons PWIs Can Learn from the Presence Strategy

Black women students may feel that they are the spokesperson or representative for all Black women and actively seek to shatter stereotypes and imposed constructions of Black woman identity. As they negotiate aesthetic presentations of themselves in White spaces, some Black women students may reflect upon the manner in which their mothers conducted themselves in White spaces and pull on these strategies as they interact with White professors, students, and campus personnel. Deliberation in speech or modulation of one's gestures and voice intonation should not be automatically assumed to be manifestations of low self-esteem or uncertainty of self. It may reflect a young woman who is aware of her surroundings—her actions in raced-gendered spaces and the associated stereotypes—and her attempts to contest racist and sexist perceptions. At the same time, behavior that is deemed to be expressive, animated, or *boisterous* should not immediately label the African American woman exhibiting it as defiant, rowdy, or oppositional. Behavior such as this, particularly when exhibited amongst peers claiming the same racial-gender identification, may function as a way of dealing with issues of authenticity as one constantly attempts to enact agency in White spaces. Operationally, it serves as an outlet—a means of decompressing—for these young women when they are in surroundings where they feel they are not being surveilled or *gazed upon*. In fact, Lipford Sanders & Bradley (2005) suggested that scholars and practitioners need to “examine how [African American women] use personal agency, that is, the ability to effectively change and intervene in one's own circumstance” (p. 302).

Universities and student affairs professionals can counter how “the dominant representations of people of color build upon and elaborate ideas, images, and stereotypes that are deeply rooted in American history and become the rationale for the differential treatment of groups and individuals” (Dill & Zambrana, 2009, p. 10), by educating the university community about this aspect of presence, how it might manifest itself, and how it should be interpreted. Such commitment to dismantling hegemonic power through privileging the lived experiences of young African American women, can create a more welcoming campus climate; one in which Black women report greater cultural congruity (Constantine & Watt, 2002) and are better adjusted to college, possibly improving their chances of staying and graduating (Anglin & Wade, 2007). Furthermore, university officials and student affairs practitioners should provide programming which allows these students a safe space to interrogate their multidimensional identity and do the work that is necessary to manage any struggles with authenticity (Stewart, 2009). Doing so requires bringing campus persons—specifically those traditionally marginalized and silenced voices—and assets into the decision-making process from the inception to the execution of this new programming.

Imaging: Through Hair, Role Models, and Home Décor

Another strategy mothers employ to promote a positive racial-gender identity and to advocate for their daughters' academic success is that of imaging. Mothers are sensitive to the images they put before their daughters whether through social interactions, household décor, personal grooming, extracurricular activities, or popular media (Bailey-Fakhoury, 2013).

The subject of hair has a long, turbulent history in the African American community, especially for African American women. One's hair texture, hair length, hairstyle, and adornments have symbolic implications within and outside the community. Numerous African American women have *hair stories* to tell. As young African American girls attempt to find their place in their family, clique, school, or community—in a society that places overt value on long flowing, straight blonde locks—hair and the meaning it is imbued with can be a harbinger of things to come. Mothers are supremely cognizant of the American standard of beauty and realize that their daughter's phenotypic features are deemed antithetical. For the majority of these mothers it is essential to provide various alternatives to the American standard of beauty, images which reinforce the unique, versatile beauty of African American women. Mothers work hard to teach and show their daughters how to embrace their natural self and to take pride in what is uniquely their own (Bailey-Fakhoury, 2013).

Another aspect of imaging that mothers used was that of role models. Mothers felt that it was very important to provide role models that reinforce a positive self-image for their daughters. Mothers were keenly aware of the lack of role models in the classrooms, schools, and after-school activities/organizations of their daughters; their daughters could go the entire school day and not interact with one individual who “looked like them.” To counter this, families who left the urban center for the suburb intentionally kept their membership in their church home, enrolled their daughters in dance troupes, Brownie troops, ice skating groups, and various clubs that were located in the predominantly Black city, and visited racially-/culturally-specific institutions (Bailey-Fakhoury, 2013).

Mothers also work hard to be a role model for their daughter, demonstrating how to balance normative and alternative gender role expectations. One mother referenced her own upbringing and the lessons she learned which she hopes to recalibrate for her daughters. She stated that she developed her strength and independence—qualities which are usually labeled as masculine—prior to marriage, however, she actively seeks to background those qualities while foregrounding submission to and alignment with her husband, traits which are generally identified as feminine. This mother hopes to show her daughter that she can have/do it all as a woman, on her own, but that she does not have to. Her daughter can develop these qualities and has the option of foregrounding or back grounding them at will; she does not have to be beholden to one set of gender expectations or another. Many mothers seemed to be fully aware of the multidimensionality of the Black-female identity; an identity requiring a Black woman to simultaneously and effortlessly maintain normative and alternative gender roles (Bailey-Fakhoury, 2013).

The last aspect of imaging which emerged in the focus groups was that of reinforcing reflections of their daughters through home décor (and other consumables). Mothers purchased paintings, statues, clothing, book bags, school supplies, books, posters and other items that reflected the phenotypic features of their girls. Many mothers reported that whenever they could purchase goods or bring items into the home that reinforced their daughter's image, they did it.

It appears that mothers believed this to be a key means of encouraging their daughters' positive self-image and racial-gender identity (Bailey-Fakhoury, 2013).

Lessons PWIs Can Learn from the Imaging Strategy

African American mothers are well aware that daughters “are bombarded early with negative messages about their worth, intelligence, and beauty” (Lipford Sanders & Bradley, 2005, p. 301), and seek to counter “the pervasiveness of media images in television, movies, music videos, and even commercials that perpetuate negative stereotypes” (Thomas et al., 2013, p. 94) by reinforcing positive images of African American womanhood. Mothers are quite deliberate in providing their daughters with healthy presentations of Black female identity not readily found in the mainstream media. Emphasizing daughters' positions as *outsiders within* (Collins, 1986) and as experiencing the world through a *double jeopardy status* (Thomas et al., 2013) helps strengthen their self-worth and self-concept by preparing them to reject and transcend notions of the White feminine ideal. Some mothers see themselves as the vessel by which to demonstrate these maneuvers. Many mothers also turn to other Black female figures as role models for their daughters, pinpointing women who successfully balance normative and alternative gender role expectations.

Institutions of higher learning should be committed to not perpetuating the “unfeminine connotations attached to strength, persistence, expression of anger, and intelligence [that] inhibit understanding African American girls who have been socialized to believe that these attributes are both positive and functional” (Brown, as cited in Lipford Sanders & Bradley, 2005, p. 300). Institutional policies, programs, rituals, routines, activities, and pedagogies must be interrogated to determine how debilitating notions of femininity and race are being propagated. This truly transformative work requires an intersectional lens. Additionally, it is important for colleges and universities to create opportunities of mentorship for their African American women students. Staff, faculty, and community members at-large who may provide counsel/advice to these young women should be enlisted, helping to foster a sense of community and belonging for them. This may necessitate creating a critical mass of mentors who have managed to create healthy representations of themselves in the midst of a racist and sexist society. Lastly, Black women may feel isolated, especially in the dating realm (Ariza & Berkey, 2009; Henry, 2008). Student affairs can work with historically Black sororities and other student organizations to create intercultural dialogues, service-learning projects, and other opportunities to help connect Black women students to the larger campus community. Such actions will help African American women students navigate academe, create beneficial social networks, and persist and thrive.

Code-switching: Teaching Bicultural Fluidity and How to Navigate the Triple Quandary

Code-switching refers to one's ability to move between cultural milieus at will and with fluidity (Bailey-Fakhoury, 2013). It involves knowing the appropriate cultural rules, prescripts, vernacular, and behavior unique to each setting and how and when to use them. Mothers use code-switching to help their daughters navigate the dominant, minority status, & Afrocentric cultural terrains. Parental racial socialization occurs across these three distinct milieus of our sociopolitical structure—Boykin and Toms (1985) named this phenomenon the *triple quandary*. African American mothers must navigate these three terrains when socializing their children. The dominant culture reflects mainstream messages and expectations; the minority status

experience is the milieu in which African American mothers must prepare their children to face an oppressive society, one predicated on subjugation and dominance; and the Afrocentric/cultural experience is the setting in which African American mothers educate their children about racial pride, traditions, and customs unique to being African American. Code-switching is an exercise involving direct instruction, hypotheticals, role play, and practice (Bailey-Fakhoury, 2013).

Lessons PWIs Can Learn from the Code-Switching Strategy

Code-switching is a skill that is actively taught by mothers with young daughters attending PWIs. Such race-conscious parenting (Tatum, 2004) allows daughters to develop biculturalism/multiculturalism, which helps them successfully navigate the Black community, White spaces, and their double-minority status. Successful code-switchers demonstrate leadership skills, have strong self-confidence, embrace a multidimensional identity, and possess skills that encourage their college adjustment and academic success (Anglin & Wade, 2007; Constantine & Watt, 2002; Hesse-Biber et al., 2010).

PWIs would do well to assist their African American women students in cultivating and strengthening code-switching skills. Constantine and Watt (2002) suggest that “culturally-sensitive interventions that help African American women develop the bicultural skills necessary to successfully navigate PWIs may be important in increasing their cultural fit and academic persistence” (p. 192). Creation of these interventions requires the talents and skills of persons—on campus and in the larger community—who have traditionally been excluded from the table. Nevertheless, such an endeavor requires a delicate balance between identifying and understanding normative institutional practices, while utilizing intersectional lenses to critique these practices. Critical examination provides opportunities for resistance—chances to exploit *cracks* in the normative system as a way to spur the creation of alternative institutional practices which benefit young African American women.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The number of African American women attending PWIs is continuing to increase; however, our understanding of the factors related to their academic success at these institutions is wholly underdeveloped. It is our contention that an area that provides a launching pad for better understanding the lived experiences of these young women is rooted in the relationship between racial factors and adjustment to college. Specifically, the processes of racial-gender socialization and racial-gender identity development are aspects which need to be further investigated using an intersectional framework. Anglin and Wade (2007) stated that “racial socialization was found to be a significant positive predictor of academic adjustment. . . . The role of parents seems to be a contributing factor in future academic success” (p. 214). We believe that the phenomenon of African American motherwork—strategies embedded in the racial-gender socialization process—occurring in predominantly White, suburban elementary schools is a foundational element of African American women college students’ experiences with academic success. We hope to encourage further investigations of African American motherwork that utilize an intersectional analysis, especially studies that examine socioeconomic effects as current Black college students are more affluent than their predecessors (Baber, 2012; Strayhorn, 2011). We realize that the ability to enact aspects of the African American motherwork strategies is

associated with the middle-class, suburban mothers' skill sets, resources, and social networks; that efficacy was enhanced by various elements of social and/or cultural capital possessed by these mothers. Studies which look at lower-income African American mothers with young daughters attending predominantly White schools will enhance our understanding of with-in group differences.

Just as importantly, we urge PWIs to do the hard, but transformative work of conducting thorough self-assessments utilizing an intersectional framework because:

social change cannot occur without institutions of higher education allocating resources to those alternative initiatives within their institutions that have an intersectional lens, that seek to promote inclusivity in knowledge production, curriculum transformation, mentoring, and pedagogy, and that actively seek to use knowledge to achieve social justice. (Dill & Zambrana, 2009, p. 276)

Social change begins by amplifying the marginalized and often silenced voices of African American women college students.

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