

“WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT TRANSFERRING?”: EXPLORING TRANSFER
EXPERIENCES OF BLACK TRANSFER STUDENTS AT HISTORICAL WHITE
INSTITUTIONS

by

RAENECE D. JOHNSON

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Doctoral Advisory Committee:

V. Thandi Sulé, Ph.D., Chair
Julia Smith, Ed.D.
Maria Beam, Ph.D.

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DEDICATION

I want to dedicate my work to my late mother, **Restee LaRose Johnson**. A Detroit teacher for over forty years, from as early as I can remember, you have always shared the importance of education. When I was a kid and we were window shopping, and I told you I wanted a pair of expensive boots, you told me, “You're gonna need all the education you can get with that kind of taste!” to encourage me to return to school after starting my family. You reminded me that it did not matter how old I was or what was going on in my life; I needed to go back to school to get an education.

Although you may not be here to see this accomplishment, I know you have been with me every step of the way. It is through this work that I hope to bring attention to what you always talked about-educational disparities. You would mention that your students at your school do not have the same opportunities as I do, and I should be grateful to attend a school with top-of-the-line education. Most importantly, you told me that I needed to work ten times harder to get noticed. I worked through that, and I find comfort in knowing I share a part of that healing with you. We can work hard while also calling out inequities. We aren't staying silent. Rest in Power, Mom. “Look, Ma, no hands!”

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Raenece D. Johnson

ABSTRACT

“WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT TRANSFERRING?”: EXPLORING TRANSFER EXPERIENCES OF BLACK TRANSFER STUDENTS AT HISTORICALLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS (HWIS)

by

Raenece D. Johnson

Adviser: V. Thandi Sulé, Ph.D.

The ongoing underrepresentation of Black students, especially during transitions like transferring from community colleges to historically White institutions (HWIs), highlights critical systemic inequities requiring urgent action. Black transfer students often face unique challenges rooted in racialized and institutional barriers, including microaggressions, racism, and inadequate advising, that threaten their sense of belonging and academic success. Despite these obstacles, Black transfer students demonstrate resilience, agency, and strength, leveraging cultural assets and support networks to navigate their transfer journeys. This qualitative study examines the lived experiences of Black transfer students transitioning from community colleges to HWIs, highlighting their agency, strengths, and the resources they utilize to navigate their academic journeys. This study also examines the racialized and systemic challenges Black transfer students encounter and the resilience they draw upon in the face of adversity. Guided by Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Community Cultural Wealth (CCW), this study examines how

race, culture, and social capital influence Black transfer students' perceptions, challenges, and successes during their transition from a community college to their initial semester at the HWI. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with purposefully selected participants, allowing for an in-depth exploration of their lived experiences. Guided by Critical Race Methodology, the analysis uncovered five key themes: Belongingness, Capitalizing on Support, Shock and Confusion: Navigating the Unknown, Agentic Advocacy, and The Blueprint: Black Transfer Student Experiences that Shape Success. This approach enabled a nuanced understanding of how race, power, and systemic inequities influence students' perceptions and pathways, emphasizing their agency and resilience within racially charged institutional contexts. Findings highlight barriers such as microaggressions, racism, and insufficient advising, which threaten Black transfer students' sense of belonging and academic persistence. Conversely, the mobilization of cultural assets, proactive self-advocacy, and culturally responsive institutional support act as vital resilience factors. This study highlights the importance of higher education institutions implementing inclusive practices, increasing representation, and developing targeted support systems to promote equitable pathways for transfer. By centering the voices of Black transfer students, this research offers critical insights for policymakers and practitioners seeking to dismantle systemic inequities and foster a more equitable and supportive educational environment.

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CHAPTER ONE

DISSERTATION OVERVIEW

As a high school senior, I felt a rush of excitement when I received my acceptance letter from a prominent university in the Midwest. In the summer leading up to my first semester, I engaged in all the preparations that any 18-year-old would undertake to embark on their college journey: shopping for dorm room essentials featuring the school's mascot and connecting with my new roommates ahead of move-in day. My initial semester, however, proved challenging as I struggled to adapt to the newfound freedoms of college life, ultimately landing on academic probation. A year and a half later, I left behind my dreams and moved back home from my off-campus apartment.

Over the past 12 years since leaving that university, I enrolled in two different community colleges, took various college classes, and navigated the joys and challenges of raising three children while working multiple low-wage jobs. One day at work, I encountered a social worker, and our conversation ignited my interest in pursuing a career in social work. I felt compelled to better support my community and sought a degree that would enable me to earn a more stable income for my family. The first step was to return to school, but I questioned where to begin.

Living near a Historically White Institution (HWI) in the Midwest, I applied there primarily due to its convenience. Upon acceptance, I faced a mix of excitement and apprehension; I was no longer the 18-year-old straight out of high school but rather a single mother with work experience and accumulated college credits. Six months into my

pregnancy with my third child, I attended the transfer orientation. Upon entering the student center, I was guided into a room filled with tables hosted by student organizations, fraternities, sororities, and academic advisors. Unfortunately, the orientation provided little guidance or support tailored to my specific needs as a transfer student, who was managing the complexities of parenting and a job. After meeting with an academic advisor who informed me that many of my previous credits would not apply toward my social work degree, my sense of belonging at the university diminished. I felt different from my peers, particularly as a Black student, older, and visibly pregnant. During a visit to the bookstore months later to purchase books for the upcoming semester, I overheard a parent seemingly comment on my pregnancy, saying, “Study hard and don't end up like her.” This moment further deepened my doubts about my place at the university and my ability to complete my degree. Yet, despite the myriad challenges faced during my transition, the support of my community, both personal and professional, empowered me to navigate this period and ultimately graduate.

Were my feelings and experiences as a Black transfer student at an HWI unique? Were there holistic support systems for Black transfer students during their transition? Did they feel connected to their institution from enrollment through the end of their first semester? These questions lingered in my mind long after graduation, inspiring the current study. This research aims to highlight the experiences and feelings of Black transfer students during their transition, particularly from enrollment to the end of their first semester. Additionally, I will explore the types of community capital and campus support, if any, that were beneficial for Black transfer students during this process.

Overview

When envisioning the traditional path to a college degree, many imagine high school graduates progressing directly to a four-year university and completing their education within four years. However, this route has become increasingly complex, with many students choosing alternative pathways. Transferring, in particular, is a common option that reflects the diverse motivations behind students' decisions.

For many, transferring from a community college to a four-year university can represent a fresh start and an opportunity to realign their academic and career goals. Factors influencing this decision can vary, with students seeking different learning environments, better job prospects, or more suitable locations and finances. Community colleges have emerged as essential steppingstones in the higher education landscape, providing critical pathways for students aiming to transition to a university. In the 2020-21 academic year alone, there were 1,294 two-year colleges alongside 2,637 four-year colleges across the U.S. (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2022).

Financial considerations also play a major role in shaping students' educational journeys. With tuition rising 31 percent over the past decade for public institutions, many students are drawn to the more affordable options offered by community colleges (NCES, 2023). For some students, beginning their education at a community college to complete general education requirements before transferring to a university is a financially viable path that accommodates increasingly busy lives filled with work and family obligations. Ultimately, community colleges provide a practical pathway for students to pursue their education while balancing financial constraints and personal responsibilities.

Not all students navigate the transfer process equitably. Several factors, including racial dynamics and economic challenges, can create obstacles for specific demographic groups, especially minoritized students, who often find their journeys considerably more complicated. The term “minoritized” is employed purposefully here, reflecting how socio-cultural hierarchies and policies serve to marginalize specific populations rather than merely indicating a lack of representation (IGI Global, 1998-2024, as cited in Paniagua, 2015). Racial discrimination, economic instability, and inadequate support systems can significantly impact students' ability to transfer successfully and thrive in their new academic environments (Taylor & Jain, 2017).

Community colleges have historically served as a crucial resource during economic downturns, primarily due to their accessibility for those at risk of unemployment (Camardelle et al., 2022). With a notable enrollment of Black college students facing high unemployment, it is essential to recognize how community colleges can facilitate economic recovery (Camardelle et al., 2022). Ongoing challenges, such as the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, shape the educational landscape, disproportionately impacting Black college students (Camardelle et al., 2022). During this period, many Black college transfer students faced heightened stressors related to health, access to technology, and economic hardships. Such pressures can exacerbate existing inequalities, leading many students to view community colleges as realistic pathways to secure degrees and enhance their financial stability (Castro & Cortez, 2017). In a report by Camardelle et al. (2022, p. 11), the authors noted that more recent data indicate that transfer rate gaps may be worsening for Black students during the pandemic.

While the share of all students transferring from community college to public four-year colleges fell by 11.6 percent, Black student transfers making that same transition fell more sharply by 14.2 percent (Camardelle et al., 2022, p.11).

Despite the challenges faced by Black transfer students in their transition from community colleges to HWIs, research on their specific experiences remains limited. Amplifying the voices of Black transfer students and understanding their unique challenges is vital. Thus, as we consider this complex landscape, an essential question arises: What are the experiences of Black transfer students as they navigate the often-daunting journey from community colleges to four-year HWIs, and how can their narratives drive improvements in support systems within higher education?

In today's higher education landscape, understanding how students transition from community colleges to four-year institutions is crucial to student success, particularly for minoritized students. This study examines variables such as community capital, transfer-sending culture, and transfer-receptive culture that influence these transitions. In the following section, guidance on the key terms that will frame this study is offered below.

Background and Context

Definitions of Key Terms

Community capital refers to the networks and relationships among resources and individuals in one's community (Jain et al., 2020).

Community colleges, sometimes referred to as two-year colleges or junior colleges, these institutions are defined as higher education entities that provide a two-year curriculum leading to an associate degree.

They also offer transfer programs toward four-year degrees and vocational training (Chen, 2021).

Transfer-sending culture, as established by Jain et al. (2020), a transfer-sending culture refers to the systems and standards in place at institutions that ease the transfer process for all students aiming to move to a university efficiently (p. 10).

A ***transfer student***, as defined by eLearners (2020), is a student who has earned credits at one institution and seeks to transfer to another, bringing those credits along. In contrast to incoming freshmen, transfer students have previous college experience and have earned college credits.

Transfer-receptive culture, as defined by Jain et al. (2020), refers to a university's institutional commitment to support community college students in making successful transfers (p. 26). It is grounded in CRT and focuses on the nuances of race and racism in the vertical transfer process.

Vertical transfer, as defined by Jain et al. (2020), describes the process by which a student completes the necessary lower-division coursework for a major at a community college and subsequently transfers to a baccalaureate-granting institution to pursue upper-division coursework for a bachelor's degree (p. 7).

Transition refers to the period from a student's enrollment in a four-year university through completing their first semester. Acknowledging that Black transfer students have unique educational journeys, which may include various gaps, this study focuses on the transition process rather than a strict timeline.

Universities are institutions that offer baccalaureate degrees or higher, often referred to as "four-year" colleges. This terminology does not apply to community colleges that also confer baccalaureate degrees (Jain et al., 2020).

History of Higher Education

The evolution of higher education in the United States (U.S.) can be traced back to institutions like Harvard College, which is regarded as one of the earliest colonial colleges (Dorn, 2017). Historically, higher education was primarily accessible to affluent, influential White men through the establishment of Colonial Colleges (Dorn, 2017). Early colonists, including those from Cambridge and Oxford, sought to replicate elements of their English heritage by establishing institutions such as Harvard, as noted in New England First Fruits in 1643 (Dorn, 2017). Initially, these colleges focused on preparing skilled laborers, disseminating knowledge, and conducting scientific research—all of which was supported by substantial funding from both public and private sources (Dorn, 2017).

As the landscape of higher education expanded across the nation, so too did its commitment to serving the public good (Dorn, 2017). The founding of Michigan State University in 1855, recognized as the first four-year institution emphasizing scientific agriculture, set a precedent for land-grant universities aimed at enhancing agricultural productivity and increasing access to higher education, especially for the children of farmers. Thus, Michigan State University marked a significant turning point in the evolution of higher education, establishing a framework for subsequent institutions dedicated to advancing knowledge and promoting societal progress (Dorn, 2017).

Throughout its history, higher education has been criticized for its lack of inclusivity, particularly within HWIs, where the student population remains predominantly White, and socio-cultural norms reinforce a culture of Whiteness (Bonilla-Silva & Peoples, 2022). Moreover, HWIs have maintained a historical context in terms of student demographics, curriculum, and overall environment, perpetuating Whiteness and White supremacy as prominent elements of the higher education framework (Bonilla-Silva & Peoples, 2022). Historically, the policies and practices at most HWIs have either explicitly or implicitly aimed to segregate and subjugate Black students (Allen et al., 2018).

Universities, commonly referred to as four-year colleges or institutions, play a pivotal role in awarding baccalaureate degrees and higher, distinguishing them from community colleges that also offer similar degrees (Jain et al., 2020). The following section examines the origins of community colleges, tracing their beginnings to the Morrill Act of 1862, which aimed to increase public access to higher education—a notable shift from the era of Colonial Colleges (Drury, 2003).

History of Community Colleges

The establishment of community colleges in the U.S. can be attributed to the Morrill Act of 1862, which aimed to broaden public access to higher education (Drury, 2003). This act paved the way for individuals who had previously faced restrictions based on race, gender, and socioeconomic status (SES). The subsequent Morrill Act of 1890 further enhanced access for minoritized students by stipulating that federal funds would be withheld from colleges denying admission based on race unless they established

separate institutions for those students. However, the first junior college in the U.S. was not founded until 1901 (Drury, 2003).

Over the years, community colleges have transformed into dynamic institutions that offer a two-year curriculum leading to associate degrees, as well as transfer programs to universities and vocational training options (Chen, 2021). Today, community colleges fulfill various missions, including vocational, community, and developmental education, in addition to providing transfer pathways to universities (Jain et al., 2020). By maintaining open access to higher education regardless of prior academic achievement or standardized test scores, community colleges have historically provided opportunities for minoritized students, marking a significant departure from a system that primarily served the elite (Jain et al., 2020).

As community colleges continue to evolve, a significant trend is the rise of Community College Baccalaureate (CCB) programs. First authorized in 1989, these initiatives have allowed select community colleges to award bachelor's degrees, effectively addressing specific local labor market needs. This growing acceptance signifies an enhanced recognition of community colleges as vital players in the broader higher education system, particularly for students who might not have pursued a four-year degree otherwise (American Association of Community Colleges [AACCC], 2024).

Community colleges serve as essential gateways to higher education for Black students. Due to their accessibility and location, they have been vital resources during times of economic downturn. During the Great Recession in the early 21st century, Black students exhibited higher enrollment rates in community colleges compared to other racial groups, largely due to rising unemployment and limited job prospects for Black

workers (Camardelle, 2022). Remarkably, around 36 percent of Black undergraduate students nationwide opt to pursue their education at community colleges (Camardelle, 2022). Between the academic years 2000-01 and 2015-16, the number of associate degrees awarded to Black students more than doubled—a significant increase of 110 percent, from 63,900 to 134,000 (AACC, 2024).

Community colleges, often characterized by diversity in student demographics, leadership, curriculum, and community resources, now face unprecedented challenges in accommodating the evolving needs of their varied student populations. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the impact of community colleges on higher education, especially in supporting historically minoritized students (Taylor & Jain, 2017). Despite their importance, community colleges encounter issues related to inequities in the recruitment, enrollment, and retention of minoritized students, which can obstruct Black transfer students' transitions to universities. These barriers highlight the importance of understanding and addressing the distinct experiences and academic outcomes of Black students, particularly given their disproportionate representation in community colleges (Jain et al., 2020; Camardelle, 2022).

The Transfer Process from Community College to a Four-Year Institution

Although there are various methods to transition to another institution, this study will focus specifically on vertical transfer. A vertical transfer occurs when a student completes the necessary lower-division coursework at a community college and subsequently transfers to a university to complete their major and obtain a bachelor's degree (Jain et al., 2020). Jain et al. (2020) also documented other transfer pathways, such as lateral, reverse, and dual credit transfers.

Scholars' attention has generally concentrated on the culture of transfer-sending institutions (community colleges) rather than on the culture of transfer-receiving institutions (universities) during the transition process (Jain et al., 2020). As mentioned, a transfer-sending culture refers to the systems and standards in place at institutions that ease the transfer process for all students aiming to move to a university efficiently (Jain et al., 2020, p. 10). Jain et al. (2020) defined transfer-receptive culture as “an institutional commitment by two- and four-year institutions to provide the resources necessary for students to transfer and earn the baccalaureate degree” (p. 29, para. 1). Research has underscored the importance of fostering a college environment that supports transfer aspirations and expectations at transfer-sending institutions (Jain et al., 2020). Cooper and Brohawn (2023, p. 5) outlined six success factors for Black transfer students: being directed and focused, feeling nurtured and valued, and being connected and engaged. This study additionally determined that colleges need to provide comprehensive support to historically minoritized groups, including African American/Black students, to prevent equity gaps from growing (including transfer outcomes). In a study conducted by Berhane et al. (2024), participants reported gaining advantages from supportive institutional representatives, such as faculty and advisors, who provided resources related to the transfer process. Participants also mentioned involvement in various community college programs, including initiatives specifically for Black students, which offered transfer resources (Berhane et al., 2024). Elements such as faculty engagement with students and prominent campus signage can signal that transferring is not just a rare opportunity for a few exceptional students but rather a clear and attainable process that

encourages widespread ambition and success in transferring to receiving colleges (Jain et al., 2020).

Most research has narrowly focused on the flow of information and resources from transfer-sending institutions to the transfer-receiving culture, neglecting the expectation for the receiving institution to proactively engage in the transfer process or specialize in supporting transfer students (Jain et al., 2020). Walker and Okpala (2017, p. 35) noted that the lack of transfer student support programs and initiatives at the university level can be particularly challenging for some transfer students. Emerging scholarship has begun reconceptualizing the transfer function as a partnership between transfer-sending and transfer-receiving institutions rather than portraying it as a one-sided commitment from community colleges (Jain et al., 2020). For example, Hayes et al. (2020, p. 49) stated that pre-transfer partnerships and pre-transfer advising between public, four-year universities and community colleges are expanding strategies used to support students through the transfer pipeline. However, little research details the specific impact of these pre-transfer programs and services on the outcomes of transfer students (Hayes et al., 2020). Jain et al. (2020) assert that the overall outcome during the transition process for both sending and receiving institutions should center on students historically excluded and underserved by higher education.

The first year of college is a critical period of heightened stress for students, often leading to withdrawal or dropout due to its significant impact on health and academic performance. Research by Rayle and Chung (2007) indicates that the first year of college is the most stressful period, during which many college students withdraw or drop out. High levels of perceived stress can impact both health and academic performance for

students new to higher education (Rayle & Chung, 2007). Academic stress is often accompanied by symptoms of anxiety and depression, contributing to high attrition rates (Rayle & Chung, 2007). This stress can be especially pronounced for transfer students in a new academic environment, who face increased expectations.

Social support from friends and family plays a vital role in helping students navigate the challenges of transitioning to higher education, particularly for minoritized groups such as Black transfer students at HWIs. Rayle and Chung (2007) emphasize the significance of social support from friends and family in facilitating successful transitions into higher education. A robust support system is critical for managing and developing coping mechanisms to address academic stress. This social support not only aids in students' adjustment to college but also promotes their psychological well-being and sense of belonging (Rayle & Chung, 2007). For Black transfer students attending HWIs, academic stress may be exacerbated by limited social support, especially in environments where they have historically been excluded from higher learning opportunities. My research will center on the lived experiences of Black transfer students, aiming to illuminate the social and cultural capital they identify as critical for facilitating a successful transition. Central to this study is the application of CRT in education, which will guide my exploration of Community Cultural Wealth that aids in the successful transition for Black transfer students.

Significant inequities persist in the recruitment, enrollment, and matriculation of minoritized students across the higher education landscape (Jain et al., 2020). Studies have indicated that community college students, particularly those from minoritized backgrounds, face unique obstacles during their transition to postsecondary education

compared to their White peers, whether first-year or transfer students (Crisp & Nuñez, 2014; Wilson, 2014). Crisp and Nuñez (2014) describe how “environmental pull” factors, such as off-campus work commitments and family responsibilities, can distract students from immersing themselves in the academic and social culture of college. Additionally, factors such as SES, race, and educational background play a vital role in determining the degree attainment of transfer students. Wilson (2014) further notes that limited financial resources, inadequate academic preparation, and feelings of cultural alienation can impede the transfer of minoritized students from community colleges to degree completion.

My study aims to contribute to the growing body of literature that emphasizes the transfer-receptive culture at receiving institutions, with a particular focus on the lived experiences of Black transfer students during their transition to these institutions. Terms such as transfer-receptive culture, transfer-affirming culture, and transfer-student receptive ecosystem are often used interchangeably to describe the institutional and campus supports that enhance successful transitions for Black transfer students (Jain et al., 2020). I plan to utilize the Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) framework to investigate the forms of campus and community support identified by Black transfer students. By employing the CCW framework to examine the experiences of Black transfer students during their transition, I aim to center the dynamics of race and racism within the vertical transfer process, aligning with CRT in education (Jain et al., 2020).

Specific Research Questions

As my study examines CCW and the various forms of capital that foster agency and success among minoritized students, I aim to highlight several gaps in the existing

literature that this study seeks to address. Notably, there is a significant deficit in discussions that focus specifically on the experiences of Black transfer students. Furthermore, the literature on transfer students often overlooks the unique experiences of Black transfer students. My dissertation intends to narrow this gap, specifically examining the forms of capital that facilitate the transfer process. I aim to elevate the narratives of Black transfer students, a demographic that is frequently overlooked or generalized in research encompassing other minoritized groups. In addition to the limited research on Black transfer students, what are the experiences of Black transfer students as they undertake the challenging transition from community colleges to four-year HWIs, and how can their stories contribute to enhancing support systems in higher education?

In this context, I will investigate the transition experiences of Black transfer students from enrollment through the end of their first semester at an HWI. The guiding questions for this research are as follows:

1. How do Black transfer students describe their transition experiences, feelings, and/or thoughts from enrollment to the end of the first semester?
2. What kinds of community capital, if any, were helpful during the transition from enrollment to the end of the first semester?
3. What kinds of campus support, if any, were helpful during the transition from enrollment to the end of the first semester?
4. How may these students' experiences inform others?

Focusing on the lived experiences of Black transfer students, I aim to underscore the social and cultural resources they identify as critical for facilitating a successful transition.

Significance

The significance of this research lies in its response to the shifting landscape of higher education, where students face soaring tuition costs and increased responsibilities that compel them to reassess their educational trajectories. Black college students, who have historically faced minoritization in this realm, often choose to complete their general education coursework at community colleges before transferring to universities, reflecting their financial needs and the realities of balancing busy lives (Taylor & Jain, 2017). Community colleges serve as critical gateways for these students, enabling them to attain bachelor's degrees and improve their socioeconomic conditions. Understanding the essential role community colleges play in this educational framework is increasingly important as demographic shifts reshape the national landscape (Taylor & Jain, 2017).

Community college enrollment remains a crucial pathway for historically minoritized students seeking to enhance their economic prospects (Taylor & Jain, 2017). While previous research has explored the experiences of transfer students at community colleges and their transitions to universities, knowledge regarding the experiences and emotions of Black transfer students moving to HWIs remains insufficient.

If community colleges and HWIs ignore this issue, institutions risk implementing policies that are not responsive to the realities faced by minoritized students. The consequences of neglecting the transfer experiences of Black transfer students are detrimental to communities and higher education. If policies are not enhanced to support Black transfer students, efforts to create equitable educational opportunities may be hindered. Inaction could perpetuate existing disparities, leading to lower retention and graduation rates for Black transfer students. Moreover, policies that are not informed by

students' lived experiences may inadvertently reinforce barriers to access and success, ultimately detracting from the overall diversity and inclusivity that higher education strives to achieve (Cepeda et al., 2021).

By focusing on the transfer experiences and feelings of Black transfer students throughout this transition, this study aims to amplify the voices of this often-overlooked cohort in academic discourse. The findings could inform the development of targeted interventions and support systems within higher education. For instance, insights into the transfer process could lead to the creation of tailored orientation programs, mentorship opportunities, and academic resources that facilitate smoother transitions. As institutions recognize the unique barriers faced by Black transfer students, they may also implement policies designed to enhance their sense of belonging and academic success.

Additionally, insights from Black transfer students could significantly enhance the inclusivity of educational environments. By adopting research-informed practices, institutions can gain a deeper understanding of the diverse experiences of Black transfer students, thereby fostering an atmosphere that values their contributions and supports their academic journeys. Acknowledging the needs of Black transfer students can lead to initiatives that combat systemic inequalities in higher education. By ensuring that research led by Black transfer students grounds these policies, institutions can better support the academic journeys of all students, particularly those from historically marginalized backgrounds.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The doors to higher education have opened, becoming increasingly diverse as institutions enroll a larger and more diverse student population (Goldrick-Rab, 2006). This trend is expected to continue, with the National Center for Education Statistics [NCES] (2019) projecting an enrollment increase of 8% for Black students, 14% for Latinx students, 2% for Asian/Pacific Islander students, and 16 % for women between 2017 and 2028. As more students from the United States (U.S.) enter college, their pathway through the broadly differentiated higher education system is changing (Goldrick-Rab, 2006). A substantial portion of enrollment growth in U.S. higher education has resulted from increased accessibility to more diverse citizens (Cavote & Kopera-Frye, 2006). Community colleges play a significant role in this evolving ecosystem and represent a crucial element of the U.S. higher education pipeline.

Community colleges are the institution of choice for millions of students because of their open-access philosophy, diverse curricula, and multicultural student body (Laanan et al., 2010). Indeed, community colleges are among the most diverse institutions in U.S. higher education, as evidenced by their diverse student body, leadership, curriculum, and community resources (Taylor & Jain, 2017). Additionally, they are often praised for their ability to provide supportive environments for students

who are traditionally underserved by other higher education institutions (Mamiseishvili & Deggs, 2013).

Community colleges serve as a key gateway for historically minoritized groups in higher education. This is evidenced in data about community college enrollment over time, which reveals that community colleges enroll far more minoritized students than universities. The American Association of Community Colleges (2022) reported that in 2021, 40% of Black students enrolled in a community college, compared to 35% who enrolled in a university. This pattern was similar for Latinx and American Indian students, with 52% of both groups enrolled at community colleges compared to 34% and 31%, respectively, at universities. On a larger scale, community colleges enroll 51% of all Latinx and 41% of all Black college students across the United States (Crisp & Nuñez, 2014).

At the same time, even with the increased demand for postsecondary education, socioeconomic status (SES), gender, and race continue to serve as barriers or limitations when accessing and completing postsecondary education (Jain et al., 2020). Due to factors such as a lack of state and federal funding and increases in financial aid, the cost of a postsecondary degree or certificate has increased exponentially (Jain et al., 2020). Hanson (2021) reported that in the last 20 years, the cost of tuition at the average community college had risen 46%, compared with a 76% rise among public universities. In our current context, the average yearly cost (tuition, fees, housing, transportation, and personal expenses) to attend a public community college is \$10,300 (Hanson, 2021). Tuition increases can strain the already financially independent student, who is often responsible for paying for college costs out of pocket. With limited financial resources,

students with additional responsibilities, such as caring for dependents or working full-time, may withdraw or drop out (Jain et al., 2020).

As defined by Laanan et al. (2010), the “transfer function” in higher education is the movement of students between community colleges and universities or vice versa. Since the founding of community colleges in the early 1900s, the transfer function has been a primary purpose of the community college sector (Taylor & Jain, 2017). In fact, the preliminary search produced a vast array of literature on transfer students in higher education.

Students have reimagined their path to their degree as a way to respond to rising tuition costs and additional roles and responsibilities without foregoing their higher educational goals. For some students, completing general education coursework at a community college before transferring to a university is a practical option that suits their budget and accommodates their increasingly busy lives. Thus, the primary mission and function of community colleges that has emerged in the literature is the ability for students to start their higher education journey before transferring to a university to complete a degree (Jain et al., 2020).

The transfer function in community colleges is a mechanism that facilitates access and social mobility, making research on student experiences important for understanding the dynamics at play and the possibilities for supporting growth and mobility. Underserved students, in particular, benefit from this, as many rely on community colleges to access higher education and provide a transfer pathway to a baccalaureate degree (Taylor & Jain, 2017). For instance, McGuire and Belcheir (2013) found that many transfer students come from populations historically underserved: women, first-

generation, minoritized, financially independent, parenting or have dependents, working full-time while enrolled in school part-time, eligible for Pell grants (an indicator of low income), and students who are generally over 25 years of age.

The extensive use of community colleges as a springboard is a key component in the pathway to a baccalaureate degree for millions of students, particularly among minoritized students who have historically been excluded from higher education institutions. Given the number of undergraduates that these institutions educate each year and the fact that community colleges are especially welcoming to minoritized students, community colleges must play a significant role in any national strategy to increase college completion (Handel, 2013).

Adapting to meet the evolving needs of diverse college student populations is undoubtedly one of the most significant challenges in the history of higher education. However, as schools have diversified and enrollment for minoritized students surges at community colleges, much of the scholarly research focuses on White transfer students and their transition experiences. More specifically, limited research has explored the transition experiences of Black transfer students from a community college to a historically White institution (HWI). HWIs are known for their historical background, student demographics, curriculum, and overall atmosphere that perpetuate Whiteness and White supremacy, becoming prominent features within the higher education landscape (Bonilla-Silva & Peoples, 2022). Additionally, the literature on Black transfer students often focuses on the barriers and challenges they face during their transition, rather than exploring the existing resources and support that Black transfer students utilize to reach their full potential.

The literature reviewed for this study aims to discuss what is currently known about the transfer function in the literature, highlighting the transfer experiences and implications for Black students in transfer situations. Three themes emerged from the student transfer literature: transfer experiences, factors contributing to transfer success, and barriers that college students encounter when transferring from a community college to a university. First, I will highlight the most discussed transfer pathway in the literature reviewed, the vertical transfer, and discuss the motivating factors for transferring. Next, the themes from the literature review on student transfer research will be discussed, laying the groundwork for the current study and highlighting what has been thoroughly explored and is noticeably absent. In addition to discussing barriers identified during the transfer process for Black transfer students, literature on student agency for minoritized and Black transfer students will be explored. Student agency refers to the capacity of individuals to actively engage in their learning processes by exercising intention, purpose, and persistence (Vaughn, 2020). Student agency involves making choices, interacting with others, and negotiating their experiences within social contexts. Influential scholars, such as Vygotsky (1978) and Bandura (1986, 2001), emphasize that agency is closely tied to the use of tools and social practices, as well as self-efficacy and the pursuit of control over one's learning activities. Lastly, the implications for future research will be discussed.

Student Transfer

The Transfer Function

The literature reviewed revealed that vertical transfer was the most frequently discussed, supporting Taylor and Jain's (2017) assertion that vertical transfer remains the

dominant focus in transfer literature. As defined by Taylor and Jain (2017), a vertical transfer refers to students who start at a community college and transfer to a university, either with or without an associate's degree. Several articles reviewed sampled students who transferred from a community college to a university (Zilvinskis & Dumford, 2018; Laanan et al., 2010) or had the intent to transfer to a university from a community college (Schudde et al., 2021; Cepeda et al., 2021; Mamiseishvili & Deggs, 2013). Some discussed the transfer function more broadly, examining various transfer forms, including lateral, reverse, and transfer swirls, in addition to vertical transfer (Taylor & Jain, 2017; Handel, 2013; Arnold, 2001). Lateral transfer students, meanwhile, move between community colleges or universities (Taylor & Jain, 2017). Reverse transfer refers to students who begin at a university and then transfer to a community college, encompassing various categories, including undergraduate reverse transfer, postbaccalaureate reverse transfer, double reverse transfer, and summer sessions (Taylor & Jain, 2017).

For instance, Arnold (2001) captured reverse transfers (university students who may enroll for a community college course during the summer term), co-enrolled students (students simultaneously enrolled in a community college and a university), and graduate students (enrolled in a community college for personal enrichment or employment-enhancing experiences) in their study. In another study, Goldrick-Rab (2006) examined mobility patterns among 4628 students participating in lateral or transfer swirls (i.e., start, stop, start, stop; 4-year to 4-year). I aim to focus on vertical transfer to contribute to the existing knowledge on vertical transfer and expand the body of literature regarding Black transfer students engaging in vertical transfer.

Both transfer type and institutional culture significantly impact minoritized students, yet the existing literature remains limited. Research has narrowly focused on the exchange of information and resources from the transfer-sending institution compared to the transfer-receptive culture at the receiving institution (Jain et al., 2020). However, emerging research has begun to see the transfer function as a partnership between the transfer-sending institution (community college) and the transfer-receiving institution, rather than a one-sided commitment of community colleges sending students to universities (Jain et al., 2020). Research has highlighted the significance of creating and maintaining a college environment that supports transfer aspirations and expectations at transfer-sending institutions (Jain et al., 2020). From faculty dialogue with students to visible signage on campus, transferring is not seen as an accidental opportunity for a few smart students but rather as a clear and efficient process that encourages students to endeavor and succeed at transfer-receiving colleges (Jain et al., 2020).

Despite Black transfer students demonstrating equal aspirations to transfer as their White counterparts, vertical transfers perpetuate racial disparities (Jain et al., 2020). Studies suggest that significant gaps exist in educational attainment for Black students, including transfer rates, when compared to other racial and ethnic groups. This is known as the “racial transfer gap” (Crisp & Nuñez, 2014). For students who started at a community college, a report revealed that Asian (48.1%) and Latinx/a/o (37.2%) students were much more likely to transfer to a university than Black (28.4 percent) students (National Student Clearinghouse, 2018). For example, a quantitative study of 1,360 college students found that only 39% successfully transferred to a university within six academic years, revealing significant racial inequities in transfer success: 45% of those

who transferred were White, while only 31% were African American or Latinx/a/e (Crisp & Nuñez, 2014).

Furthermore, Crisp & Nuñez (2014) highlight notable differences in the characteristics and experiences of White and minoritized students. Socio-demographic and educational experiences of minoritized students highlight the systemic challenges they face in community colleges, underscoring the need for targeted support and interventions to facilitate successful transfer and degree completion (Crisp & Nuñez, 2014), particularly for Black transfer students. By intentionally examining the transfer experience through the lens of minoritized identities, we can uncover deeper insights essential to effectively supporting minoritized students, particularly Black transfer students, in their academic journeys. Ultimately, highlighting the transfer experiences of Black transfer students is a matter of equity and a crucial step toward creating a more inclusive higher education landscape.

Motivating Factors to Transfer

The transfer process is complex and involves various motivations, particularly among Black transfer students (Crisp & Nuñez, 2014). Researchers have sought to understand why college students transfer from community colleges to universities. Community college students are diverse and have differing educational goals; while some intend to transfer, others may pursue their education for personal growth, career advancement, or skill acquisition (Mamiseishvili & Deggs, 2013). Additionally, the U.S. government has contributed to transfer research through longitudinal data collection initiatives, such as the 2004/2009 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BTS 2004/2009), which followed first-time postsecondary students over their first, third,

and sixth years in college (Taylor & Jain, 2017). The findings from the BTS study indicated that the primary motivations for transferring from an initial institution included pursuing a bachelor's degree (57%), personal reasons (38%), completion of required courses (28%), various other motivations (19%), scheduling conflicts (18%), dissatisfaction (17%), financial considerations (11%), family obligations (6%), and academic difficulties (3%) (Taylor & Jain, 2017). The current study will focus on the transition experiences of Black transfer students, rather than the motivations behind their decision to transfer. However, the factors driving students to transfer have emerged as a significant theme in existing literature, providing essential context for research on transfer experiences.

Transfer Experiences

The primary focus of the literature review centered on the transfer experiences of college students transitioning from community colleges to universities. While some research has focused on the social and academic experiences during the transfer process (Castro & Cortez, 2017; Chin-Newman & Shaw, 2013; Cepeda et al., 2021), other articles have explored transfer student experiences with advising and faculty support (Zilvinskis & Dumford, 2018; Hern et al., 2019). Other aspects of the transfer experience, such as policy trends and articulation agreements between community colleges and universities, were also reflected in the transfer literature (Schudde et al., 2021).

According to Handel (2013), despite the historical popularity of community colleges as essential pathways to earning a bachelor's degree, the transition from a community college to a university is notably complex. Transfer students must navigate typical academic pressures and the challenges of acclimating to a new educational

environment (Handel, 2013). Castro and Cortez (2017) conducted in-depth interviews with six Mexican community college transfer students, illustrating the relationship between their identities and experiences. Castro and Cortez found that the interconnection between their identities and experiences resulted in various experiences that significantly influenced their interactions with higher education institutions. Furthermore, the findings revealed that individual identities, shaped by factors such as culture, background, and personal history, play a crucial role in how the participants navigated the transition to four-year universities (Castro & Cortez, 2017).

Once admitted to a university, transfer students face the demanding task of adapting to the university's pace and culture (Chin-Newman & Shaw, 2013). Chin-Newman and Shaw (2013) conducted a study highlighting the common hurdles transfer students face before and after transferring to a university, drawing insights from focus groups with 14 students who had recently transitioned from community colleges. Chin-Newman and Shaw's findings revealed that many transfer students encountered stigma associated with their community college backgrounds, struggled with self-doubt regarding their ability to succeed academically at the university level, and fostered feelings of inferiority regarding their academic contributions compared to those of their peers. Transfer students often experience considerable stress from navigating university technology once enrolled, such as delays in evaluating and transferring their community college credits toward fulfilling degree requirements (Chin-Newman & Shaw, 2013).

In the current educational framework, universities increasingly utilize technology and online systems to disseminate course materials, administer assessments, communicate grades, and enhance interactions between professors and students (Chin-

Newman & Shaw, 2013). However, when transfer students are unfamiliar with these technological platforms or lack adequate support to navigate them, they may be compelled to learn independently, piecing together essential information for their academic success (Cepeda et al., 2021). Cepeda et al. (2021) argued that information transparency is vital in facilitating successful transfers from community colleges to universities. A qualitative study by Cepeda et al. (2021) explored the transfer experiences of 18 individuals from five open-access campuses who were either preparing to transfer to or recently adjusting to a large public university's flagship campus in the Midwest. Cepeda et al. (2021) examined the distinct experiences of internal transfers—students who transfer from a regional campus to a flagship campus—versus external transfers, who transfer from a large urban community college to a university. The findings from Cepeda et al.'s study indicated that access to comprehensive transfer information is essential for overcoming various challenges encountered during and after the transfer process. Cepeda et al.'s findings also indicated that internal transfers benefit from additional support derived from established relationships with peers and faculty (Cepeda et al., 2021).

Experiences on the new campus play a critical role in the transfer process. Zilvinskis and Dumford (2018) comprehensively analyzed the transfer experience involving 22,994 senior students who transitioned from community colleges to a large flagship university. Zilvinskis and Dumford's study sought to determine whether there is a significant direct or indirect relationship between transfer status, student engagement, and participation in high-impact practices (HIPs). Zilvinskis and Dumford found that both positive and negative experiences, ranging from social and academic skills to

counseling and preparation, significantly influenced students' academic and social adjustment post-transfer. Furthermore, Zilvinskis and Dumford's quantitative findings underscore the essential role faculty play in advocating for and supporting transfer students while raising questions regarding the extent of institutional support necessary to help students successfully engage with HIPs within a four-year context. Specifically, Zilvinskis and Dumford (2018) noted that student-faculty interactions have an impact on the participation levels of transfer students in HIP experiences, suggesting an increase in faculty engagement in institutional and departmental policies related to transfer students.

The literature reviewed also highlighted that students who engage with advising services and establish strong relationships with faculty advisors tend to have more favorable transfer experiences (Carlsen & Gangeness, 2020; Hern et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2017). Hern et al. (2019) noted that transfer students are often overlooked within institutional structures from an advising perspective. Hern et al. contend that faculty and staff attitudes toward transfer students are crucial in helping navigate challenges and building meaningful connections within the campus community. In Hern et al.'s qualitative focus group study of 32 transfer students, Hern et al. revealed that advising was a recurring concern in every discussion. Notably, 29% of participants indicated they did not know their faculty advisor, and 42% reported not meeting with their advisor at least once per semester despite this being a standard expectation. Additionally, the findings suggested that while certain coursework in Hawaiian Studies is mandatory for all students at Island University, there is a pressing need for improved sensitivity training related to the racial dynamics and historical legacy of colonialism in Hawaii throughout the educational experience.

Wang et al. (2017) conducted a longitudinal study to investigate the factors influencing upward transfer among students initially enrolled in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) majors. Using survey data and administrative records from 1,245 first-time students at three large, comprehensive two-year institutions in a Midwestern state, Wang et al. identified important implications for policy and future research regarding transfer processes in STEM fields, with a particular emphasis on gender and racial disparities within the transfer pathway.

Wang et al. (2017) findings revealed that students who actively engage with faculty and advisors at baccalaureate institutions during the transfer process gain valuable insights into transfer admissions, articulation agreements, scholarships, and financial aid opportunities. Moreover, the study demonstrated that students who utilized transfer services more frequently were significantly more likely to exhibit aspirational momentum; however, this relationship was notably weaker for female students than their male counterparts. Additionally, Black and Hispanic students showed less aspirational momentum in response to transfer support than their White peers. However, Black students experienced a significantly stronger correlation between transfer service usage and aspirational momentum (Wang et al., 2017).

Higher education environments often send mixed signals regarding policies and articulation agreements, forcing students to navigate a complicated landscape to reach their transfer objectives (Schudde et al., 2021). Transfer agreements and articulation agreements, as defined by Schudde et al., facilitate students' transitions across state higher education institutions by preventing the loss of credits. Minimal research has investigated how students comprehend or utilize information about transfer-related

policies. As a result, many students face insufficient guidance while managing their transfer journey. According to Schudde et al. (2021), because more than a third of college students, the majority of whom hope to earn a baccalaureate, begin higher education at a community college, higher education stakeholders need to understand how students experience and make sense of existing policies to develop and fine-tune an efficient transfer function.

Schudde et al. (2021) conducted semi-structured interviews, each lasting approximately 60 minutes. In their study, which targeted students who expressed an intention to transfer to a university within the next 12 months, they recruited a total of 104 participants during the first year. While Schudde et al. aimed to follow up with all 104 participants in the second year, only 61 responded. In the third year, Schudde et al. spoke with 66 participants (Schudde et al., 2021). Using sense-making theory and longitudinal qualitative data, Schudde et al. (2021) investigated how community college students interpret state transfer policies and how their interpretations shape their subsequent actions. Over the course of three years of interviews, the data demonstrated how students navigated conflicting and overlapping policies. Moreover, the higher education environment, characterized by institutions sending mixed signals regarding policies, forced students to decipher complex messages to achieve their transfer objectives. Students typically adopted one of two approaches to understanding transfer policies: either treating policy signals as sequential procedures or adapting and merging various signals to create a personalized transfer pathway. Both approaches had significant implications for their transfer outcomes. Notably, Schudde et al. found no evidence of

differences in the signals received or deliberation methods based on race or family income (Schudde et al., 2021).

While the aforementioned studies offer valuable insights into the transfer experiences of college students, they mainly concentrate on non-Black transfer students (Zilvinskis & Dumford, 2018; Hern et al., 2019; Cepeda et al., 2021). In the following sections, I will examine the literature on the transfer experiences of minoritized and Black transfer students, with a particular emphasis on the need for a more in-depth exploration of the experiences of Black transfer students.

Minoritized Student Transfer Experiences

Research has explored the relationships between student demographics (such as race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status), institutional characteristics, and student engagement to better understand their effects on transfer intentions and retention among minoritized transfer students (Mamiseishvili & Deggs, 2013). Mamiseishvili and Deggs (2013) quantitatively analyzed 1,350 low-income students enrolled in public two-year institutions, specifically those who intended to transfer or obtain an associate degree. Utilizing the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study dataset to assess students' persistence behaviors and outcomes, the research found that positive interactions with faculty and academic advisors, social integration, ambitious degree aspirations, and being female were associated with a higher likelihood of transferring. Conversely, factors such as identifying as Black or African American, participating in distance education, and experiencing delayed enrollment were linked to a decreased probability of transfer among low-income students (Mamiseishvili & Deggs, 2013). The study highlighted the challenges faced by predominantly low-income participants, many

of whom came from families without college degrees and delayed their transition to higher education after high school (Mamiseishvilli & Deggs, 2013).

Rennick and Kim's (2023) study aimed to enhance the understanding of the unique college engagement experiences of Latinx transfer students at more selective institutions and how this engagement may influence their learning outcomes, particularly cognitive skills, compared to those of their non-transfer Latinx peers. Rennick and Kim's study identified distinct predictors of cognitive skill development for Latinx transfer students versus their non-transfer peers. The data for Rennick and Kim's study was sourced from the 2012 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), focusing solely on seniors from institutions in the United States who identified as Latinx (Rennick & Kim, 2023, p. 1167). The sample consisted of 968 Latinx college students from 120 four-year institutions nationwide, including 281 non-transfer students and 687 transfer students. Rennick and Kim found that Latinx transfer students displayed significantly greater engagement within the classroom than their non-transfer counterparts, particularly in collaborative projects (Rennick & Kim, 2023). Rennick and Kim's study also revealed that interactions with faculty positively impacted the cognitive skills development of Latinx transfer students, a beneficial effect not observed in their non-transfer peers. Rennick and Kim's findings suggest that Latinx transfer students may derive greater benefits from faculty interactions that occur within or near the classroom environment (e.g., during office hours or before and after class).

Rennick and Kim's findings also showed that Latinx transfer students exhibited lower levels of engagement than their non-transfer peers in enriching educational activities, such as co-curricular involvement (e.g., student organizations, fraternities and

sororities, and student government) and interactions with diverse classmates (e.g., engaging in serious discussions with individuals from different racial/ethnic backgrounds, religious beliefs, or political perspectives). Furthermore, Latinx transfer students were less likely to participate in research opportunities with faculty when compared to non-transfer students. While involvement in community-based projects (e.g., service learning) emerged as a significant positive predictor of cognitive skills for non-transfer Latinx students, this was not the case for Latinx transfer students. These findings of Rennick and Kim's study suggested that even when Latinx transfer students participate in extracurricular activities, they tend to benefit less in terms of cognitive skills than non-transfer students (Rennick & Kim, 2023).

Black Transfer Student Experiences

Campus climate and culture can significantly impact the experiences of Black transfer students as they navigate the complexities of being both transfer students and Black students (McCall & Castles, 2020). From the lack of diversity represented in the student, staff, and faculty body to experiencing racism, discrimination, and chilly campus climates, Black students often do not feel part of the overall university experience because of segmentation across racial and cultural lines (McCall & Castles, 2020). While attending HWI, many Black students find themselves having to constantly explain why they participate in certain activities, engage in awkward conversations about their culture, or are subjected to subtle digs by roommates and peers (Chiles, 2016). McCall and Castles added that the lack of on-campus activities geared toward Black students at an HWI may cause them to disconnect entirely from campus life, producing troubling experiences, deep feelings of resentment, and reserved alumni. McCall and Castles

(2020) hold the view that Black transfer students face a unique set of challenges during the transition period, often seeking out resources or leaning on a community of peers from the same previous institution they had attended for support during their transition. Given the complex dynamics of campus climate and the unique challenges faced by Black transfer students, it is essential to examine how these factors intertwine with existing support structures and academic systems as they navigate the transition to HWIs.

According to Flowers (2006), the existing systems and support structures designed to facilitate student transfers are often insufficient and frequently rooted in deficit-based perceptions regarding students' academic abilities and potential. The intersection of race and ethnicity with social class significantly influences Black students' treatment within educational institutions, impacting their experiences when transferring to new environments (Flowers, 2006). Three studies in the literature specifically focused on the transfer experiences of Black transfer students (McCall & Castles, 2020; Flowers, 2006; Wood & Palmer, 2016). McCall and Castle's (2020) study aimed to explore the experiences and sense of belonging of African American transfer students at a predominantly White institution in the Midwest. Additionally, McCall and Castle sought to explore the effect of support services (or lack of) and staff on African American students' lived experiences and student involvement on a particular campus. McCall and Castles conducted interviews with six students and seven staff members, uncovering several key themes from their study. The findings revealed cultural differences observed by some students, while others expressed satisfaction with the support and programs provided by the university. Staff members noted a deficiency in university services and support aimed at retaining and assisting these students. The themes identified from the

collected data encompass perceptions of the campus community, levels of involvement and sense of belonging, relationship-building, staff, and university support, and the adequacy of support provided by the institution's staff for these students. Overall, the results highlighted significant disparities between the opinions of students and staff, illustrating the contrasting thoughts and feelings of each group (McCall & Castle, 2020).

Flower's (2006) study examined the direct effects of institutional type on African American male students' academic integration and social integration experiences in the first year of college, controlling for pre-college characteristics, institutional characteristics, and college experiences. Utilizing the descriptive and multivariate analysis of the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (1996/1998), Flowers found that African American males enrolled in universities tended to report greater academic and social integration levels during their first year of college. The results suggest that student affairs professionals at community colleges should prioritize creating targeted interventions to facilitate academic and social integration experiences for African American males during their initial year of college (Flowers, 2006).

Wood and Palmer (2016) examined the factors that influence the likelihood of Black male community college students transferring to a university. Their objective was to determine whether student-level and institutional-level measures of engagement could predict transfer intentions. Wood and Palmer analyzed whether the effects of engagement predictors at the student level varied across different colleges. The study employed a quantitative analysis of secondary data from the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE), which included a sample of 11,384 Black males enrolled in 259 community colleges. The findings revealed that students whose primary goal was to

transfer, compared to those who did not have this goal, tended to be younger, had accumulated more credits, were non-first-generation students, were enrolled full-time, and had participated in developmental education courses. Additionally, they were more likely to be actively engaged (Wood & Palmer, 2016).

Although the literature reviewed for this study documented inequalities in the transfer process across race and ethnicity (Mamiseishvili & Deggs, 2013; Rennick & Kim, 2023), few studies focused explicitly on Black transfer students (Castro & Cortez, 2017; Chin-Newman & Shaw, 2013). While some transfer research discussed the transition experiences of Black transfer students (McCall & Castles, 2020; Flowers, 2006), the articles synthesized for this study overwhelmingly sampled White college students (40 % of the sample or more) in their studies (Mamiseishvili & Deggs, 2021; Schudde et al., 2013; Cepeda et al., 2021; Zilvinskis & Dumford, 2018). To date, there remains a scarcity of qualitative studies that specifically center on the unique experiences of Black transfer students during the critical transition from a community college to an HWI; however, the current study will highlight the importance of recognizing the complexities of identity and lived experiences as articulated by Castro and Cortez's (2017) study of Mexican college students.

This study aims to address the notable gaps in the transfer literature by focusing specifically on the lived experiences of Black transfer students as they transition from community colleges to HWIs. By highlighting the unique experiences of Black transfer students, the research aims to promote a more inclusive dialogue around transfer processes. Lastly, it is crucial for future research to delve deeper into the intersectionality within the Black transfer student community, advocating for the inclusion of their voices

in discussions about transfer processes. Such efforts are crucial to ensure that the distinct experiences of Black transfer students inform effective policies and practices within higher education.

Factors in Transfer Success

Research has shown that transfer students encounter various experiences and expectations when transitioning to a new institution, highlighting the distinct factors contributing to their success (McGuire & Belcheir, 2013; Yu et al., 2024; Schwehm, 2017). In a quantitative study by McGuire and Belcheir (2013) involving 12,103 students, the scholars aimed to identify and define profiles of transfer students and evaluate whether these profiles correspond to varying levels of student success, as measured by first-semester grade point average (GPA), retention rates, and graduation outcomes. One significant finding highlighted the positive impact of learning and study skills—conceptualized as Transfer Student Capital (TSC)—on students’ academic adjustment during the transfer process. Conversely, McGuire and Belcheir’s study found that students’ motivations for transferring and their experiences with academic counseling at the community college negatively affected their adjustment to the new institution. The findings indicate that different types of transfer students navigate their first year at a new institution in distinct ways. McGuire and Belcheir (2013) noted that understanding the diverse profiles of transfer students can aid in developing targeted intervention strategies to improve student success.

In a study conducted by Yu et al. (2024), the primary aim was to investigate the connection between early academic momentum among community college students and their vertical transfer outcomes. The researchers focused on identifying whether

variations existed in this relationship across different racial and ethnic groups. Their quantitative analysis demonstrated a significant correlation between early academic momentum and successful vertical transfers for community college students. Notably, the findings indicated that academic momentum did not function uniformly across all racial and ethnic backgrounds; specific indicators were found to be particularly influential in enhancing transfer outcomes for Black/African American and Latinx/Hispanic students (Yu et al., 2024).

Schwehm's (2017) quantitative study aimed to identify the demographic variables and community college experiences that significantly influence the academic and social adjustment processes of adult vertical transfer students at a university. The findings revealed that a community college student's GPA emerged as the most critical predictor of their university GPA, highlighting the importance of academic performance during initial college years (Schwehm, 2017). Furthermore, the degree of perceived classroom involvement at the community college was a primary predictor of academic self-efficacy and social adjustment at the university level. Interestingly, Schwehm's study noted that students who engaged in more extracurricular activities at the community college reported a diminished sense of belonging at the university. Schwehm (2017) suggested that students who were deeply embedded in their personal and academic communities at the community college may have maintained those connections, inadvertently hindering the formation of new relationships within the university environment.

Academic Success and Student Engagement

Duggan and Pickering (2007) conducted a correlational study exploring the barriers to persistence among a cohort of 369 incoming transfer students surveyed during

Transfer Preview, an orientation program designed for transfer students. The findings indicated that noncognitive factors, including institutional support, financial considerations, and student goals, predict academic success and persistence for first-year transfer students. Interestingly, the study revealed that the barriers faced by transfer students varied significantly across different academic classifications, specifically between freshmen, sophomores, and upper-division students (juniors and seniors). Duggan and Pickering's (2007) findings highlight the need to consider noncognitive factors when addressing the challenges of transfer students and their academic trajectories.

Researchers have also explored the engagement levels of transfer students. As previously discussed, Zilvinskis and Dumford (2018) conducted a survey of 22,994 senior college students to investigate the relationship between transfer status—specifically, students transitioning from two-year to four-year institutions—and various aspects of student engagement, including collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, and the perception of a supportive campus environment. Additionally, they examined participation in high-impact practices (HIPs), such as learning communities, service-learning, research collaborations with faculty, internships, study abroad programs, and culminating senior experiences. Zilvinskis and Dumford's (2018) findings indicated that while each engagement indicator significantly mediated HIP participation for transfer students, the impact of student-faculty interaction was notably significant. Again, the findings underscore the necessity for increased faculty involvement in developing institutional and departmental policies to support transfer students (Zilvinskis & Dumford, 2018).

Transfer Student Capital

Transfer student capital (TSC), as defined by Laanan et al. (2010), refers to the experiences of community college students who transfer to four-year institutions. Specifically, TSC indicates how community college students accumulate knowledge to negotiate the transfer process, such as understanding credit-transfer agreements between colleges, grade requirements for admission into a desired major, and course prerequisites (Laanan et al., 2010).

A study by Lukszo and Hayes (2020) specifically examined transfer student capital (TSC) through semi-structured, in-person interviews with 17 transfer students from in-state community colleges, three of whom identified as Black or African American. Lukszo and Hayes aimed to identify the role of academic advisors in facilitating the development of TSC for these transfer students. Lukszo and Hayes (2020) also conducted eight observations of advising meetings between in-state community college transfer students and pre-transfer advisors to gain insights into the information shared during these interactions and the dynamics of these meetings.

Lukszo and Hayes (2020) found that academic advisors play a role in fostering the development of TSC for community college transfer students (Lukszo & Hayes, 2020). Notably, the data revealed that advisors significantly enhance students' self-efficacy and shape their expectations. However, the study's results also highlighted that not all advising experiences were positive. Some participants noted limitations in academic advising, specifically expressing concerns about inadequate guidance and the necessity for self-advocacy (Lukszo & Hayes, 2020).

Logistical and Procedural Factors

Community college students' transfer decisions are complex and nonlinear, shaped by the uncertainty of the community college context, according to qualitative research by Jabbar et al. (2021). Through in-depth interviews with 58 students in Texas, the study found that students' pathways to transfer were influenced by a range of factors, including the timing of transfer, cost, credit transferability, and the need to balance career, education, and family responsibilities. The study revealed that many students' transfer processes were far from linear or sequential, with some experiencing multiple rounds of applications and decision-making, resulting in increased costs, time, and effort. Furthermore, some students experienced catastrophic disturbances, where seemingly minor hurdles, such as missing a deadline, led to a restart of the college choice process or a re-evaluation of their decision to transfer altogether. Jabbar et al.'s findings underscore the importance of policymakers and practitioners acknowledging the complexity of community college students' transfer decisions and developing strategies to support them in navigating the transfer process (Jabbar et al., 2021).

A study by Fay et al. (2022) explored how students identify and evaluate potential transfer destination colleges, highlighting the role of dedicated and personalized advising in shaping their transfer plans and outcomes. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the research combines interviews examining students' transfer planning processes with an analysis of student record data to assess transfer outcomes. Fay et al.'s study compares students who received personalized transfer advising through a community college honors program with similarly qualified peers attending the same six community colleges who received standard advising. Results indicated that personalized advising and strong

relationships with transfer advisors correlate with higher transfer rates and may facilitate transitions to more selective institutions. Fay et al. (2021) study underscores the importance of tailored support for students in the transfer process.

Transfer Success Among Minoritized and Black Transfer Students

Studies have explored the direct and indirect relationship between successful transfers and factors such as students' demographic traits (including race and socioeconomic status), pre-college background, in-college experiences, and personal aspirations. Pérez and Ceja (2010) reviewed existing research on Latinx/a/o transfer students and found that models and mentors who reflect the students' backgrounds offer essential resources that make college attendance, transfer, and graduation attainable.

Crisp and Nora (2009) conducted a study investigating the influence of theoretically derived predictor variables on the persistence and transfer of Hispanic community college students. The study aimed to inform policy and intervention efforts that promote equity in higher education for Hispanic students by providing empirical and theoretical insights into their academic preparation, experiences, and achievements. Three major conclusions emerged from Crisp and Nora's study. First, a common set of factors impacting student success at four-year institutions is also relevant for Hispanic community college students, enhancing existing theories concerning Latino student success. Second, environmental pull factors significantly affect both developmental and non-developmental students, highlighting the necessity for increased financial support for Latino students. Third, while shared variables influence success across both student categories, certain factors seem to have a greater impact on developmental students earlier in their academic journey, suggesting that institutional policies regarding

developmental education may also play a critical role in shaping long-term outcomes (Crisp & Nora, 2009).

Additionally, Clark and Nora (2009) identified parental education levels as a form of social capital that positively influences the academic success of Hispanic students attending community college. Finally, the study revealed that community college students who can afford to enroll full-time achieve notably higher success rates by the conclusion of their second and third years. In contrast, Crisp and Nora (2009) noted that stronger socioeconomic conditions and financial constraints might delay students' entry into higher education, often compelling them to work extensive hours and engage with the college environment part-time.

In summary, the literature surrounding transfer success reveals a complex interplay of factors influencing the experiences and outcomes of transfer students, particularly among minoritized groups such as Black and Latinx college students. Studies by McGuire and Belcheir (2013), Yu et al. (2024), and Crisp and Nora (2009) highlight the importance of understanding diverse student profiles, early academic momentum, and social capital, including parental education levels, in promoting successful transfers. Additionally, noncognitive factors, including institutional support and personalized advising, play a pivotal role in fostering academic success and persistence among first-year transfer students (Duggan & Pickering, 2007; Fay et al., 2022). While the impact of engagement strategies on transfer student success has garnered attention, particularly through high-impact practices (HIPs), a notable gap remains in qualitative research specifically addressing the unique barriers and experiences of Black transfer students (Schudde et al., 2021; Zilvinskis & Dumford, 2018). As the understanding of the transfer

process continues to evolve, it is essential for policymakers and educators to acknowledge these nuances and implement targeted interventions that support all transfer students, facilitating a smoother transition and ultimately enhancing their academic outcomes.

Challenges Encountered During the Transfer Process

Vast inequities persist concerning the recruitment, enrollment, and matriculation of minoritized students across the higher education landscape (Jain et al., 2020). Several studies have indicated that community college students, specifically minoritized students, face unique challenges and barriers during the transition to postsecondary education compared to first-year or transfer students who are white (Jain et al., 2020; Laanan et al., 2010). Barriers to a successful transfer for minoritized students can be attributed to a lack of academic preparation, inaccurate transfer advising, unfamiliarity with academic expectations and rigor of the receiving institutions, and weak transfer and articulation policies (Laanan et al., 2010). Taken together, these factors can create challenges for minoritized transfer students when they enter 4-year institutions (Laanan et al., 2010). Minoritized students, like Black transfer students, are tasked with managing new academic stressors in addition to adjusting socially to campus communities that lack diversity and traditionally discriminate against minoritized transfer students.

Despite extensive research on the personal or institutional obstacles to transfer, there is often a lack of attention to the systemic racism and exclusion faced by minoritized students during the transfer process. Crisp and Nuñez (2014) conducted a quantitative analysis to uncover the student and contextual factors that affect vertical transfer, emphasizing the differences and similarities between White and

underrepresented minoritized (URM) students. Among the sample of 1,360 students who planned to transfer for a bachelor's degree or higher, only 39% successfully transitioned within six academic years. Crisp and Nuñez's (2014) findings reveal that the elements that either facilitate or obstruct vertical transfer can differ markedly between White and URM students, with the research highlighting more distinctions than commonalities in the predictors of transfer.

According to McCall and Castles (2020), for Black transfer students entering HWIs, academic stress can be heightened if they lack adequate social support to navigate new academic challenges in environments that have traditionally marginalized minoritized students. In response to this stress, Black transfer students often seek support from peers, which can serve as a beneficial coping mechanism. Being among individuals with similar backgrounds offers comfort and an opportunity for authenticity (McCall & Castles, 2020). Increasing the proportion of Black transfer students successfully transitioning to universities is vital for addressing national educational attainment disparities across racial groups and fostering a well-educated workforce for the future (Crisp & Nuñez, 2014).

Transfer Shock

Research has examined the association between academic performance and declines in GPA after a student transfers to a new institution, known as transfer shock (Elliott & Lakin, 2020; Laanan et al., 2020). Elliott and Lakin (2020) conducted a study examining the post-transfer factors that contribute to transfer shock among students transitioning from community colleges to four-year institutions. Specifically, the research focused on identifying the academic normative differences that exist between these two

educational settings and how these disparities contribute to the experience of transfer shock. Through semi-structured interviews with transfer students from 17 geographically diverse community colleges across five states, the study revealed significant differences in faculty interactions, examination expectations, and norms related to independent learning. The findings highlight a notable disjuncture in academic practices between community colleges and four-year universities, offering insight into the transitional academic challenges transfer students frequently encounter (Elliott & Lakin, 2020).

In another study, Laanan et al. (2010) explored the complexities of the transfer experience for students who began their postsecondary education at a two-year college before transitioning to a large four-year university. The research aimed to expand the understanding of the transfer process beyond the notion of "transfer shock" by examining the significance of TSC concerning student retention. The findings indicated that the motivation behind students' decisions to transfer and their experiences with academic counseling, particularly when transfer students did not receive accurate or sufficient information, negatively impacted their academic adjustment at the university level.

Although McGuire and Belcheir (2013) did not explicitly focus on transfer shock or its contributing factors, their findings shed light on important correlations among student transfer, transfer GPA, first-semester GPA, retention, and graduation rates. McGuire and Belcheir's study revealed that "Old Hand at Transfer" students, those who transferred in a significant number of credits, attended multiple institutions before their current enrollment, and previously experienced the four-year college environment, achieved the highest first-semester GPAs. This group also exhibited the least transfer shock when comparing their transfer GPAs to their first-semester GPAs, as well as higher

rates of retention and graduation. By contextualizing these findings within the concept of transfer shock, scholars have highlighted the challenges transfer students face during their transition (Elliott & Lakin, 2020; McGuire & Belcheir, 2013).

Although prior studies have highlighted the racial and ethnic disparities within the transfer process, there remains a need to identify the community and institutional support crucial for ensuring a successful transfer experience for Black students. By examining the specific types of campus support that shape the experiences of Black transfer students, this research aspires to provide a more nuanced understanding of what constitutes a successful transfer, countering the prevailing narrative that primarily emphasizes the deficiencies of transfer students while overlooking their acquired strengths and attributes.

Shifting Success Frameworks

The existing literature on transfer students is extensive, examining various factors that influence the success of transfer students. Research has primarily focused on the characteristics of transfer students that affect their achievements (McGuire & Belcheir, 2013; Yu et al., 2024; Schwehm, 2017) as well as the challenges they face throughout the transfer process (Crisp & Nuñez, 2014; McCall & Castles, 2020). Studies predominantly analyze the barriers that transfer students face, emphasizing what they lack rather than exploring their strengths and capabilities. This literature review aims to shift the success frameworks for transfer students, seeking to provide a more holistic understanding of their experiences and contributions.

Bourdieu's cultural capital theory has been employed in educational discourse to explain the achievement gap between minoritized and White college students (Yosso, 2005). Bourdieu argues that privileged groups gain valuable cultural knowledge and

resources through formal education and familial connections (Yosso, 2005). These resources, which include social and economic capital, are often out of reach for minoritized groups, thereby perpetuating systemic inequalities. For instance, middle- or upper-class students may thrive academically due to early exposure to technology and the associated vocabulary, thus accumulating cultural capital that is recognized and rewarded within school environments (Yosso, 2005). Conversely, students from working-class backgrounds possess unique skills and perspectives that can significantly enhance their academic settings, underscoring the diverse forms of cultural capital within minoritized communities.

Yosso challenged Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, which tends to classify communities as either culturally affluent or impoverished. Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) redefines how we view minoritized communities, shifting the focus from a perception of cultural deficiency to one that appreciates cultural knowledge, skills, and often-overlooked networks of minoritized communities (Yosso, 2005). Yosso developed CCW using CRT to challenge traditional interpretations of cultural capital (Samuelson & Little, 2016). Yosso (2005) introduces the concept of CCW to underline the positive assets that minoritized groups utilize to resist systemic oppression. The CCW framework encompasses six distinct types of capital: aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital. Aspirational capital embodies the hopes and dreams individuals hold onto despite challenges, while navigational capital includes the skills needed to navigate social institutions. Social capital reflects the networks individuals create within their communities. Linguistic capital showcases the communication skills developed through bilingual or culturally specific experiences, familial capital denotes

the knowledge and cultural intuition fostered in family settings, and resistant capital represents the skills and knowledge acquired through experiences of resistance (Yosso, 2005).

Viramontes (2025) conducted a study to examine the community cultural wealth utilized by Latinx community college transfer students who faced limited pre-transfer support and unwelcoming environments at their new institutions. Viramontes's research was centered at Southwest State University (SSU), an HWI in Texas, and involved semi-structured interviews with ten Latinx community college transfer students. The findings revealed that students employed various forms of capital—aspirational, familial, navigational, resistant, and social—to compensate for the deficiencies in the transfer of information and resources required to transition to a university. The study advocated for four-year institutions to enhance or create a more receptive pre-transfer culture for Latinx students by implementing transfer policies, programs, and practices that prioritize their needs, thereby improving post-transfer completion rates (Viramontes, 2025).

Mwangi (2017) conducted a qualitative study to provide a nuanced understanding of how Black families influence academic achievement and the pursuit of higher education. The research specifically investigated the roles of families in shaping the academic motivations of Black native and Black immigrant students. The findings indicate that family expectations significantly drive students' academic motivation regardless of ethnicity or nativity, with many expressing a strong familial expectation to attend college. Additionally, the study highlights that students' self-motivation and goal orientation are also influenced by their families. However, notable distinctions emerged between ethnicities and nativity concerning perceptions of familial impact on academic

motivation and the specific messages regarding college aspirations and academic performance communicated by family members.

Student Agency, Asset-framing, and Capital

Scholars have extensively explored the concept of human agency in academic literature. For instance, Vygotsky (1978), as referenced in Vaughn (2020), argued that individuals exercise agency by utilizing tools and engaging in social practices while navigating and interacting within social contexts. From a social cognitive perspective, Bandura (1986, 2001) emphasized that agency is linked to an individual's self-efficacy and pursuit of control over their learning activities (Vaughn, 2020, p. 110). Vaughn (2020) noted that student agency emphasizes intention, purpose, persistence, choice-making, interactions, and negotiations as individuals decide to take or not take action.

In my quest to review the literature on Black transfer students' student agency, my search yielded very few results. Few researchers have reported on theories and models that build student agency among transfer students, specifically Black transfer students. Although minimal, several studies have begun examining how social and cultural capital theories are used to investigate factors affecting student persistence and retention.

Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth Framework uses a Critical Race Theory (CRT) lens to theorize, examine, and challenge how race and racism implicitly and explicitly impact social structures, practices, and discourses (Yosso, 2005). Thus, CRT shifts the center of focus from notions of White, middle-class culture to the cultures of minoritized communities (Yosso, 2005). Additionally, the CCW Framework has been highlighted in the literature on self-efficacy and agency among college students, with researchers drawing attention to the various forms of social and cultural capital that exist

among minoritized students, which contribute to their academic success. From the CCW theoretical orientation, we can recognize and acknowledge the cultural knowledge, skills, abilities, and connections of minoritized students, which aid in their success and persistence (Luna & Martinez, 2013).

According to Yosso (2005), the cultural capital that minoritized students acquire through families and communities contributes to successfully navigating educational systems. One form of capital that may support minoritized students, particularly Black transfer students at HWIs, is resistance capital. Resistance capital is fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality and is a form of cultural wealth grounded in the legacy of resistance to subordination exhibited by Communities of Color (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). Recognizing the various forms of capital that foster student agency amongst minoritized students is significant. The literature review highlighted community as a central theme for minoritized students, encompassing both familial communities (Jones & Reddick, 2017; Murillo, 2024) and Black student communities (Sulé & Brown, 2023).

Resistance capital may particularly influence Black student communities at HWI during times of social unrest. In the wake of highly visible institutionalized anti-Black violence, Sulé and Brown (2023) conducted in-depth interviews to examine how a sense of belonging manifests among Black students at historically White colleges. Sulé and Brown found two themes in their study: 1) That whiteness everywhere addresses the pervasive and all-consuming effect of whiteness on the spaces and environments students navigated within, and 2) Critical agency highlights participants' responses to racism and white supremacy, which were reflected in their academic and co-curricular experiences.

Through their agency, students can cultivate a sense of belonging as a resistance tool (Sulé & Brown, 2023, p. 6).

Resistance capital may particularly influence Black student communities at HWIs during times of social unrest. Jones and Reddick (2017) explored the perceptions of 10 Black campus leaders at a southern HWI. Participants were immersed in affecting campus climate, inspiring multiple forms of resistance, and challenging inequality individually and through the mobilization of the Black student community (Jones & Reddick, 2017). The study's findings shed light on the challenges to achieving lasting change in a HWI environment (Jones & Reddick, 2017). Participants expressed individual and collective insights into the novel ways the Black student community exercised resistance capital, seeking influence within an institutional context so often resistant to change (Jones & Reddick, 2017).

Murillo (2024) conducted a study aimed at understanding how Latinx immigrant-origin community college students leverage their funds of identity to persist and successfully transfer to 4-year institutions. Employing a multimethodological qualitative approach, the study gathered self-portraits and testimonios from 20 Latinx immigrant-origin students at California community colleges in the spring of 2022, all of whom intended to transfer to a 4-year college in the fall. The results revealed that family connections significantly influenced students' aspirations and persistence, while the development of new funds of identity played a crucial role in shaping their experiences at community college. Additionally, culturally affirming courses and programs that resonated with students' funds of identity were instrumental in supporting their persistence and transfer during challenging periods. Furthermore, students' academic

interests and career exploration emerged as key motivating factors that helped them achieve their future goals (Murillo, 2024).

In summary, while the literature on student agency, asset framing, and capital provides insight into how minoritized students navigate their educational journeys, a gap remains regarding the specific experiences of Black transfer students. As established, the Community Cultural Wealth Framework significantly illuminates the strengths and resources of minoritized students, enabling them to overcome systemic barriers and foster a sense of belonging at HWIs (Yosso, 2005). The reviewed studies emphasize the significance of familial and community ties, as well as culturally affirming experiences, in fostering student persistence and success (Jones & Reddick, 2017; Murillo, 2024; Sulé & Brown, 2023). However, the limited research on Black transfer students emphasizes the need for future studies to explore the unique forms of capital that influence Black transfer students' transitions from community colleges to universities. Such inquiries will be vital for bridging cultural mismatches between educational institutions and the diverse backgrounds of their students, ultimately leading to more inclusive and supportive academic environments (Murillo, 2024).

Summary

In summary, while transferring from community colleges to universities is a common path (Handel, 2013; Arnold, 2001), systemic racial and gender inequities present significant challenges for Black transfer students (Jain et al., 2020; Laanan et al., 2010). Research indicates that Black transfer students often encounter barriers such as attending under-resourced schools, receiving inadequate academic guidance, and facing socioeconomic hardships that hinder both their social engagement and academic success

(Crisp & Nuñez, 2014). Additionally, the campus environment, including the diversity of faculty and peers, plays a crucial role in shaping their experiences (McCall & Castles, 2020).

Inequities concerning race, gender, and socioeconomic status contribute to transfer gaps that disproportionately affect Black students. Structural challenges arise from institutional practices that may unintentionally dissuade their ambitions, such as community college counselors guiding them toward vocational programs or universities frequently modifying transfer agreements, complicating credit evaluations (Jain et al., 2020; Crisp & Nora, 2009).

Employing Critical Race Theory and the Community Cultural Wealth Framework, this study aims to explore the lived experiences of Black transfer students, with a focus on the social and cultural capital essential for their successful transitions. Moving away from the traditional narrative that views Black students as disadvantaged, the current study will highlight their diverse cultural knowledge and capabilities, which are often overlooked in existing frameworks. By addressing the gaps in the literature on Black transfer students, this study will explore the lived experiences of Black transfer students and examine the community capital that facilitates their transitions, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of their experiences and informing strategies to improve support for Black transfer students moving from community colleges to historically White institutions.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Historically, educational research has (a) ignored minoritized groups by simply not addressing their concerns, (b) relied heavily on genetic or biological determinist perspectives to explain away complex social and educational problems, or (c) de-emphasized race by arguing that the problems minoritized students experience in schools can be understood via class or gender analyses that do not fully take race, culture, language, and immigrant status into account (Parker & Lynn, 2002, p. 13). Whether explicitly or implicitly, social science theoretical models explaining educational inequality support majoritarian stories (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 30).

Research Design

Educational researchers have increasingly employed Critical Race Theory (CRT) to examine the ongoing relevance of institutional racism in academic settings (Powers, 2007). Ledesma and Calderón (2015) argued that Critical Race Theory (CRT) is instrumental in understanding the underlying systemic factors that contribute to unequal educational access and opportunities. Moreover, CRT emphasizes the importance of being conscious of the discursive impacts of efforts to promote change and achieve equity in higher education within the United States (U.S.) (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015). According to Allen et al. (2018), CRT exposes the intersections between various cultural,

political, economic, social, and legal factors that create, sustain, and account for the persistent systemic challenges in U.S. higher education.

Narratives and storytelling in CRT challenge and disrupt conventional understandings of race. Storytelling can play a crucial role in constructing legal narratives of racial discrimination. Using in-depth descriptions and interviews characteristic of case study research, these narratives not only illuminate discriminatory practices but also provide evidence of both institutional and overt racism. By gathering these interviews and narratives, a case can be constructed to challenge racially biased actions or discriminatory policies (Parker & Lynn, 2002).

Critical Race Theory originated in legal analysis but has evolved into a vital framework for educational researchers and critical race scholars seeking to examine the ongoing presence of institutional racism in academic contexts (Powers, 2007). As a scholarly movement established in the early 1970s, CRT was significantly shaped by the writings of Derrick Bell, a pioneering Black civil rights lawyer and the first Black professor at Harvard Law School (Delgado & Stefancic, 1998). Scholars like Richard Delgado have pointed out systemic issues within academia, such as the tendency of prominent White scholars to overlook the contributions of scholars of Color (Delgado & Stefancic, 1998). Kimberlé Crenshaw further criticized both liberal and radical legal frameworks for their inadequacy in addressing race-related concerns (Delgado & Stefancic, 1998).

The impact of CRT extends significantly into racial analysis within legal studies and education, highlighting how majoritarian structures shape educational access and opportunities for underrepresented populations (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015). By shifting

away from a deficit perspective of minoritized college students, CRT acknowledges and honors their diverse experiences and contributions (Hong, 2018). In higher education, CRT scholars focus on critical areas, including campus racial climate, selective admissions policies, and the concept of colorblindness (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015). Critical race theory is a theoretical framework that helps illuminate how institutional racism is embedded within the educational system and how it perpetuates barriers for minoritized groups. By employing CRT in this study, I aim to reveal the nuanced interplay of race, ethnicity, and societal factors that impact the transition experiences of Black transfer students, thereby offering insights that can inform policy changes and institutional practices aimed at fostering equity and inclusion for Black transfer students attending historically White Institutions (HWIs).

Critical Race Methodology

I employed critical race methodology so that participants who have been injured by racism and other forms of oppression can discover they are not alone and become empowered by hearing their own stories and the stories of others (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Solórzano and Yosso assert that the ideology of racism creates, maintains, and justifies the use of a “master narrative” in storytelling. It is within the context of racism that “monovocal” stories about the low educational achievement and attainment of minoritized students are told. Unacknowledged White privilege helps maintain racism’s stories (p. 27). The master narrative distorts and suppresses the lived experiences of minoritized students. By employing “standard formulae,” majoritarian methods claim to be unbiased and impartial, but they perpetuate assumptions based on negative stereotypes about minoritized students (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 29). For instance, according to

cultural deficit storytelling, a successful minoritized student is an assimilated minoritized student.

Critical race methodology exposes deficit-informed research and methods that silence and distort the experiences of minoritized people and instead focuses on their racialized, gendered, and classed experiences as sources of strength (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 26). The deficit storytelling approach underscores the importance of acknowledging experiences related to racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism as legitimate sources of data. By contextualizing Black transfer student experiences in the past, present, and future, critical race methodology employs diverse and innovative research methods to incorporate the insights of individuals who have been traditionally excluded from academic discourse. While critical race theory names racist injuries and identifies their origins, critical race methodology finds that racism is often well disguised in the rhetoric of shared “normative” values and “neutral” social scientific and educational principles and practices (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Critical race methodology is crucial in education, providing insightful frameworks for examining racial dynamics and challenges in academic environments. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) identify five key elements that highlight challenges to traditional scholarship and enhance the understanding of race and equity. The first element emphasizes the intercentricity of race and racism with other forms of subordination, recognizing the overlapping layers of oppression based on factors such as gender, class, and immigration status (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 25). The second element critiques dominant ideologies, particularly White privilege, and addresses the inadequacies of “neutral” research that often silences the epistemologies of minoritized populations. The

third element underscores a commitment to social justice, acknowledging that various forms of oppression inspire diverse resistance strategies. The fourth element emphasizes the centrality of experiential knowledge, challenging traditional research paradigms that inadequately represent the lived experiences of minoritized groups. Finally, the transdisciplinary perspective integrates insights from multiple disciplines, including ethnic studies, sociology, and law, to better understand the impacts of racism, sexism, and classism on minoritized students (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, pp. 26-27). Together, these elements provide a comprehensive framework for applying critical race methodology in education, enriching data analysis and the investigation of systemic inequities.

In summary, traditional educational research has frequently overlooked historically minoritized groups, often opting for genetic or biological determinist perspectives to explain social issues while downplaying the role of race in educational disparities (Parker & Lynn, 2002). Scholars of CRT emphasize the importance of recognizing power dynamics in research and advocating for narratives that challenge mainstream views on race (Parker & Lynn, 2002). Innovative approaches such as Decolonial Collaborative Autoethnography (Castillo-Montoya et al., 2022) and Sista Circle Methodology (Lacy, 2018) offer fresh perspectives on the experiences of minoritized students and aim to dismantle oppressive systems within academia. By employing a critical race methodology, researchers can empower individuals affected by racism, amplify their voices, and interrogate prevailing narratives that uphold stereotypes and inequities.

This research focuses on the transition experiences of Black transfer students who transfer from community colleges to HWIs. To gain deeper insight into their transfer

experiences, I pose the following research questions: 1) How do Black transfer students describe their transition experiences, feelings, and thoughts from enrollment through the end of their first semester? 2) What forms of community capital, if any, were helpful throughout the transition? 3) What types of campus support, if any, were helpful throughout the transition? and 4) How can their experiences inform others? These questions are designed to illuminate the complexities of the transition process and contribute to a broader understanding of the unique needs and experiences of Black transfer students in higher education.

Population, Sampling, and Participants

Population and Sampling

The research focused on Black or African American individuals who transitioned from community colleges to historically White institutions (HWIs), requiring participants to be 18 years or older and to have experienced the transfer process. The study aimed to explore their lived experiences and the support systems that aided them during their transition. A screening survey was utilized to determine eligibility for participant selection. The screening survey contained the following questions: 1) How does the participant describe their race/ethnicity? 2) Did the participant attend a two-year community college? 3) Did the participant transfer to a four-year college? 4) Was the 4-year college a historically White institution (HWI)? "HWI" means the predominant student population is White, and the socio-cultural norms perpetuate whiteness. A sample of nine participants was formed based on these criteria, all of whom completed the entire study, including the screening survey, demographic questionnaire, initial virtual Zoom interview, and follow-up Zoom meeting.

This study utilized a purposeful sampling method to select participants based on specific criteria, aiming for a targeted and homogeneous group. Participants needed to identify as Black or African American, be 18 years old or older, have attended a two-year community college, and have transferred to a HWI. The purposeful sampling approach was chosen to facilitate a detailed examination of the unique experiences and perspectives of Black transfer students, yielding data to address the study's research questions.

Participant Description

The participant sample for this study consisted of individuals who met the predetermined criteria outlined in the screening survey and completed the demographic questionnaire, initial interview, and follow-up meeting. Regarding enrollment status, participants included one not currently enrolled, two alumni, two graduate students, three seniors, and one junior. The gender breakdown revealed six female and three male participants. Regarding relationship status, six identified as single (never married), while three reported being married or having a domestic partner. Participants' ages varied, with three aged 18-24, one aged 25-34, one aged 35-44, three aged 45-54, and one aged 65-74. The group comprised five full-time and four part-time participants, with living arrangements distributed among four off-campus, one off-campus living with parents, one off-campus in separate housing, and three who did not specify their housing status. Additionally, five participants reported having no dependents, three had 1-2 dependents, and one reported having 3-4 dependents. Of the participants, eight indicated that they had family members who attended college, while one did not (Table 3.1). Participants were given pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality (see Table 3.2).

Table 3.1*Demographic information*

Category	Count
Enrollment Status	
Freshman	0
Sophomore	0
Junior	1
Senior	3
Graduate Student	2
Alumni	2
Not Currently Enrolled	1
Gender Identity	
Female	6
Male	3
Relationship Status	
Single (never married)	6
Married, or in a domestic partnership	3
Employment Status	
Full-time	5
Part-time	4

Table 3.1 (cont.)*Demographic information*

Category	Count
Age	
18-24	3
25-34	1
35-44	1
45-54	3
65-74	1
Housing	
On-campus	1
Off-campus with parents	1
Housing status not listed	3
Off-campus separate housing/lived alone	4
Dependents	
None	5
1-2	3
3-4	1
Has anyone in your family attended college before?	
Yes	8
No	1

Table 3.2*Participant Pseudonyms, Pronouns, and Gender Identity*

Participant	Pseudonyms, Pronouns, and Gender Identity
Participant A	Angel, he/him, male
Participant B	Blair, he/him, male
Participant C	Charley, she/her, female
Participant D	Duran, he/him, male
Participant E	Emry, she/her, female
Participant F	Fynn, she/her, female
Participant G	Ginnie, she/her, female
Participant H	Haydn, she/her, female
Participant I	Indigo, she/her, female

Instruments and Measures

I employed a qualitative method approach grounded in critical race methodology to facilitate a space for participants who may be injured by racism and other forms of oppression to discover they are not alone and become empowered in hearing their own stories and the stories of others (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Critical race methodology aims to empower minoritized students by fostering recognition of their shared experiences and creating opportunities for them to share their own stories and those of others (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Central to this methodology is counter-storytelling, which challenges and disrupts conventional narratives that often rely on notions of biological and cultural deficiencies (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). To gain a comprehensive understanding of the participants' lived experiences, I employed several research instruments and measures designed to gather nuanced qualitative data that captures the depth of their stories.

Recruitment

The recruitment process for this study involved several systematic steps, including creating a screening survey and a demographic questionnaire, developing recruitment strategies, and scheduling interviews, all of which adhered to established protocols. Following approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I implemented a recruitment strategy that included distributing recruitment flyers through social media platforms (Facebook and LinkedIn) and emailing admission offices at HWIs. I also shared the recruitment flyer within my professional network and contacted my

institution's Registrar's Office, which provided me with a list of 300 email addresses of transfer students.

After completing the screening survey, I proceeded to the next phase by sending a blind carbon copy (BCC) email to eligible participants, inviting them to participate in virtual interviews. The email included an attached Information Sheet for Exempt Research outlining the study details and the IRB approval date to inform participants about the research. Key steps outlined in the Information Sheet and email included: 1) Scheduling a 60-75-minute virtual interview, 2) Completing a demographic questionnaire prior to the initial scheduled interview, 3) Reviewing their interview transcript, 4) Scheduling a follow-up meeting, and 5) Expectations for the timeline to receive the Amazon e-gift card as a participant incentive. This email allowed participants to review the information and schedule their virtual interview at their convenience.

Screening Survey

I created a screening survey to determine participant eligibility. The survey included questions assessing participants' willingness and consent to participate in the study, their racial and ethnic identification, whether they had attended a two-year community college, whether they had transferred to a four-year college, and whether that college was a historically White institution (HWI). HWI was defined on the screening survey as an institution with a predominantly White student population, and the socio-cultural norms perpetuate Whiteness. Additionally, participants were asked for their preferred method of contact, either by phone or email. Initially, I received 50 responses. After determining eligibility, nine participants met the criteria of being 18 years old or older, identifying as Black or African American, attending a two-year community

college, transferring to a four-year institution (HWI), and completing the first semester after transferring.

Demographic Questionnaire

I created a demographic questionnaire on Qualtrics, which all nine participants completed before their first scheduled interview. The demographic questionnaire was emailed to the nine participants 24-48 hours prior to their scheduled interview. The purpose of the demographic questionnaire was to gather essential information, including age, gender identity, relationship status, enrollment status, and the campus support and community capital that aided them during their transition. Participants were asked to rate on a scale of one to ten to what extent each of the following supported them when transferring to a four-year HWI (Table 3.3).

Table 3.3*Campus Support and Community Capital*

Campus Support	Community Capital
Academic Advisor	Support from friends and family
Disability Support Services	Storytelling from family/friends who have attended college previously
Academic Clubs	Church
Staff	Ability to express yourself in more than one language/communication style (storytelling, art, music)
Counseling Center	Community Organizations
Building relationships with other Black college students	Hopes and Dreams of family members
Student Organization/Clubs	Support Groups
Faculty	Talking about injustices and barriers you may face in schools and community with others
Student Orientation	Family Connections
Gender and Sexuality Center	Social Networks
Dean of Students	Family traditions/culture
Recreational Center	Social Media (Facebook, X, Snapchat, Instagram, etc.)
Student Transfer Office/Support	Engaging in campus activism
Sororities/Fraternities	Community Service

Table 3.3 (cont.)
Campus Support and Community Capital

Campus Support	Community Capital
Study Groups	Hopes and Dreams of Community Members (i.e. neighbors, pastor)
Peer Support from fellow students	Creating your own definition of success
Tutors	Engaging in self-care
	Family
	Mentorship programs
	Friends
	Employer/Colleagues
	Extracurricular Activities (i.e., playing in a band, sports, sewing)
	Mentors
	Navigating the campus social scene
	Navigating campus technology systems (i.e., scheduling an advisor appt., submitting assignments)

Data Collection Procedures

The data collection process consisted of a screening survey, demographic questionnaire, initial interview, transcription, field notes, and a follow-up meeting. I developed an interview protocol for each participant to remind me of my research questions and to take notes during the interview and follow-up meeting (see Table 3.4). The primary platform for conducting the 60- to 75-minute initial interview was Zoom, which enabled real-time interaction and data collection. I conducted semi-structured interviews informed by the demographic questionnaire and the literature on transfer students and Black college students. After conducting the initial interviews, I utilized Rev.com to transcribe the audio files from the participants. Next, I reviewed the Zoom recordings for my field notes to observe and document nonverbal communication, such as laughing, smiling, or nodding in agreement. I used the interview protocol document to record field notes and document nonverbal communication for each participant. Next, I sent each participant a BCC email containing their transcript, inviting them to schedule a follow-up Zoom meeting lasting 60-75 minutes to review the transcript for accuracy and to provide an opportunity for them to add any additional insights. During the follow-up meetings, the participant and I reviewed the transcript for accuracy, and the participants were allowed to share any further insights or information they wanted to contribute. I also inquired if anything regarding their transition process had not been addressed during the interview; however, all participants chose not to share any additional information in the follow-up meeting. After the follow-up meeting, I sent each participant a \$10 Amazon e-gift card for their participation, which was emailed to them after the follow-up meeting.

Overall, the data collection period for each participant spanned approximately six to eight weeks, starting with their submission of the screening survey and concluding with a follow-up meeting to review their transcript.

Table 3.4*Interview Protocol*

Date of Interview:
Participant:
Thank you for completing the screening survey and demographic questionnaire. The purpose of this research study is to explore the transfer experiences of Black transfer students from enrollment to the end of the first semester at Historically White Institutions (HWI). Interviews are recorded for transcription purposes. The interview is 60 to 75 minutes. After the interview, the audio file will be transcribed and sent to you by email for review. The recorded interview and transcript are saved on a password-protected computer to protect the data, and all identifying details in the transcript will be redacted. Do you have any questions before we get started? Research Questions: 1. How do Black transfer students describe their transition experiences, feelings, and/or thoughts from enrollment to the end of the first semester? 2. What kinds of community capital, if any, were helpful during the transition from enrollment to the end of the first semester (review demographic questionnaire)? 3. What kinds of campus support, if any, were helpful during the transition from enrollment to the end of the first semester (review demographic questionnaire)? 4. How may your experiences inform others? Thank the participant for participating in the study. Provide mental health resources if needed. Reassure confidentiality. Provide the participant with the next steps: transcription timeline, follow-up meeting, and timeline for receiving incentive (\$10 Amazon e-gift card).
Follow-Up Meeting:
Follow-Up Meeting Notes:

Positionality

As a Black woman and social worker, I view this research as a means of advocating for social justice and equity in higher education. Every student has unique needs for student support, and community support should not be overlooked. As an insider, having been a Black transfer student myself, I am acutely attuned to the experiences of the participants in my research. In this way, my positionality is not purely objective but informed by my experiences and beliefs. I acknowledge that my positionality as an individual may influence the research project. During the research process, I am aware that the participants may directly affect me because this study was influenced by my own experiences as a Black transfer student to a historically White institution. I am committed to recognizing the potential influences of my positionality on the research process and remaining open to all participants' perspectives in the research project. Through my positionality and ongoing evaluation of my research approach, I aim to develop a deeper understanding of the complexities of student support in higher education for Black transfer students.

Analysis

I conducted manual coding to analyze the interview transcripts, field notes, and interview protocol data collected. I created a code workbook using Microsoft Excel. Each participant had a separate tab for coded data from their interview transcripts. I employed the First-Cycle Methods outlined by Saldaña (2009), encompassing Structural Coding and In Vivo Coding. In the code workbook, I labeled the columns for each participant with the corresponding code (Table 3.5). First-cycle methods were used to identify preliminary categories within the qualitative data to be examined in the Second Cycle. I

used Pattern Coding in the Second Cycle to identify emerging themes from the initial categories identified in the First-Cycle coding. In the following sections, I will discuss the steps taken for the First and Second Cycle coding methods.

It is important to acknowledge that in traditional qualitative research, saturation is often regarded as the point when no new themes emerge during data collection and analysis (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). According to Creswell and Guetterman, saturation refers to the point at which major themes have been identified and additional data no longer contributes to the understanding of these themes (p. 252). However, because this study is rooted in Critical Race Theory and critical race methodology, my focus extends beyond reaching saturation. I prioritize the lived experiences and stories of Black transfer students, valuing their narratives as vital to understanding their realities and challenges. I am invested in amplifying their voices and how their stories contribute to a deeper, collective understanding of their experiences, rather than aiming for saturation. This approach aligns with the critical race perspective of centering marginalized voices and emphasizing the importance of storytelling as a tool for social change (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

First Cycle

Structural Coding. To analyze the interview transcripts, I organized the data using Structural Coding, a technique developed by Saldaña (2009) that involves applying pre-defined phrases connected to specific research questions to relevant data segments. I reviewed each participant's transcript, extracting raw data in the initial coding process. I used Structural Coding to document participants' responses to the semi-structured research questions and follow-up questions posed during the interviews. I utilized the

demographic questionnaire as a foundational reference, rather than directly asking about "types of campus support" or "community capital" during the interviews. The questionnaire provided a pre-defined framework for understanding participants' perspectives on these areas, guiding the analysis. Utilizing Structural Coding, I analyzed the interview data concerning participants' responses to the questionnaire's predetermined ratings of each campus resource and community capital item. Key segments of the interview responses were recorded in the codebook, with separate columns for each participant labeled "Structural Code - Community Capital" and "Structural Code - Campus Support.

In my analysis, I labeled the first column “Structural Code: Transfer Experiences, Thoughts, and Feelings.” This column contained the raw data from each participant's transcript, explicitly focusing on their answers to the question, "How would you describe your transition experiences, thoughts, and feelings during the transfer process from enrollment to the end of the first semester at the HWI?" I highlighted the participants' responses in green to signify that the data were copied to the codebook during the Structural Coding process (Table 3.5).

The Structural Coding process was repeated to identify the types of community capital and campus support that participants discussed in their interviews. I labeled a column “Structural Code-Community Capital” and another column “Structural Code-Campus Support (Table 3.5).” I highlighted the types of community capital discussed in pink and campus support in blue on the transcript to signify that the data were copied to the codebook during the Structural Coding process. For the final question, “How may this information inform others?” I copied raw data from the participant’s interview transcript

to the codebook in response to this question (Table 3.5). I highlighted participants' responses in yellow on the transcript and copied them into the codebook under a column labeled "Structural Code- How may this information inform others" to signify that the data were copied to the codebook during the Structural Coding process. The Structural Coding approach was consistently applied to each participant, with all data coded on their respective tabs in the codebook.

Table 3.5

Code Workbook, Structural Coding

Structural Code-Transfer Experiences, Thoughts, and Feelings
Sure. So I'm pretty proactive. So it was pretty simple. As long as you give me a list of instructions and everything makes sense, I pretty much handled it myself. So, the overall transition was fine. I got a scholarship from going from the two-year community college to go to the four year, so that helped a lot financially. So, I left my four-year, degree with no, no debt.
Structural Code-Community Capital
I knew also that there was no safety net. So that's a whole nother layer. My mom was not going to come and save me. She wasn't going to pay for anything. She let me shack up with her those first two years, but I was still responsible for paying parts of the rent for groceries. Like I still had responsibilities. So when I went to that four-year school, I was like, I'm not going back because I really can't. Because going back would actually set me back. Because I'm not like these other people who might get to go back home and save money and then go out in the world. I would have to go back and pay. Probably more because. Because at that point, you know, I was making more money. She'd be more into my business. I knew there was no going back, and I knew she was going to save me. So that was another push for me. There was no going back. Never. no safety net. And I think if a student knows, I can go back home. That might change their motivation sometimes.
Structural Code-Campus Support
When it comes to things within the school system, again, when I went to the four-year college, that's when I actually started tapping into those things. And I would say that's when the faculty, again, I don't know the tokenism again or not, but that's when I noticed, especially the black professors really bringing me underneath their wings, like helping me do research or, you know, really wasn't like I did the independent study, working on the Journal article, just really pulling me closer to them that I hadn't experienced before, that level of support.
Structural Code- How May This Information Inform Others
Definitely admissions. And then the advisors and then, the programs, too, that the students are going into, that they understand that students come in with more challenges than academic and not to make excuses or give special treatment to anyone, but just to be understanding. I know now, with my students I'm super understanding, something came up at work, da da da, okay then we'll get it turned in by this date, and avoid a late fee and I'll still take it late like just. Be flexible. Be realistic.

In Vivo Coding. Next, I conducted In Vivo Coding to capture the participants' language, reflecting their voices and perspectives (Saldaña, 2009, p. 74). In Vivo Coding method prioritizes and honors participants' voices (Saldaña, 2009, p. 74). Building on the Structural Coding process, I used In Vivo coding to analyze the data, extracting words and short phrases from each segment extracted from the transcript during the Structural Coding process. During In Vivo Coding, I focused on identifying words or phrases that would warrant bolding or vocal emphasis if spoken aloud, as outlined by Saldaña (2009, p. 75). The In Vivo Codes were displayed alongside each Structural Coding label referenced above (see Appendix F). Table 3.6 highlights the In Vivo Codes and definitions. I applied the codes I developed during the First Cycle from Participant A (Angel) to the participants' narratives, utilizing existing codes and identifying new ones. After reviewing the transcript of each participant, the identified codes and their descriptions, formulated during the In Vivo Coding process, are as follows:

Table 3.6*In-Vivo Codes and Definitions*

In-Vivo Code	Definition
Proactive Approach to Transition	Handling challenges and taking initiative during the transition, such as scheduling, advising appointments, and attending transfer orientation. Self-advocacy during the transition process.
Not A Good Experience	Having a negative/difficult experience during the transfer process, including but not limited to advising, faculty, other college students at the community college or HWI. Participants experiencing barriers or challenges to transition.
Token	Experiences of being either hyper visible or invisible at HWIs, where individuals frequently felt they received support simply because they were the only Black student, or conversely, felt excluded and faced challenges in establishing a sense of belonging.
Representation	Participants saw Black faculty, staff, and other college students in predominantly White spaces, emphasizing the connection and feeling of welcome at HWI when there is representation
My Voice Should Matter	Reflects the participant's assertion of their importance and validity in discussions, emphasizing the need for respect and representation in spaces where they feel minoritized and compelled to fight for their rightful place in predominantly White spaces at an HWI.
Culture Shock	Describes the participants' feelings during the transition. Sometimes, the shock is from academics or diversity (or lack thereof) at the HWI.
Confusion	This describes participants' feelings during the transition. Some participants had difficulty navigating the overall transfer process, including advising, transfer credits, financial aid, purchasing books, and getting to class on campus.
Individualized Plan	Emphasizes the importance of tailored guidance and resources to support diverse student needs and choices

Table 3.6 (cont.)*In-Vivo Codes and Code Definitions*

In-Vivo Code	Definition
Nontraditional	Emphasizes participants' focus on achieving their degree rather than participating in social aspects at HWI, such as student organizations. It recognizes nontraditional college student identities, including first-generation, professional (working) students, and older students.
Racism	Describes participants' experiences discussing race at the HWI. These experiences can include microaggressions, racism, discrimination, conversing with others about their race/culture, and witnessing conversations about racism.
Didn't want to go into Debt	Considers financial planning to attend college (financial aid, scholarships).
Social Media Engagement	Using social media for student engagement, peer support, and guidance throughout the transition.
Transition Adjustment	Transfer expectations during the transfer process include expectations that they would receive communication on the transfer process, advising support, and have a smooth transition.
Faculty Didn't Play a Big Role	Faculty having little to no involvement throughout the transition.
Orientation	Participants' experiences and perceptions of their transfer orientation at the HWI. This includes participants who did not feel motivated to attend orientation or could not participate because they had other obligations.
Self-sufficient	The participants' determination to navigate college independently, self-motivation, goal-orientedness, and ability to figure it out independently throughout the transition.
Didn't Lean on Anyone	Experiencing minimal family support, whether financial or emotional, throughout the transition.

Table 3.6 (cont.)*In-Vivo Codes and Code Definitions*

In-Vivo Code	Definition
Equitable	Participants recognize diverse needs at HWI and the various needs of students from diverse backgrounds.
Employer Support	Recognizes the support from the participant's employer, such as a flexible schedule, time off, and being celebrated by colleagues throughout the transition.
Supportive Family	Recognizes the support from the participant's family, such as sharing their lived experiences of college, providing emotional and/or financial support, and celebrating their accomplishments. This in turn motivates participants throughout the transition.
Build Relationships	The ability or inability to build relationships with other college students, advisors, faculty, or staff throughout the transition.
Program Support	The participant received support from a specific program, major, or department at the HWI throughout the transition.
Support from Program Faculty	Support offered by faculty within the participant's program, major, or department at the HWI includes mentoring, classroom assistance, guidance with advising requirements, and preparation for career opportunities during the transition.
Peer Support in Program	This includes the assistance provided by fellow peers in the program at the HWI, such as collaboration in study groups, group projects, or involvement in student organizations within the program.

Table 3.6 (cont.)

In-Vivo Codes and Code Definitions

In-Vivo Code	Definition
No Safety Net	Highlights the participant's awareness of their lack of a safety net such as financial support from family, which was a motivating factor throughout the transition.
Advisor Didn't Know	This highlights the lack of adequate advising or support from advisors at the community college or HWI during the transition.
Advisor was Great	This includes support from an advisor at the community college or HWI throughout the transition.
Student Involvement on Campus	Participation in student organizations or other campus departments and services, such as the Multicultural Center and various student groups.
Holistic Approach	Participants emphasized that this information should be shared with everyone involved in the transition process, including high school counselors, college faculty and advisors, and Black transfer students.

Second Cycle

Pattern Coding. According to Saldaña (2009), Pattern Codes are “explanatory or inferential codes, ones that identify an emergent theme, configuration, or explanation (p. 152). Saldaña (2009) asserts that Pattern Coding pulls together a lot of material into a more meaningful and parsimonious unit of analysis and a way of grouping summaries into smaller numbers of sets, themes, or constructs (p.152). Pattern Coding was employed to synthesize the Codes identified during the In Vivo Coding process for each participant into more meaningful and concise units, revealing overarching themes (Saldaña, 2009, p. 152). This iterative process identified the following emerging themes during Pattern Coding: 1) Belongingness, 2) Capitalizing on support, 3) Shock and confusion: navigating the unknown, 4) Agentic agency, and 5) The blueprint: Black transfer student experiences that shape success. Table 3.7 illustrates the In Vivo Code and emerging themes and definitions identified during the Pattern Coding process.

Table 3.7*In Vivo Codes, Pattern Codes, and Pattern Code Definitions*

In-Vivo Code (subthemes)	Pattern Code (Theme)	Definition of Theme
Representation, My Voice Should Matter, Token, Nontraditional, Racism, Cultural Shock	Belongingness	This theme captures the experiences of participants who feel minoritized and underrepresented at HWI. Highlights participants' challenges in seeking belonging, emphasizing the significance of diversity and representation in creating a supportive community.
Individualized Plan, Equitable, Employer Support, Family Support, Program Support, Faculty Support, Peer Support, Advisor was Great	Capitalizing on Support	This theme highlights the essential role of different support systems in facilitating participants' transitions. It encompasses assistance from faculty, advisors, peers, employers, and the community.
Not A Good Experience, Confusion, Faculty Didn't Play a Big Role, Build Relationships, Advisor Didn't Know	Shock and Confusion: Navigating the Unknown	This theme reflects the obstacles and difficulties participants encountered as they transitioned to higher education, including feelings of confusion, inadequate support, and negative advising experiences. It highlights the complexities of navigating the transition process and the emotional toll it can take.
Proactive Approach to Transition, Didn't want to go into debt, Self-sufficient, Didn't Lean on Anyone, No Safety Net	Agentic Advocacy	This theme emphasizes the significance of agentic advocacy and independence during the transition process. Participants frequently felt the need to take initiative and manage their educational paths independently, especially without support from family or traditional safety nets.
Social Media Engagement, Transition Adjustment, Orientation, Student Involvement on Campus, Holistic Approach	The Blueprint: Black transfer student experiences that shape success	This theme emerged as a Blueprint that informed student success. The Blueprint offers guidance on transitioning with minimal obstacles, fostering engagement with the campus community, and disseminating information to better support Black transfer students in their pursuit of a successful transfer.

Summary

In summary, the research methods and design employed in this study critique conventional educational research for overlooking crucial issues related to race and culture, often adopting deficit perspectives that oversimplify the complexities of educational inequality (Parker & Lynn, 2002). This study utilizes CRT to illuminate institutional racism within academic settings and focuses on the experiences of Black transfer students transferring from community colleges to HWIs. By prioritizing the narratives of Black transfer students, this research aims to gain a deeper understanding of Black transfer student experiences and highlight the support systems that significantly impact their success during this transition.

Grounded in CRT principles, the methodology employs a purposeful sample of nine Black transfer students to collect qualitative data through screening surveys, demographic questionnaires, and in-depth semi-structured interviews. The analysis involves Structural, In Vivo, and Pattern coding cycles aimed at identifying Codes related to participants' experiences throughout the transfer process. The analysis revealed the following themes: 1) Belongingness, 2) Capitalizing on support, 3) Shock and confusion: navigating the unknown, 4) Agentic advocacy, and 5) The blueprint: Black transfer student experiences that shape success. By elevating the voices and perspectives of Black transfer students, my research aspires to enhance understanding of the complexities involved in the transfer process while contributing to ongoing efforts for equity in higher education. The findings are anticipated to inform institutional practices, thereby enhancing the transition experiences for Black transfer students in HWIs.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings of this study, which examined the transfer experiences of Black students who transitioned from a community college to a historically White institution (HWI), encompassing their journey from enrollment through the completion of their first semester at the HWI. The four research questions guiding this study are: 1) How do Black transfer students describe their transition experiences, feelings, and/or thoughts from enrollment to the end of the first semester? 2) What kinds of community capital, if any, were helpful during the transition from enrollment to the end of the first semester? 3) What kinds of campus support, if any, were helpful during the transition from enrollment to the end of the first semester? Furthermore, 4) How may your experiences inform others?

The findings reveal that Black transfer students encounter systemic barriers such as racism, microaggressions, and insufficient institutional support, which can negatively impact their sense of belonging, confidence, and overall success. Despite these challenges, participants demonstrated resilience and agency by leveraging community capital, engaging in self-advocacy, and seeking support networks, including faculty, peers, family, and social media platforms. The findings underscore the importance of adopting a holistic, collaborative approach to support that involves transparent communication, representation, targeted advising, and inclusive campus environments.

Additionally, the participants' narratives emphasize that empowering Black transfer students through culturally responsive support and proactive institutional practices can foster smoother transitions, improve retention, and promote equitable educational opportunities. The insights gathered serve as a valuable blueprint for institutions aiming to create more inclusive spaces that recognize and build upon the strengths and agency of Black transfer students, ultimately guiding efforts to dismantle systemic inequities and support their success in higher education. The themes and subthemes identified through participant narratives are summarized in Table 4.1, which provides an organized overview of the key areas that influence the experiences of Black transfer students during their transition to HWIs. Table 4.2 includes the participants' pseudonyms, gender identities, and pronouns.

Table 4.1*Themes and Subthemes Summary Table*

Theme	Subthemes
Belongingness	Representation My Voice Should Matter Token Cultural shock Nontraditional Racism
Capitalizing on Support	Individualized plans Equitable support Employer Support Family Support Program Support Peer support Advisor was Great
Shock and Confusion: Navigating the Unknown	Not a Good Experience Confusion Faculty Didn't Play a Big Role Build Relationships Advisor Didn't Know
Agentic Advocacy	Proactive Approach to Transition Didn't want to go into debt Self-sufficient Didn't Lean on Anyone No Safety Net
The Blueprint: Black Transfer Student Experiences that Shape Success	Social Media Engagement Transition Adjustment Orientation Student Involvement on Campus Holistic Approach

Table 4.2*Participant Pseudonyms, Pronouns, and Gender Identity*

Participant	Pseudonyms, Pronouns, and Gender Identity
Participant A	Angel, he/him, male
Participant B	Blair, he/him, male
Participant C	Charley, she/her, female
Participant D	Duran, he/him, male
Participant E	Emry, she/her, female
Participant F	Fynn, she/her, female
Participant G	Ginnie, she/her, female
Participant H	Haydn, she/her, female
Participant I	Indigo, she/her, female

Belongingness

Throughout the journey of higher education, the experience of belonging—or the lack thereof—can significantly influence a student's academic and social trajectory (Griffith et al., 2019). Consider a Black transfer student navigating an HWI, feeling as though they neither belong nor are acknowledged. Their story is not unique; it echoes a broader narrative of minoritization and underrepresentation in HWIs. Students often felt alienated when that sense is absent, hindering their engagement, persistence, and overall success (Cooper & Brohawn, 2023). The participants' insights highlight the critical importance of understanding the nuanced experiences of Black transfer students and the factors that influence their sense of belonging within HWIs.

The initial theme identified is Belongingness, with sub themes including representation, my voice should matter, token, cultural shock, nontraditional, and racism. This theme emerged in response to the research question focused on how Black transfer students describe their transfer experiences during the transfer process until the end of the first semester at the HWI. According to Strayhorn et al. (2012), a sense of belonging “refers to students’ perceived social support on campus, a feeling of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group (e.g., campus community) or others on campus (e.g., faculty and peers)” (p. 3). In this study, Belongingness refers to the experiences of participants who felt minoritized and underrepresented at the HWI. Additionally, this theme highlights participants’ challenges in seeking belonging and recognition, emphasizing the significance of inclusivity and representation in creating a supportive community throughout the transfer process. Belongingness comprises subthemes that shed light on

the various facets of feeling accepted and included as a Black transfer student during their transition and as they navigate the environment of HWIs. The insights gathered from these discussions highlight the need for institutions to acknowledge the importance of diversity and actively foster an inclusive environment that empowers all students to feel a sense of belonging. Addressing these issues is essential to enhancing the educational experience for Black transfer students, ultimately supporting their academic and social well-being at HWIs. The following section emphasizes the participants' narratives regarding their transition, including the importance of representation and their voices, instances of tokenism, the challenges of being a nontraditional transfer student, and encounters with racism at the HWI.

Representation at HWIs

Representation is pivotal in shaping the perceptions of Black transfer students regarding acceptance and belonging. The presence of Black faculty, staff, and peers can significantly foster feelings of inclusion, serving as tangible evidence that Black transfer student identities are valued in HWIs. For example, Charley reflected on the impact of having a Black male professor at her HWI, sharing:

He was super down-to-earth...he talked about his experiences...didn't shy away from it either...his vulnerability in class felt good.

The professor's vulnerability created an environment where Charley felt seen, reinforcing the importance of authentic representation at HWIs. The professors' openness to their life experiences resonated with Charley, fostering a sense of belonging that is often absent in HWI spaces.

Ginnie highlighted the rarity of such representation within the faculty at HWIs, noting her surprise during the first week of classes when all her professors were Black:

My first week of classes, all of my professors were Black. I called up a social work friend of mine, and I was like, all of my professors are Black. And she was like, do you know how that never happens?

Ginnie reflected on the unexpected experience of having all Black professors during her first week of classes, by calling a friend to express her surprise and excitement. Ginnie's friend's reaction highlighted how uncommon such a situation is at an HWI. The reality for Black transfer students is the scarcity of Black professors at HWIs. When representation is lacking, Black transfer students may feel unwelcome (Jain et al., 2020). Fynn emphasized the importance of feeling accepted in HWI spaces and shared her thoughts on representation at her institution, noting:

I did expect to see the representation...to be more than what it was, and I didn't see that. I think that's a conversation that needs to be had across the board.

Fynn highlights the ongoing necessity for representation at HWIs and the importance of validating the voices of those who often feel excluded in academic settings, such as Black transfer students. From Charley's positive relationship with a Black educator to Ginnie's surprise at encountering multiple Black professors, to Fynn's urging for increased Black faculty at HWIs, these narratives highlight the diverse experiences of representation among participants and underscore the vital role representation plays in fostering a more inclusive environment within HWIs. Angel expressed his feelings about representation:

There was nobody that looked like me as far as another black male to mentor, to look out. I thought that was lacking for me in that space of not having any type of reflection... that was kind of disappointing not to have that.

Emry shared a feeling of cultural shock upon attending their HWI, which often arises from the differences in the academic environment or the level of diversity (or lack thereof) at the institution (Taylor & Jain, 2017). In this context, cultural shock refers to the disorienting feelings and challenges Black transfer students experience at HWIs when encountering unfamiliar social and academic norms, especially in environments where representation is limited. For instance, Emry noted:

It was like a cultural shock almost. And I thought I was excelling and exceeding at the community college where actually I was average and it kind of brung my confidence, my intellectual confidence low. And I was like, I'm not as smart as I thought I was.

Emry's reflection highlights the profound impact that cultural shock can have on students as they navigate new academic environments with limited representation. According to Taylor and Jain (2017), such experiences can lead to self-doubt and diminished confidence, highlighting the importance of supporting Black transfer students as they adapt to diverse educational environments.

Tokenism refers to the phenomenon in which minoritized students are disproportionately visible in spaces dominated by the majority group (Newton, 2023). One of the effects of tokenism is what is known as the pressure of a double-edged sword: simultaneously, a perverse visibility and a convenient invisibility (Niemann, 1999, p. 119). For instance, Angel shared his experience, stating:

I don't know if it's tokenism or not, but that's when I noticed, especially the Black professors, really bringing me under their wings, helping me do research, or working on an independent study and a journal article. They really pulled me closer to them in a way that I hadn't experienced before, that level of support.

Angel's narrative highlights the duality of experiences, where moments of authentic connection and mentorship from Black faculty coexist with a broader sense of hypervisibility at HWIs. Newton (2023) stated that gendered racial microaggressions speak of the erasure or invisibility of Black women by ignoring their presence, which is a form of invalidation and is reflective of their subjugated position within society. For instance, while Angel experienced hypervisibility on campus, Charley recounted a different, uncomfortable experience of feeling invisible, stating:

I remember when I would go to school [HWI] at night. There were these little jockey-like White boys who didn't even hold the door for me; they just kept walking in. It was just like, oh my gosh. But it is what it is.

Charley's perspective highlights the routine microaggressions that contribute to feelings of not belonging at HWIs. Charley's experience also brings up another good point of how Black transfer students navigate HWIs. Together, the participants' voices underscore the critical need for greater representation at HWIs and the vital role that supportive faculty can play in alleviating the weight of tokenism.

Building on representation and tokenism, Angel highlighted an additional aspect by shedding light on the experiences of nontraditional Black transfer students. Being a nontraditional student can intensify the feelings of disconnection among Black transfer students during transition (Cavote & Kopera-Frye, 2006). Angel's reflection appears to

illustrate the disconnection felt when advisors emphasize typical college experiences, such as engagement in campus culture, stating:

So when I was talking to that counselor, she was trying to talk to me about the whole culture of college and going in, participating in things. And I was telling her, like, that's not what I'm really looking for. I'm really about getting this degree done and getting out in the world, like I don't care about that.

Angel's focus is more pragmatic, centered on completing their degree to transition into the workforce, a reality often faced by nontraditional students prioritizing educational outcomes over extracurricular activities. Angel's perspective highlights the limited understanding some advisors may have about the varying aspirations of nontraditional students, specifically nontraditional Black transfer students, but also stresses the importance of tailored support. Charley shared a similar experience, stating:

I navigated much of it by myself. I think what probably may have set me aside from other individuals in this situation is that when I went back to school, I was an adult...I didn't go to college when I turned 18. I had tried a few times, but didn't quite work out because I had my son. I was a mom. I was a first-generation graduate and college student.

I wasn't really able to depend or talk to my family about some of my experiences, mostly because they just simply would not understand. I wasn't a part of any clubs, any groups. I worked during the day, like that was a really huge commitment that I probably just did not have time for.

Angel and Charley's narratives further reveal that for some nontraditional Black transfer students, the focus often centers on tangible outcomes, such as obtaining their

degrees, rather than engaging fully in campus social life or extracurricular activities. The perspectives shared reflect the unique identities of Black transfer students, often including being first-generation, working professionals, or older students balancing multiple responsibilities.

An additional aspect of representation highlights how Black transfer students can be empowered through increased visibility. Fynn stressed the importance of acknowledging the voices of Black transfer students at HWIs and offered insights into the crucial role of representation, emphasizing the voices and agency of Black transfer students. Fynn stated:

You need more Black professors...It's up to you to make a difference. It's up to you to make your voice be heard.

Fynn's narrative highlights the importance of increasing Black faculty at HWIs and encourages Black transfer students to share their perspectives and amplify their presence. Fynn added:

We got a right to be at this table and not just be happy to be in the room peeking through the windows to see where we fit in. We need more of that...we need more Black professors. That's what we need...my voice should matter. My comfortability level should matter, and I just don't feel that that's put to the forefront a lot [at HWIs]. I feel that we're still, I mean we're always a minority, but it's just some spaces that I don't feel that I should have to fight for my place at a table when my money is the same as your money.

Fynn's narrative underscores the critical importance of representation and voice for Black transfer students within HWIs, highlighting how increased visibility and faculty

diversity can foster a more inclusive environment. The narratives shared by students like Fynn reveal ongoing challenges related to systemic inequities and the need for structural change to support Black students' sense of belonging. Recognizing these issues is essential as we turn our attention to the pervasive problem of racism at HWIs. The next section will explore participants' experiences with racism at HWIs and examine the barriers that racism imposes on Black transfer students.

Exposing Racism at HWIs

Racism in higher education manifests through a variety of lived experiences that significantly shape how Black transfer students interact and engage within HWIs (Jain et al., 2017). The stories shared by participants illustrate a concerning reality in which racism is not only present but frequently normalized at HWIs. Wilkerson (2020) stated that instead of framing racism as an either/or accusation directed at an individual, it might be more productive to focus on the specific actions that cause harm to less powerful groups (p. 69). Additionally, Wilkerson emphasized that racism encompasses any action or institutional practice that mocks, harms, assumes, or assigns inferiority or stereotypes based on the social construct of race (Wilkerson, 2020, p. 70). In this context, participants described their encounters with racism that either inflicted personal harm or involved assumptions of inferiority and stereotypes about them. The participants' stories emphasize the widespread presence of racism in their daily lives at the HWI. For example, Fynn recounted an instance of experiencing vicarious racism, indirect exposure to racial prejudice directed at another individual (Cohen et al., 2021). Fynn shared her experience involving a Black faculty member:

That kind of left a bad taste for me. It was against the professor, and it bothered me so much and it bothered the other students so much that literally we wrote to the Dean of Students and it went to...the faculty...I was happy to see that at least our concerns were addressed. I will give them that, they were addressed, and it seems, or it was portrayed that they took our concerns seriously. But honestly, in the meeting that we had, the way that the professor voiced concerns, you could tell that this was something that was common. It was common that these type of acts were normal, and I didn't like that at all...That kind of left a bad taste in my mouth...I was angry. I was hurt that this day and age, we are still at this place, especially a place, an institution of higher learning that we're still here and that racism is normalized. That instance taught me that I don't think Black professors are valued as much as other professors, and I'm hoping that I'm wrong. That's just my opinion, my feelings. But it left a bad taste in my mouth.

Fynn's narrative highlights the emotional impact of witnessing racism and underscores the critical need for institutional reforms to confront and dismantle racism in HWIs, especially educational spaces, places where students deserve support, respect, and a sense of belonging.

According to Newton (2023), Black women also experience tokenization when they are the only Black women in the classroom. This embodiment and constant objectification of Black women speak of the ways others microaggress them. For example, Emry shared an encounter with a White peer at their HWI:

I still remember, she's like, you are so weird. And I said, oh my gosh, I am like what?... I've never been told that. She's like, no, I don't mean in a bad way. You're

just weird. You're totally different. And I'm like, huh?... She's saying it because I'm a black woman.

Racism is not limited to face-to-face interactions; it also occurs online. According to Brondolo et al. (2008), acts of racism and ethnic discrimination can encompass a broad spectrum of behaviors, including social exclusion, workplace discrimination, stigmatization, physical threats, and harassment. Social exclusion involves various interactions where individuals are rejected, ignored, or excluded from social engagement due to their ethnicity or race. Stigmatization may involve verbal and nonverbal behaviors directed at the targeted individual, conveying messages that demean or devalue them (Brondolo et al., 2008). Charley recounted an experience of harassment and stigmatization from a White peer during an online class at her HWI:

I remember doing a discussion board assignment...I remember getting into it with, I wouldn't say I got into it, but it was a White peer in the class, and we were talking about racial inequalities. She got really offended...I replied to hers, not really thinking much of it. She was so upset about my reply because I was kind of questioning her experience and her understanding. And she was really offended by it to the point where she found my email and ended up emailing me to tell me that she was offended...I of course emailed back, but I had to CC in my professor 'cause I'm just like, no, like I don't want this email to come off anyway.

Charley's story illustrates the subtle yet impactful ways in which racial tensions can manifest in academic settings, often leading to feelings of harassment or intimidation. The White peer's reaction, becoming offended and reaching out via email, reflects how discussions about racial inequalities can evoke discomfort, sometimes crossing into

personal attacks or dismissiveness. Charley's response, involving communication with the professor and cc'ing them on the email, highlights the need for institutional support and clear boundaries to protect Black students from racially charged harassment.

Furthermore, Charley's narrative also underscores how these interactions can create a hostile environment that undermines students' sense of safety and belonging, emphasizing the importance of fostering respectful dialogue and addressing subtle forms of racial harassment within educational spaces.

Black women also experience hypervisibility when they are microaggressed, insulted when they use their voices to speak up for themselves (Newton, 2023). Fynn and Charley's interactions demonstrate the vital need for HWIs to cultivate an environment where discussions on racism are encouraged and approached with respect. Fynn and Charley's experiences highlight the potential for misunderstandings and tensions to arise when communication is not handled thoughtfully. Indigo shared an experience of stigmatization when communicating with staff at the HWI, stating:

You don't always want to talk correctly in order to get some assistance. Sometime it is kind of like, if you pick up the phone and say, Hey, how are you? And the person on the other end say, how can I help you? Well, goodness gracious, I just asked you. I just said, Hey, how are you? The only thing you can think and turn to say and how can I help you?

Indigo elaborated on communication with staff at the HWI, stating:

I don't think that they took me serious enough to invest in me enough to show me the ropes or whatever, and I think sometimes it also came off as rude, if you will.

Charley and Indigo's insights highlight the harassment and stigmatization that Black transfer students encounter from peers in the classroom and when interacting with staff at HWIs while seeking support. Insincere or dismissive interactions can hinder Black transfer students' sense of belonging and support within HWIs.

Collectively, the participants' narratives underscore a critical reality: racism, in both its explicit and implicit forms, continues to hinder true belonging and challenges efforts to foster inclusive environments at HWIs. According to Berhane et al. (2024), understanding the dynamics is essential for addressing the systemic issues related to racism, as they mirror broader societal patterns that persistently impact minoritized students in higher education, specifically HWIs.

In summary, the theme of Belongingness among Black transfer students highlights the challenges they face in achieving acceptance and representation within HWIs. The narratives shared by participants reveal a critical need for inclusion, supportive mentorship, and an acknowledgment of lived experiences. The call for increased representation, especially among faculty and staff, goes beyond mere visibility; it is a crucial foundation for fostering authentic connections and cultivating a truly inclusive campus community. HWIs must focus on fostering a sense of belonging, ensuring that all students, especially Black transfer students, are not only present but also heard and valued. Within the context of Critical Race Theory (CRT), which urges us to critically examine the systemic inequities embedded within educational structures, HWIs must work toward dismantling barriers that hinder Black transfer students' academic and social success (Powers, 2017). Recognizing and acting upon these insights is essential for

creating an equitable and supportive environment that empowers Black transfer students to succeed and thrive at HWIs.

Capitalizing on Support

The theme of capitalizing on support and resources emphasizes the essential role of various support mechanisms in facilitating participants' transitions. This concept emphasizes the importance of support from faculty, advisors, peers, employers, and the community, underscoring the need for customized resources to address the unique needs of Black transfer students. This theme emerged in response to the research question regarding what community capital and campus support were invaluable during their transition. The subthemes that emerged were individualized plans, equitable support, employer support, family support, program support, and support from peers and advisors at the HWI. First, I would like to examine the personalized and equitable support styles, followed by the ecological supportive styles that proved most beneficial to the participants during their transition.

Personalized and Equitable Support Styles

It is essential to understand how tailored guidance and personalized resources significantly impact the experiences of Black transfer students during their transition. The subthemes highlight different aspects of support that contribute to successful transitions, including the importance of individualized planning, equitable support that recognizes diverse student needs, and the role of proactive assistance, which aids in a seamless transition for some participants. Participants' reflections reveal that personalized support, whether through specific academic advising, clear communication about options such as minors, or an understanding of individual backgrounds, can make a meaningful

difference in students' academic journeys. Furthermore, the narratives emphasize that equitable and supportive environments, combined with proactive engagement and targeted guidance, foster smoother transitions and better experiences for Black transfer students.

One aspect of supportive approaches is the importance of an individualized plan, emphasizing the need for personalized guidance and resources to address each student's unique needs and goals. Angel reflects on the shortcomings of individualized planning during his transition, emphasizing the need for more personalized support, stating:

I just think...even speaking about that, counselor, there's just a lack of, individualizing each person's plan after college. And if my plan was to go to community college, I should have been given that type of support. I should have been given the resources, the information.

Angel acknowledges that not all students have the same experiences or approaches when navigating their educational environments. In this regard, Angel emphasized the importance of understanding these differences and providing appropriate support, stating:

I think for me, watching other students try to navigate the space and them having difficulty, I felt that, although I could say figure it out like I did, I realize that some people's personality or how they approach things can be very different. So them needing more help isn't bad. We need to be equitable in these spaces.

This perspective highlights the necessity of creating equitable conditions that accommodate students' diverse needs and foster an environment where everyone has the opportunity to succeed.

Angel's sentiment is echoed by Indigo, who expressed frustration over missed opportunities due to a lack of information regarding options such as choosing a minor. Indigo's experience illustrates how inadequate communication can impede students' progress, leaving them feeling uninformed and frustrated, highlighting a broader issue of inequities in advising support for Black transfer students. Indigo shared:

A thing came up about a minor or a major-minor. I'm thinking to myself, nobody even mentioned this. I said, I could have did this. At this point, I just want to get out this place, so now it's like, it's too late now. Like, no, I'm just ready to be done and over with at this point. You don't know what you don't know. If they keep you informed, at least you would know, okay, well, this is possible, but when you don't get nothing, it's like, oh, well, you don't know that it exists. You won't know that it exists.

The participants' experiences demonstrate that effective support systems and individualized resources are vital in ensuring Black transfer students successfully navigate their academic paths and feel informed throughout their journey.

Access to comprehensive and personalized support is crucial in ensuring a smooth transition for Black transfer students. When students receive tailored guidance, clear communication, and proactive assistance, they are more likely to navigate the complexities of transferring with confidence and ease (Cepeda et al., 2021). The participants' experiences demonstrate that effective support systems can significantly influence the transfer process. In this context, smooth characterizes the participants' transfer experiences, where credits were transferred without issues, and the overall transition was notably seamless. Some participants reported a smooth process across

multiple aspects of their transfer, primarily thanks to the extensive support and guidance offered by the HWI. This support included dedicated assistance from faculty and advisors, which played a crucial role in facilitating a successful and effortless transition. For instance, Duran recalled:

She looked at my transcripts and said, okay, this is what you need. You need A, B, and C, and then you'll be able to make a smooth transition.

By following the advisor's guidance at the HWI, Duran could take the necessary classes, ultimately allowing him to transition into their new program without difficulties. This highlights the importance of targeted academic advice in facilitating a seamless transfer. Similarly, Emry shared her perspective on their transition:

Do what you got to do, okay. Make it how you make it. So it was pretty smooth.

Furthermore, Emry credits her academic advisor's assistance, as well as attending an orientation on short notice:

That [orientation] went phenomenal, went great. They gave me all the information I needed, and it prompted me to go and apply.

Emry illustrated how proactive engagement with resources can lead to positive outcomes during the transition and reinforced that a supportive institutional framework is pivotal in the transfer process.

Charley offered advice for ensuring a smooth transfer experience, emphasizing that cultivating strong relationships with staff and faculty can facilitate a seamless transition. Charley shared:

Build really good relationships with your advisors...pay attention to your emails...find someone that you can build a really great professional or sometimes

even a personal relationship with, just to kind of make the process go by better or smoother or be more seamless.

Highlighting the vital support offered by advisors at the HWI during the transition process, Ginnie shares her positive experience with an advisor at the HWI, noting the personalized attention received even before becoming a student:

The university was great. We went through my classes one by one. The advisor blocked out time and this was before I was even a student before I had even applied. So they were great.

Blair also highlighted his appreciation for the advisors' dedication at the HWI to ensuring he had the necessary resources, emphasizing his approachability and commitment, stating:

In terms of the resources that I was able to receive from the advisors. You know, I really enjoyed their commitment to wanting to ensure that I had everything that I needed and making sure, you know, they check in, really accessible.

While Duran, Emry, Ginnie, and Blair expressed appreciation for the support they received from advisors at the HWI, Charley also reflected on the support provided by an advisor at the community college, describing how that guidance was essential in navigating the credit transfer process, stating:

The advisor at the community college, I remember this super amazing Black woman. She was super helpful in helping me understand how things will kind of transfer; my community college credits will transfer. She was probably more helpful than anybody at the PWI. I would see her in person during the day when I went to class. I would stop by her office if I had any questions. She was helpful.

The participants' narratives collectively highlight the essential roles of guidance, support, and proactive engagement from advisors at the HWI in facilitating a smooth transition for Black transfer students. The shared experiences demonstrate individual strategies and the effectiveness of supportive institutions. The participants' narratives illustrate how leveraging advising during their transition can lead to positive outcomes, highlighting the importance of a comprehensive support system in promoting the academic success and overall well-being of Black transfer students. This highlights the importance of ongoing efforts to enhance advising support for Black transfer students.

Ecological Support

Building on the understanding that strong support networks are essential for a successful transfer for Black transfer students, having personalized and equitable assistance from various sources appears to influence a student's ability to transition smoothly. Chaudhry et al. (2024) stated that when young adults feel supported by family and close friends, they develop a stronger sense of belonging at their academic institutions, better cope with life's challenges, and adapt more effectively to their educational setting. In this context, the support Black transfer students receive originates from a network of relationships and environments, including family, friends, and employment, rather than from a single source. Furthermore, Laanan et al. (2010) introduced the concept of transfer student capital (TSC), which refers to the knowledge that community college students acquire to effectively manage the transfer process. Transfer student capital offers a valuable lens for understanding the various sources of capital that students of Color (e.g., Black transfer students) leverage to navigate transfer challenges. Additionally, Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) model

offers a crucial perspective for examining the experiences of Black transfer students, as it emphasizes how communities of Color (e.g., Black transfer students) navigate systems and structures that have historically been oppressive. Recognizing the importance of the various forms of capital that Black transfer students acquire highlights the need for robust support systems.

Support from advisors, family, employers, and program staff collectively creates a foundation that helps students feel guided, motivated, and confident throughout their educational journey. From what participants shared, when Black transfer students receive comprehensive support through individualized guidance, flexible work arrangements, or encouragement from loved ones, they are better equipped to overcome challenges and achieve their academic goals. The following sections delve into the specific types of support that are pivotal in facilitating a successful transition for Black transfer students.

Participants emphasized the crucial role of employer support in accommodating their increasingly busy schedules, which involve balancing work and school. Support from employers encompasses the assistance provided by participants' workplaces, such as flexible scheduling, time off, and recognition from colleagues, all of which played a significant part during their transition to the HWI. In this context, Blair shared his positive experiences with employer support while working at a hospital, noting:

I did have an off-campus job where I work at one of the main hospitals here. And I can say I had a lot of support from them in terms of the current physicians already, working in that field that I was particularly interested in, or even just the employees that I was working with that were in my department or even some of the other clinical staff in other departments.

Similarly, Ginnie discussed how her employers accommodated her educational needs, highlighting the flexibility provided to prioritize school, stating:

I've had my employers, my supervisors and managers and directors, even up to the CEO of my department. Like I would say school is primary for me right now. And I have had them work around my schedule. There's been times I'm like, hey, I have to take a quick Zoom or something. I'm like, can I rearrange my lunch or can I take off early? And that has been really, like, I've been really blessed to have that. I know a lot of people don't get that. So I am very fortunate and I understand that.

Moreover, Fynn expressed deep gratitude for her job, indicating how her employer's compassion and understanding significantly eased her academic pressures:

My job is literally like a God-sent. I work with the courts; my boss is like amazing. She allows me time to, if I got finals or I have a paper or even if she just sees that I'm stressed and says, you know what, you need to go home. You need to go home, take the day, work on your finals. She's like a godsend. I love it. My coworkers last year, and I'm going to speak on this class in particular because there were days that I was just in here crying. Statistics. It is literally like a family. Everybody stepped up.

Together, these experiences illustrate the vital role of employers' support in enhancing students' well-being and success during their transition and academic journeys.

Alongside supportive employers, family support was vital for participants throughout their transition. Having a supportive family underscores the significance of encouragement from family members who played a key role in motivating and uplifting

participants as they navigated their educational journeys. For example, Emry reflected on the unwavering support from her mother regarding education, stating:

She was adamant about us going to school, and we were as well. And so she's always been supportive.

Duran also shared his experience with supportive family members, emphasizing the encouragement received from his uncle and aunt during his academic progress, sharing:

My Uncle. I remember him being very supportive at my progress once I was released. And my Aunt, who also has a college education kind of, uh, rooting me on.

Additionally, Haydn discussed how her mother's educational achievements drive her ambitions, highlighting how her mother's persistence influenced her goals:

My mom has gone back to school I think two or three times. She just finished her master's for Education Administration I think. 'Cause she's a principal now. And she talked about she's not gonna get her PhD, but I think she could <laugh> because it's just, I just feel like she should just top it off at this point. <laugh>. She just, like pushes me 'cause I wanna be like my mom. Like I wanna have that many degrees and be successful like her. I feel like that motivates me to like, I think that's why I'm so hard on myself. And, just always striving to do more and more and more because of what she did.

Together, the participants' stories highlight the essential role that family support plays in inspiring and motivating Black transfer students as they navigate their transition.

Participants most frequently mentioned the support provided by the programs at the HWIs to which they transferred. The program support discussed emphasized assistance from departments, majors, or academic units during transition. Program support sheds light on the vital role of dedicated program-based support in helping Black transfer students successfully navigate their transition.

The role of program faculty emerged as a critical element in providing personalized guidance and mentorship to support Black transfer students throughout their transition to the HWI. Support from program faculty highlights the role of faculty members in providing guidance and assistance within participants' specific programs, majors, or departments at HWIs. This support encompasses mentoring, classroom assistance, guidance on advising requirements, and preparation for career opportunities during their transitions. In this context, Duran reflects on his positive interactions with instructors in the social work program, emphasizing how understanding and accessibility contributed to his sense of support, stating:

Most of my instructors in the social work program, I believe, were very understanding as far as if I was having a problem or struggle, which didn't happen too often, but I felt very supported. Most of my professors were easygoing and supportive, and accessible.

Fynn further shared the pivotal role that a specific faculty member played in her transition, expressing gratitude for the guidance received from a Black professor:

Honestly, I owe a lot to the Black professor with just the whole transfer. I really do because honestly, before meeting the Black professor, when I say I was really just lost, and it's not just me, I actually, I have a little cohort now, and that's

because we were all kind of feeling the same way, but it was meeting through the Black professor's class.

Fynn elaborated on the impactful teaching style of the Black professor, highlighting how their approach encouraged critical thinking and personal growth, stating:

Honestly, the Black professor set a precedent in their classroom that require us to think outside the box. The Black professor require us to not only see what's in front of us, but look past that to see how can you navigate to change that. Just because a circumstance is your circumstance right now does not mean that that is the end all be all. And the Black professor gave us, instilled that motivation in us. The change that I seek or anything that I do that would have anything to do with moving, it wasn't because of an advisor. It was the Black professor.

Together, the participants' experiences underscore the critical role of program faculty in fostering a supportive and motivating environment for Black transfer students during their transition.

An additional layer of support that participants relied on was peer support within their academic programs. Peer support in the program highlights the support provided by fellow students within the participant's program at HWIs. This includes collaborative efforts in study groups, group projects, and participation in student organizations related to the program. In this regard, Fynn discussed the importance of contacting classmates for help, emphasizing how collaboration made challenging concepts more relatable:

I really had to kind of go to fellow students in the program, and they would have to break it down to me in terms that I could relate to. And we would hold study groups.

Similarly, Haydn described the strong support system formed among her cohort of transfer students at the HWI, noting how shared experiences fostered a sense of community and mentorship:

My cohort is strictly all transfer. I feel like they are a mentor to me in a way because I'm so young. And I have, like, I'm in a bachelor's program. So just like, just navigating it all together and just like, we're literally experiencing the same things to the T, basically. It feels like a community within, like the school as a whole, just because we're so close and we just, we just get each other. Balancing the stress and the exhaustion, like we're all feeling it. It's just like we can be very vulnerable with each other. I really like that for me.

Ginnie added :

A lot of the people in my program, we kind of take a lot of the same classes. So it was easy to kinda like build that community. I think like transition over from a community college over to the HWI the Black students gravitated towards each other. A lot of it was like, hey, don't worry about classes. They would say, be in our group and I'll show you how to do this. And then, oh, if you come out here, we're gonna have a study group. So that was a really important one, not only so I could have a comradery and classes, but two, just getting acclimated to the college life. Having that kind of support there...I really liked that.

Ginnie's insights underscore the importance of peer support in creating a collaborative and nurturing environment for Black transfer students during their transition.

In summary, the theme of capitalizing on support underscores the vital importance of diverse, personalized, and community-based resources in facilitating a successful transition for Black transfer students. From individual advising and faculty mentorship to peer networks and family encouragement, by capitalizing on support, Black transfer students collectively create a foundation of belonging, confidence, and resilience. Recognizing the multifaceted nature of support emphasizes the need for HWIs to intentionally cultivate accessible and culturally responsive resources that address the unique challenges faced by Black transfer students. Furthermore, it is essential to explore how these support mechanisms influence the emotional experiences of Black transfer students, particularly feelings of shock and confusion, when confronting the unknown in new educational environments, such as HWIs. The following section will examine how Black transfer students navigate moments of uncertainty, shedding light on their emotional journeys as they adapt to and make sense of unfamiliar campus landscapes.

Shock and Confusion: Navigating the Unknown

A key aspect of participants' experiences involved navigating the unfamiliar environment of the HWI, which revealed that, while some received support during their transition, others faced significant challenges. The third theme captures the obstacles and difficulties when transferring from a community college to an HWI. Many participants reported confusion, inadequate support, and negative interactions with advisors. This theme highlights the complexities and emotional impact of these experiences during the

transition process. This theme directly addresses the research question exploring participants' feelings, thoughts, and experiences during the transition. The subthemes that emerged included negative experiences, confusion, limited faculty engagement, and advisors who were unhelpful or unfamiliar with the process. The findings highlight the significant impact that individual interactions and institutional support can have on students' motivation and overall transition experience. In this section, I will explore participants' negative experiences during their transition, including feelings of confusion upon arriving at the HWI, limited engagement from faculty, and advisors who were unhelpful or unfamiliar with the transfer process at the HWI.

Navigating Negative Faculty Interactions and Misadvising

Although most participants described negative experiences during their transition at the HWI, including encounters with racism, Ginnie's story highlights how a particularly problematic experience with a faculty member at the community college impacted their motivation to persist and pursue her goal of transferring to a university.

Ginnie shared:

I do kind of wanna mention one thing, is that when I started at community college and I decided to go forward from community college to university. That was my second time trying to take a crack at school. The first time, I did not have a good experience with a professor at the community college. I wanna say kind of like left such a bad impression on me that I did not go back to school for four years.

Ginnie further elaborated on how her negative experience with community college faculty affected her confidence and motivation to pursue college:

The second time when I went back, I was very afraid. That's kind of why it kind of took a little bit late, let's start at one class, it was gonna happen. Let's start at two classes, and it was that kind of deal. I was afraid of having that experience again...and I think I just kind of wanna mention, you know, I don't think people understand how something like that can have an impact on a student because it took me four years to overcome that. Had I experienced that again, I don't think that I would be here talking to you.

Experiences like Ginnie's can significantly impact the motivation and willingness of Black transfer students to continue pursuing higher education or transfer, highlighting the importance of positive support and experiences throughout their academic journey.

In contrast to Ginnie's experience, Blair described a different dynamic during his first semester at the HWI, where faculty interactions felt more detached:

You know, I would say the vibe that I received from the teachers was more so, you know, come to class, do your stuff, and that's it. You know, if you have questions, they'll see you during, you know, office hours. Other than that, you know, they're more so here to teach, you know, but I heard that from a lot of different students, you know, whether it just be the way the teacher teaches academically, it's more so that they're here for, you know, as their job and not so much to just teach students how to understand the material. So faculty members didn't really play a big role.

Blair's perspective emphasizes that, although faculty play a vital role during the transfer process, limited engagement and support throughout the transition can adversely affect Black transfer students' experiences and sense of belonging.

Another challenging aspect during the transition, expressed by participants, is misadvising. Misadvising, in particular, can lead to confusion, delays, and frustration, as Black transfer students may receive inaccurate or incomplete guidance that hampers their progress. For example, Fynn recounted an experience regarding misadvising during the transfer process:

I thought everything was going smoothly. I sat down with an advisor, I thought it's going to be an easy transfer, it was just going to be easy to transfer over. And I got accepted into the Midwest HWI and then I received an email telling me that, oh, well there were credit hours that you're short, so prior to you coming here, you need to go back to the Midwest community college. So that kind of threw me through a loop.

Ginnie further shared an experience of being misadvised, stating:

There was kind of some discrepancies about if I had enough credits to transfer and I went and spoke with a counselor at the community college every semester to make sure I was on track and it was still messed up. And then I had to wait an extra year before I can start the program at the HWI, which kind of put me behind. I was really upset about that.

Additionally, Haydn echoed the concerns and confusion caused by misadvising at the HWI:

I got accepted into the program, and they went through a transitional phase of advisors. So I was talking to an advisor through the summer and then, like mid through the summer, she was like, oh, yeah, I'm not the advisor no more. And I was like, oh, well that's lovely. So now what do I do? Like, who do I talk to?

Haydn elaborated on her experience with advising during her first semester at the HWI, sharing:

It was kind of like the runaround of like, I had to explain what I was talking to her about and what I wanted to do and, you know, stuff like that. It was very challenging. I would say my first semester, I was dealing with like a lot.

Haydn also discussed the emotional impact of misadvising experiences and the overall transition process:

I feel like I was very stressed and homesick because my parents, they couldn't really even help me if they wanted to. It was really between the school and the school I'm transferring from, and they don't know who works at this school to help me. So I feel like it really impacted my first year because I was still trying to figure everything out on top of being a transfer student.

Overall, the participants' stories highlight the considerable challenges that Black transfer students encounter due to misadvising and unsupportive faculty, illustrating how such experiences can significantly impact their ability to achieve their transition goals. Building on the discussion of the challenges faced by Black transfer students with advising, it is also important to consider the role of support systems during the transition process. The lack of adequate support from advisors at the community college and the HWI highlights the gaps in guidance hindering Black transfer students' progress. For instance, Angel expressed a feeling of disconnect with advisors at the HWI:

Do they know, or do they take into consideration when advising all the culture and all the things in place? You didn't ask me. Was my mom going to pay? She didn't ask me about my job. She didn't ask me anything.

Angel's sentiment reveals an absence of cultural responsiveness and personalized support from advisors, indicating that Angel's circumstances were not adequately considered during the advising process. Similarly, Fynn shared her experience, stating:

I don't even think I feel like my program advisors knew who I was. I didn't feel that. I never really met with an advisor again. Because I was still really shook after leaving community college...it was never really an advisor...I really didn't get much from advisors. I'm going to be honest with you. I really didn't.

Fynn's experience highlights the impersonal nature of advising relationships, which left Fynn feeling overlooked and unsupported at the HWI. Furthermore, Haydn expressed that, although she did have an advisor, that person was not well-versed in the specifics of the transfer process, noting:

Straight out the gate it was kind of difficult finding a school that took all of my credits. I did have an advisor, but they didn't necessarily know like the nitty-gritty of, you know, what the transfer process is...I ended up navigating much of it on my own.

Haydn's narrative highlights significant gaps in knowledge and guidance from advisors that can exacerbate Black transfer students' challenges during their transition. Overall, the participants' reflections underscore the critical importance of effective advising in promoting student success; without sufficient support, the transition experience can be significantly hindered, ultimately affecting Black transfer students' confidence, sense of belonging, and academic achievement.

Navigating like a Freshman without Orientation

Expanding on the difficulty of misadvising and transferring credits, participants also described feelings of confusion during their transition. Navigating the transfer process proved difficult for some participants, as they encountered confusion in applying for financial aid, purchasing textbooks, and finding their way around campus. Their experiences mirror the typical first-year journey many freshmen undergo; however, transfer students, especially Black transfer students, are often overlooked and not provided with the same support systems, such as campus tours or orientation programs designed to aid them during their transition, as revealed in participant stories. In this context, Emry shared:

I just kept calling. I kept calling because I was confused. The HWI does run differently than the community college. So I was really confused with financial aid and books and all this and everything.

Fynn recounted her first day at the HWI:

Literally my first day, I was late to class because I was lost on campus just trying to find the class. I came in just like in a whirlwind like, oh my God.

Additionally, Fynn shared her expectations of feeling welcomed and receiving guidance from advisors, noting:

Once I actually got to the PWI, it wasn't really as far as what I expected as far as meeting with the advisors, and kind of a big welcome, you know, and explaining, well, you go here for this and blah, blah, blah. So it was just kind of like, okay, I'm here.

Fynn's statement underscores a sense of frustration regarding the lack of support and orientation, which further complicates the transition for Black transfer students.

Ginnie also highlighted the challenge of navigating her way to class at the HWI:

I had no idea where I was going. So, yeah, the first day for my first class, I ended up having to get a police escort to the class.

The participants' experiences highlight the uncertainty that Black transfer students encounter during their transition, emphasizing how such challenges can affect their confidence and academic success. The experiences of confusion and adjustment shared by Black transfer students are not unique; first-year students often face similar difficulties when transitioning to new academic settings. By recognizing that these challenges are common across student populations, institutions can work towards creating more equitable and supportive environments. According to Laanan et al. (2010), addressing the transfer student experience can improve retention and success rates for transfer students navigating new academic and social landscapes. Fostering understanding and tailored support can promote a more inclusive campus climate that benefits students, specifically Black transfer students, during their transition.

Overall, participants expressed feelings of confusion, frustration, and inadequate support from faculty and advisors, suggesting that HWIs often fail to acknowledge and address the specific challenges faced by Black transfer students. Insufficient understanding and engagement not only hinder academic success but also exacerbate emotional distress, as Black transfer students struggle to navigate environments that are not designed to promote their success (Jain et al., 2020). Shock and confusion experienced by Black transfer students during the transition process are reflective of the

broader oppressive structures inherent in HWIs, such as inadequate advising and faculty and staff support. HWIs frequently reinforce systemic barriers that undermine Black transfer students' sense of belonging and agency, resulting in feelings of disconnection and confusion as they navigate their transition. By failing to cultivate a supportive and inclusive environment, HWIs perpetuate a culture of alienation that hinders Black transfer students during their transition process. Insufficient support can hinder Black transfer students' ability to engage with and succeed in their new academic environment fully.

Agentic Advocacy

During transition, Black transfer students navigate educational landscapes characterized by inequitable transfer policies and limited institutional resources (Jain et al., 2017). These systemic challenges often compel Black transfer students to develop strategies for overcoming barriers and advocating for their needs. In response, agentic advocacy emerged as a crucial theme in resisting an oppressive system that is ill-equipped to support Black transfer students. Agentic Advocacy highlights the importance of self-advocacy and independence throughout the transition process. The sub-themes that emerged are a proactive approach to the transition, not wanting to go into debt, being self-sufficient, not leaning on anyone, and having no safety net. The fourth theme emerged as a response to the research question: How do Black transfer students describe their transfer experiences, and what forms of community capital or campus support were beneficial during their transition? In this section, I will examine how participants' proactive and self-sufficient approaches, including their tendency not to rely on informal or formal support systems, were influenced by their awareness of lacking a safety net.

Angel's Path of Self-Advocacy and Independence

While most participants shared how faculty, peer support within their HWI programs, family, friends, and employers provided support and assistance during their transition, one participant, Angel, consistently emphasized the importance of self-advocacy and independence, illustrating that he often had to take charge of his transition proactively. The necessity to engage actively during his transition, by arranging advising appointments or making strategic financial decisions, highlights Angel's resourcefulness in the face of systemic barriers. Angel's narrative sheds light on how Black transfer students can leverage their agency to carve out successful academic and personal pathways despite limited external and institutional support. Highlighting agentic action paves the way for deeper examination of how self-advocacy and proactive approaches enable students to confront and resist systemic inequities. Within this context, Angel shared:

I knew also that there was no safety net. So that's a whole 'nother layer. My mom was not going to come and save me. She wasn't going to pay for anything. I knew there was no going back. So that was another push for me. There was no going back. No safety net.

Angel's experience exemplifies the importance of self-reliance, as he had minimal family support, both financially and emotionally, during their transition to college. Despite these challenges, Angel remained determined and proactive. Angel further reflected on his situation by emphasizing the need to rely on himself and take charge of his educational journey, demonstrating resilience in navigating the obstacles without external support:

My mom didn't go to college, but she didn't really help me go to college. When it comes to actual college, I didn't really lean on anyone, and no one really offered me anything. As for, like, school supplies and, you know, working out my schedule, I did all that by myself, and I worked full time. So I bought all the things that I needed and I bought my car. Bought my phone, I paid for my own gas. So even like my other sister, she didn't say, 'Hey, let me tell you about financial aid,' and 'Hey, let me tell you about this.' No discussion was had, I was like, I'll figure it out...I think that really feeds into that self-sufficiency. Even if I don't have help, I'm still going to succeed, and I'll figure it out. I just felt like I could do it.

Despite the absence of familial guidance, Angel's understanding of his situation demonstrates his independence and commitment to forging his pathway. Angel's reflections highlight the resilience needed to navigate college primarily without family support, illustrating his strength and determination to succeed independently. While minimal familial involvement can present challenges, it also catalyzes personal growth and self-sufficiency. For instance, Angel shared:

Yeah, it's like everybody else is doing it. Like, I'll figure it out. Like, I know how to do my schoolwork. I know how to discipline myself to get it done... If someone offered it to me, I'm sure I would have taken it. But if it wasn't being offered, I'm pretty self-sufficient.

Angel continued:

So, the overall transition was fine. I got a scholarship from going from the two-year community college to go to the HWI, so that helped a lot financially. So, I left my four-year degree with no debt.

Angel's statement illustrates how taking the initiative allowed him to manage his transition effectively and secure financial support, reflecting a strong sense of self-advocacy. Angel stressed the importance of financial planning for attending college, including considerations of financial aid and scholarships. Angel expressed how avoiding debt for his degree significantly influenced their decisions during the transition process. For example, Angel reflected on his motivation:

And I just knew that I didn't want to go into debt. I wanted to use the scholarship, and I knew what degree I wanted. And I think that that's what gave me the advantage because I wasn't unsure at any point. I knew when I left high school, I was going to be a social worker, like I knew that. So I think that's what really helped me was that I knew what degree I wanted. I wanted it to be paid for by somebody else.

Angel's clarity and focus provided direction and reinforced his commitment to pursuing their degree without incurring debt. Angel's self-reliance became a driving force during his transition, enabling him to navigate the complexities of his transition successfully. Angel's determination to navigate college independently showcases self-motivation, goal-oriented, and the ability to tackle challenges independently throughout the transition. When asked about the impact of limited familial and external support during his transition, Angel responded:

I was passing my classes, and I didn't have any student loans....and I have my job. That's all I can do. Until I graduated. And that was my focus. That was it.

Angel's experiences reflect a sense of confidence and independence, and his goal-oriented approach demonstrates that he can manage his academic responsibilities independently. Angel also shared how his desire to break free from their past circumstances fueled their ambition to succeed independently, emphasizing the profound connection between personal history and the drive for self-sufficiency, stating:

I still have to show up in that space. And so that was enough drive for me to not want to live in poverty, not to live the way that I grew up. That was enough for me to do right. Like I didn't need anything else.

Angel's reflections illustrate his strength and resilience, highlighting his focus on independence and self-sufficiency throughout his transition. These qualities were essential to Angel's overall success and personal development during his transition.

Demonstrating Proactivity and Going Above and Beyond

Building on Angel's experiences of self-advocacy and independence, Blair and Fynn also reported the need to take the initiative and navigate their transition independently, especially when institutional or external support was lacking. Blair voiced practical concerns about his financial choices:

It really didn't make sense financially to come into a university where you were probably going to be attending virtually. The PWI just didn't financially make sense, which is why it made sense to go to the community college route and then transfer over.

Blair's decision illustrates a strategic approach to financial planning that aligns with his educational goals during the transition. Mirroring Angel's viewpoint, Blair's narrative highlights the crucial role that financial planning and awareness play in the transition for Black transfer students, illustrating how his financial decisions can shape both his educational experiences and future ambitions.

Agentic advocacy also reveals another important aspect, as Fynn described the experience of going above and beyond to be recognized at HWIs. Black transfer students frequently find themselves balancing the need to take the initiative with feelings of exclusion during their transition, often refraining from seeking support from the HWI (faculty, staff, peers) due to perceptions of marginalization or barriers to inclusion. Fynn expressed her thoughts on the importance of taking initiative and self-advocacy while navigating the HWI, stating:

When you are a minority, you got to excel and you got to excel. Excel just to excel. If you understand what I understand. You have to go above and beyond to even, I guess, be valued.

Fynn expressed her commitment to proactively engaging with campus events at her HWI, stating:

If I did not have the determination to continue on, I would've been just there [HWI] stuck. Honestly, I don't even get information to tell me when these events happened....I know that there are things out there, now as far as how to navigate to become a part of those things. That's a little more challenging. It's not out there in your face...[If] it was not for the Black professor, I probably would not even have known that these things happen on campus.

Fynn's experience underscores the importance of taking initiative when institutional support is lacking during the transition process. Fynn's narrative also demonstrates that, despite oppressive institutional policies that create additional barriers for Black transfer students, proactive efforts and personal determination are crucial for accessing opportunities and successfully navigating the transition. Blair and Fynn's narratives illustrate how agency serves as a vital tool for Black transfer students in overcoming structural obstacles and actively shaping their educational journey. Collectively, Angel, Fynn, and Blair's narratives highlight that a proactive approach, characterized by self-advocacy and initiative, is essential for Black transfer students to navigate their transitions successfully. The narratives reinforce the idea that Black transfer students must often take charge of their educational journeys, emphasizing the importance of personal agency in the face of adversity.

Agentic Advocacy highlights how Black transfer students utilize their agency to navigate their transition to HWIs. By embracing self-sufficiency and proactively seeking opportunities, Black transfer students assert their agency in an environment that often overlooks their needs. As demonstrated by the participants' experiences, engaging in self-advocacy is crucial for achieving academic success and maintaining emotional well-being amid the challenges of transitioning into unfamiliar spaces, especially HWIs. Ultimately, emphasizing the development of human capital through self-advocacy, resilience, and strategic decision-making demonstrates how Black transfer students resist and navigate systemic inequities, paving the way for a successful transition and college journey.

The Blueprint: Black Transfer Student Experiences that Shape Success

During the interviews, participants shared various challenges they faced, such as limited representation at HWIs, experiences of racism, and feelings of shock and confusion. Moving away from a deficit perspective, it is crucial to acknowledge the strengths participants demonstrated that contributed to a successful transition, such as practicing self-advocacy and utilizing their agency to find supportive systems within HWIs. From these discussions, a guiding framework, theme five, the Blueprint, emerged, outlining key strategies that Black transfer students can use to effectively transition from community college to an HWI. The fifth theme emerged in response to the research question: How do Black transfer students describe their thoughts, feelings, and experiences from enrollment to the end of the first semester at the HWI? Moreover, how may this information inform others?

The Blueprint includes strategies for navigating the transition with fewer obstacles, fostering engagement with the campus community, and effectively sharing information to better support Black transfer students in achieving a successful transition. Additionally, the Blueprint highlights the discrepancies between participants' expectations and lived experiences, reflecting their thoughts and feelings throughout the transfer process. Highlighting the gaps between expectations and actual experiences is a crucial element of the Blueprint for a successful transfer. Recognizing the gaps between expectations and lived experiences helps identify areas where additional support and resources are needed. By understanding participants' thoughts and feelings, institutions can tailor interventions to better address the emotional and academic needs of Black

transfer students, ultimately fostering a smoother transition and increasing the likelihood of successful transfer outcomes.

The subthemes encompass social media engagement, transition adjustment, orientation, student involvement, and a holistic approach to the transition. The subthemes could function as a guide for Black transfer students with aspirations to transfer. This section provides a guide to a successful transition, based on the subthemes and narratives of the participants.

Student Involvement That Influences Transfer Success

Participants emphasized that student involvement and participation in their academic programs at their HWI are beneficial during the transition, even if motivation levels affect their ability to fully engage in campus activities or attend orientation at the HWI. Student involvement on campus refers to participation in student organizations or other campus departments and services, such as the Multicultural Office and various student groups. Duran shared his personal experience, stating:

I found for me what was very helpful is, not just focusing on the classes and the material in the classes. I participated in a couple of student orgs, found out where the gym was, and I could go there. So those sorts of explorations and participation in things outside of the classroom kind of made me more connected to the university, to the program, and as a student.

Duran's reflection demonstrates how involvement in campus life contributed to a sense of belonging and connection to the HWI. Blair expressed another perspective about the importance of HWIs promoting student engagement to attract and retain students, emphasizing that an engaging campus life can enhance his educational experience:

I can say that there needs to be a better push for helping student engagement, student involvement on campus life and why students should want to come to your campus instead of going to another campus.

Haydn offered a different perspective on campus life and involvement, describing how she felt overwhelmed as she tried to make up for what she missed in the first two years of college. Haydn shared:

Like the college life, I feel like transferring, it cuts it short. So I don't know if all transfer students only have two years, but it feels like I have to jam-pack everything that I wanted to do in the college experience in those two years. Yeah. And I feel like that's why I'm exhausted and burnt out, because I'm trying to accomplish all that I wanna do in college in two years.

Haydn's statement reveals the pressure that transfer students feel to maximize their limited time after transferring, which can lead to exhaustion and burnout as they strive to make the most of their college experience. The reflections from Blair, Duran, and Haydn reveal a spectrum of experiences regarding student involvement on campus. While Blaire emphasizes the need for better promotion of engagement opportunities to attract students, Duran illustrates the positive impact of participation on one's connection to the university. In contrast, Haydn highlights the unique challenges that Black transfer students face, who often feel the urgency to engage fully in campus life within a limited timeframe. Together, the participants' viewpoints highlight the crucial role of student involvement in shaping the overall college experience and the diverse challenges that different students encounter in pursuing that engagement.

How Social Media Engagement Influences Transfer Success

Participants also mentioned several ways to get involved at their HWI, such as using social media for resource sharing, expanding their networks, and becoming engaged on campus. For some participants, social media proved to be a valuable tool for enhancing student engagement, providing peer support, and offering guidance during their transition. For instance, Blair highlighted how the social media platform, Snapchat, facilitated their connection with others during his transition. Blair recalled:

Some things that worked in my transition. I would probably say getting actively involved on the social media platforms that are directly related to the class that I'll be graduating in. So, for example, there's a Snapchat page for the class of 2025. And of course, you know, the other classes that have been there before and the ones that are thereafter. So I guess kind of getting involved with that and being active on that kind of put me out there to kind of meet a few people.

Blair's engagement highlights how social media can foster connections and create a sense of community among students. Similarly, Ginnie expressed the importance of online communities by stating:

I found a couple of groups on Instagram and Facebook. You know, kind of like, social work groups. Having that online community is important to me because I really don't have that on campus.

Ginnie's sentiment underscores the significance of social media in bridging gaps in on-campus support and representation, a factor previously identified as crucial to the transition process. In contrast, Haydn noted that social media can have a dual impact—helping students connect with other Black students on campus while potentially

contributing to feelings of isolation, affecting their sense of belonging, and their transition to campus life. Haydn noted:

What I really noticed was that a lot of people were like, a lot of Black people were clicked up, everybody knew everybody. So if you're coming new, it is just kind of like they're looking at you crazy and like, who is that? So I was very hesitant to even talk to anybody in person on campus. I feel like it stemmed from social media because you don't really have to interact face-to-face to talk to people. So I feel like that was my safe outlet to just go to social media and find all the Black people on this campus.

Haydn's experience highlights how social media can serve as both a bridge and a barrier for Black transfer students, offering a welcoming platform for connection while exposing the social dynamics present in physical environments.

Blair, Haydn, and Ginnie's narratives illustrate the multifaceted role that social media plays in students' lives during their transition. While it serves as a crucial tool for building connections and fostering a sense of community, social media also reflects the complexities of navigating social interactions on campus.

Bridging Expectations and Perceptions: Key to a Successful Transfer Journey

Without utilizing social media to build connections or explore campus life, some participants shared their expectations regarding the adjustment to their transition. Within this context, the transition adjustment refers to participants' expectations during the transfer process, including building relationships with other college students, transfer orientation, anticipating effective communication about the transfer, and receiving advising support. Specifically, during the transfer adjustment, Black transfer students

expected a smooth transition from the community college to the HWI, clear communication about transfer procedures, and supportive interactions with peers, faculty, and staff. Blair expressed his expectations about forming connections with other students at their HWI, stating:

When you transfer from a community college to a university you missed out on a lot in those first two years, but I honestly thought that adjustment would have been a lot different. Transitioning. But it didn't turn out that way... You kind of have to make your own footing, especially if you weren't there those first two years when, you know, those people did come in together... You're kind of like the outsider. They don't really know you.

Blair's reflection highlights the expectation of what the first years of college should be like, particularly in terms of building relationships and enjoying campus life, as opposed to the realities faced by Black transfer students who may feel they have missed these experiences. Another vital component of the Blueprint is how participants shared their experiences regarding transfer orientation. In this context, orientation refers to participants' experiences and perceptions of their transfer orientation at the HWI. Specifically, the participants anticipated that they would receive a transfer orientation and expected it to promote proactive engagement with advisors in addition to aiding them in navigating their new campus environment more effectively. For example, Ginnie shared how a positive experience with orientation was helpful during her transition, stating:

I did find the orientation helpful. The orientation was very helpful as far as knowing who I needed to talk to as far as my advising. But it did not really help with getting around the campus.

Ginnie's reflection highlights how she benefited from the orientation in terms of understanding advising resources, while also highlighting a limitation in the program's effectiveness for navigating the physical campus. As discussed earlier, not fully orienting transfer students, specifically Black transfer students, can hinder a sense of belonging in a new environment. For example, Indigo shared a more concerning experience regarding transfer orientation, recalling:

I was not offered the transfer orientation, but I do remember, how you get mail, things in the mail, or whatever. It was no follow-up to say, hey, are you still considering or whatever. Again, so it was nothing, no follow-up. Something may have come through the mail, and that was it. That's all that it was, nothing to say, let's show you on campus.

Indigo's account emphasizes HWI's lack of proactive engagement, which can leave Black transfer students feeling unsupported and disconnected from the HWI. Indigo and Ginnie's experiences and perceptions of transfer orientation at their HWIs demonstrate a range of engagement and support, or lack thereof. While Ginnie appreciated the value of the orientation, Indigo felt it lacked the necessary guidance to prepare her to transfer to the HWI. The differences in their experiences underscore the need for more inclusive and accessible orientation programs at HWIs that effectively support Black transfer students in their transition, ensuring they feel welcomed and equipped to navigate their new environment.

When I inquired about how this information might benefit others, participants offered a range of perspectives. Overall, they emphasized the importance of adopting a holistic approach to the transition process. While some participants advocated

transparency and sharing experiences, others expressed concerns about overwhelming prospective students. Despite differing views on the best way to communicate information, a common thread emerges: the need for collaboration among various stakeholders. Such an approach underscores the importance of communicating information to all parties involved, including high school counselors, college faculty, advisors, and Black transfer students, to support their transition experiences more effectively. For example, Indigo shared:

We're going to start from the top all the way to the bottom.... don't sugar coat it.

Give it to 'em because I think that they need to hear that.

Indigo's perspective highlights the importance of comprehensive and transparency in sharing information among all parties involved in the transfer process. Participants also discussed how sharing their transfer experiences could benefit high school students and counselors. Fynn emphasized:

I think if we start at the high school level with the counselors making interactions with these colleges, especially your community colleges, because not every student is ready to go away and leave home. So your community colleges, I think if we start working, connecting with the high schools, with the community colleges to speak directly with the counselors and let the students meet with faculty and get a feel for that campus, get a feel for the college, just to make sure that it's a good fit for 'em.

Fynn's approach emphasizes the importance of early engagement in preparing Black transfer students for their transition into higher education.

Duran offered a similar viewpoint, suggesting that this information sharing should begin in high school and provide ongoing orientation for pivotal stages in college student life, stating:

Perhaps it should start in high school, and then once somebody gets to college, that it should be mandatory orientations again, with the faculty.

This recommendation highlights the significance of ongoing support throughout the educational journey, including orientations at community college and HWIs. Further emphasizing the need for sharing experiences across the higher education landscape, Haydn added:

Because of the difficulties and disparities that they [Black transfer students] may face. I feel like if they have this information, they can better help transfer students...You gotta make it very welcoming and very easy as possible for transfer students. 'Cause it's already hard transferring. It's a process within itself from applying to the HWI.

Haydn's insight suggests that a greater awareness of the challenges encountered by Black transfer students could improve the admissions process, making it more supportive and inviting. By providing access to pertinent information, institutions can foster a more welcoming atmosphere and facilitate the transition, acknowledging that transferring is inherently difficult and comes with its own set of challenges.

In summary, the Blueprint serves as a valuable tool for Black transfer students to use during the transition process. By utilizing the information and resources provided, Black transfer students can strategically navigate the transition process, positioning themselves for a successful transition and college experience. This approach not only

empowers Black transfer students to overcome potential obstacles but also allows them to take full advantage of the opportunities available at HWIs.

Summary

The findings shed light on the transition experiences of Black students who transfer from community colleges to HWIs. The findings also revealed that systemic racism affects Black transfer students' experiences during the transition. Participant narratives highlighted both explicit and implicit forms of racism, demonstrating how such discrimination not only persists but is often normalized within academic environments. Participants also shared feelings of isolation and discrimination, underscoring the urgent need for greater representation and support from faculty and staff to improve their transition experiences.

Critical Race Methodology plays a crucial role in this study by centering the lived experiences of Black transfer students and acknowledging the impact of racism during their transition. By prioritizing Black transfer student narratives, I aim to amplify their voices, which are often sidelined in traditional academic discourse, and challenge master narratives that depict Black transfer students solely through a deficit lens. Critical Race Methodology validates the nuances of Black transfer student experiences and positions their stories as essential data for understanding the systemic inequalities in higher education. Critical Race Methodology affirms the necessity for engagement with the realities faced by Black transfer students, paving the way for meaningful change across the higher education landscape.

This study shifts away from the conventional portrayal of Black transfer students as solely disadvantaged, instead highlighting the intricate relationship between race and

academic experiences that calls for heightened awareness in educational contexts. For instance, through participant narratives, the importance of capitalizing on support emerged, demonstrating how participants drew on social networks, familial support, and cultural assets to facilitate their transitions. Additionally, some participants highlighted the advantages of self-advocacy and independence in navigating their transitions, such as taking a proactive approach to advising and engaging actively in campus involvement.

Lastly, the findings reflect the necessity for targeted institutional practices that acknowledge the challenges faced by Black transfer students. The participants indicated that proactive engagement, tailored support, and a holistic approach to resource allocation are essential for navigating their transition and academic journeys. By employing Critical Race Methodology, the study validates the participants' lived experiences and highlights their agency in overcoming obstacles. Ultimately, the insights gained from the findings provide a blueprint for enhancing the transfer process for Black transfer students, fostering a more inclusive and supportive educational environment within HWIs.

CHAPTER FIVE

IMPLICATIONS

This chapter discusses the implications of this study, which examined the transition experiences of Black transfer students from enrollment through the end of their first semester at a historically White institution (HWI). The guiding questions for this research are:

1. How do Black transfer students describe their transition experiences, feelings, and/or thoughts from enrollment to the end of the first semester?
2. What kinds of community capital, if any, were helpful during the transition from enrollment to the end of the first semester?
3. What kinds of campus support, if any, were helpful during the transition from enrollment to the end of the first semester?
4. How may these students' experiences inform others?

Reflecting on my journey as a Black transfer student, the questions that arose from my experiences resonate throughout this work. My early excitement during my transition shifted to difficulties as I encountered the complexities of returning to college as a professional student, while balancing a full-time job, caring for my children, and managing various other responsibilities that diverted my attention. My experiences prompted me to explore whether my feelings were unique and what forms of support might exist for students like me. Through qualitative analysis involving nine Black transfer students, this study identifies key themes, such as belonging and community

support, that shape their academic journeys. By amplifying the voices of Black transfer students, this research aims to inform institutional practices that enhance the transfer experience for Black transfer students, ultimately contributing to greater equity in higher education.

While the findings highlighted barriers such as systemic racism and pervasive microaggressions that compromise Black transfer students' sense of belonging and academic success, they also illuminate the strengths that Black transfer students exhibit in overcoming challenges during their transition. Notably, participant narratives revealed how they leveraged various support systems, including social networks, familial connections, and cultural resources, to navigate their transitions. The findings also highlight the experiences of isolation and discrimination faced by Black transfer students at HWIs, underscoring the urgent need for increased representation and enhanced support within these institutions. Additionally, the findings call attention to the importance of implementing targeted institutional practices that not only acknowledge the obstacles faced by Black transfer students but also build on their resilience and resourcefulness. I will summarize the findings and discuss their implications in the following sections.

Summary of Findings

This section is organized by the themes identified in chapter four: Belonginess, Capitalizing on Support, Shock and Confusion, Agentic Advocacy, and The Blueprint: Black Transfer Student Experiences that Shape Success. Data were collected through qualitative interviews with nine Black transfer students who transferred from a community college and completed their first semester at an HWI. The analysis of the data revealed key findings for a successful transfer for Black transfer students, in addition to

unveiling the impact of racism and discrimination on Black transfer students during their transition.

Belongingness

Belongingness reflects the experiences of participants who often feel marginalized and underrepresented within HWIs. This theme captures the challenges faced by Black transfer students in their pursuit of belonging and recognition in an environment where diversity may not be prioritized. While a couple of participants expressed satisfaction with the representation of faculty in their program at the HWI, others shared stories regarding the lack of representation at their HWI. For instance, some participants shared difficulties identifying a supportive community that recognizes and validates their identities and perspectives. Their narratives highlight the crucial role of representation and diversity in fostering a sense of belonging, which is vital for their overall success and well-being in an academic setting.

Belongingness emerged in response to the research question of how Black transfer students characterize their experiences during the transfer process, from the start of their transition from the community college to the end of their first semester at a historically White institution (HWI). The insights gained emphasize the necessity for institutions to acknowledge the importance of diversity and actively create an inclusive environment that empowers Black transfer students to feel a sense of belonging. Addressing these concerns is crucial for improving the educational experience of Black transfer students and ultimately supporting their academic and social development within HWIs.

Capitalizing on Support

The findings reveal that support and resources play a crucial role in the successful transition of Black transfer students at HWIs. Participants emphasized the importance of assistance from various sources, including faculty, advisors, peers, and community members. Tailored support systems are necessary to address the unique needs of Black transfer students, recognizing their distinct backgrounds and experiences. Such customized resources are fundamental to helping Black transfer students navigate their educational journeys and adapt to their new environments.

The findings also highlight the significance of both human and social capital in the transition process. Human capital refers to the individual skills, knowledge, and abilities that students bring with them, while social capital encompasses the relationships and networks they cultivate with family, peers, and faculty (Yosso, 2005). By fostering connections and providing meaningful campus support, HWIs can validate the existing community resources of Black transfer students and promote a more inclusive environment. A holistic approach that embraces and enhances both community and institutional resources is essential for empowering Black transfer students academically and socially, ultimately contributing to a more equitable educational landscape.

Shock and Confusion: Navigating the Unknown

Findings reveal that Black transfer students encounter significant obstacles during their transition from community colleges to HWIs, often grappling with confusion, inadequate support, and negative experiences with advising. These challenges highlight the emotional toll associated with the transition process and underscore the complexities of navigating a new academic environment. Feelings of disconnection stem from the

broader oppressive structures within HWIs, which reinforce systemic barriers that undermine students' sense of belonging and agency, ultimately affecting their overall academic and social development.

Moreover, the lack of inclusivity within HWIs perpetuates systemic inequities, leaving Black transfer students feeling alienated and unsupported. Participants expressed frustration over insufficient recognition of their needs by faculty and advisors, suggesting that HWIs frequently overlook the challenges faced by Black transfer students. The emotional distress not only impedes academic success but also exacerbates feelings of confusion and frustration, emphasizing the urgent necessity for HWIs to evaluate and reform their practices. HWIs can foster a sense of belonging and promote a more equitable educational experience by creating more inclusive environments that actively support Black transfer students.

Agentic Advocacy

Agentic advocacy emerged as a vital theme for Black transfer students in confronting systemic barriers within HWIs. The findings highlight the crucial role of self-advocacy and independence for Black transfer students as they navigate their transitions to HWIs. Participants frequently expressed the need to take the initiative in shaping their educational experiences, especially in the absence of traditional support systems. Participants reported confusion and frustration due to a lack of support from faculty and advisors, underscoring the challenges faced by Black transfer students. Participant narratives revealed a remarkable sense of resilience and determination, as they actively sought out resources, arranged advising sessions, and made informed financial decisions.

This proactive approach illustrates their capability to navigate an often unwelcoming academic landscape effectively.

The educational environment is marked by inequitable transfer policies and limited resources, making it imperative for Black transfer students to assert their agency in the face of such challenges. By embracing self-sufficiency and seeking out opportunities, Black transfer students not only work towards academic success but also prioritize their emotional well-being during a demanding transition. The emphasis on cultivating human capital through self-advocacy, resilience, and strategic actions demonstrates how Black transfer students resist systemic inequities, forging paths that lead to successful transitions and enriched college experiences.

The Blueprint: Black Transfer Student Experiences that Shape Success

Findings revealed that a comprehensive "Blueprint" emerged to guide Black transfer students successfully navigating their transitions to HWIs. This Blueprint offers essential guidance on minimizing obstacles, fostering engagement with the campus community, and sharing valuable information to support Black transfer students throughout their academic journeys. Additionally, the Blueprint highlights discrepancies between participants' expectations and their lived experiences, emphasizing the importance of utilizing campus resources and involvement. Participants noted challenges relating to motivation and access to orientation programs, reinforcing the need for improved communication of supportive resources to facilitate smoother transitions.

The insights shared by participants underscore a collective recognition of the necessity for a holistic approach in the transition process. While some advocate for transparency and the sharing of experiences, one participant raised concerns about the

risks of overwhelming prospective students. Despite varied opinions on how to communicate effectively, a common theme emerged: collaboration among high school counselors, college faculty, and advisors is crucial for fostering a supportive environment that promotes successful transitions. The Blueprint serves as a powerful tool, enabling Black transfer students to navigate potential challenges while maximizing opportunities within HWIs strategically. By drawing on the resources and experiences shared by Black transfer students, other Black transfer students in similar circumstances can increase their chances of a successful transition and a more rewarding college experience.

This study aims to address a gap in the existing literature by shifting the focus toward the lived experiences of Black transfer students during their transition from community colleges to HWIs. Much of the prior research has predominantly approached transfer success from a deficit perspective, emphasizing barriers, challenges, and shortcomings faced by minoritized students without adequately exploring their strengths, agency, and cultural assets. By centering the voices of Black transfer students, this work contributes to Black student literature by providing nuanced, qualitative insights into how systemic racism, microaggressions, and institutional climates uniquely shape their sense of belonging, identity, and agency during these transitions. The findings of this study highlight the importance of community capital, representation, and proactive advocacy—elements often underexplored—that are crucial for fostering resilience and success among Black transfer students.

Furthermore, my research advances the literature by emphasizing the intersectionality of race, transfer status, and student agency. While much existing work views transfer success primarily through institutional or demographic lenses, this study

foregrounds the active agency and cultural assets that Black transfer students leverage to resist systemic barriers. Using frameworks such as CRT and Community Cultural Wealth, the findings illustrate how Black transfer students draw upon their social, familial, and resistant capital to navigate and challenge oppressive structures. This asset-based approach shifts the narrative from one of deficit to one of strength, positioning Black transfer students as active agents shaping their educational trajectories.

Compared to broader transfer literature, which often discusses structural barriers such as credit transfer issues and advising shortcomings without explicitly addressing racialized experiences, this work highlights how systemic racism manifests through microaggressions, tokenism, and exclusionary campus climates, disproportionately impacting Black students' sense of safety and belonging. By contrasting these systemic challenges with the resilience and agency demonstrated by Black transfer students, this study underscores the need for culturally responsive, equity-focused practices and policies that recognize and build upon their unique strengths. Overall, this research contributes a vital, strength-based perspective to the literature on Black students and transfer students, advocating for reforms that better support Black transfer students' successful navigation of higher education pathways.

Discussion

In this study, I examined the transfer experiences of Black college students who transitioned from a community college to an HWI and completed their first semester there. In the following sections, the participants' narratives will provide an in-depth perspective on the factors that aided in a successful transition, including Black student

agency and the community and institutional capital they utilized, as well as the challenges they encountered, such as a lack of representation and racism.

Representation and Addressing Racism at HWIs

Black transfer students must navigate new academic pressures while also adjusting socially to campus environments that often lack diversity and have a history of discriminating against minoritized students, especially Black college students. According to McCall and Castles (2020), the campus climate and culture have a significant influence on the experiences of Black transfer students as they navigate the complexities of being both transfer students and Black students. Issues such as limited diversity among students, staff, and faculty, along with experiences of racism, discrimination, and unwelcoming campus environments, often lead Black students to feel excluded from the broader university community. This sense of alienation is compounded by racial and cultural divisions across the campus (McCall & Castles, 2020).

The findings align with and support the existing research by McCall and Castles (2020). Recounting Fynn's statement, "I did expect to see the representation...to be more than what it was, and I didn't see that," confirms the expectation that Black transfer students often encounter limited representation within campus communities, which contributes to feelings of exclusion and alienation. Fynn's emphasis on the need for representation and the importance of having faculty, staff, and peers who reflect their identity underscores the critical role that representation plays in validating the experiences of Black transfer students and fostering a sense of belonging. Similarly, Angel's statement about the lack of Black male representation and mentorship highlights the absence of visible role models and support networks, which research indicates can

negatively impact the adjustment and well-being of Black students at HWIs (McCall & Castles, 2020; Castro & Cortez, 2017; Griffith et al., 2019). Overall, the findings reinforce the idea that representation is a vital component in addressing the challenges faced by Black transfer students at HWIs. The findings advance the conversation by highlighting the crucial role of representation at HWIs and by amplifying the voices of minoritized students' perspectives, which are frequently overlooked in existing transfer literature and often go unrecognized during the transition process, especially at HWIs.

In higher education, patterns of anti-Black violence manifest in various forms. Although physical threats may be less visible, psychological and economic vulnerabilities remain prevalent. Experiences such as microaggressions, tokenism, impostor syndrome, and racial battle fatigue serve as evidence of the ongoing psychological toll inflicted upon Black individuals within academic environments (Dancy et al., 2018). For instance, Emry acknowledged this form of tokenism when a White peer repeatedly called them “weird,” leading Emry to realize that the tokenization stemmed from them being Black. Charley's narrative highlights instances of anti-Black hostility in online spaces, such as questioning White peers' perspectives on discussion forums. Indigo also shared how stigmatization, through verbal and nonverbal behaviors aimed at the targeted individual, which convey messages that demean or diminish them (Brondolo et al., 2008), can obstruct Black transfer students' sense of belonging and support within HWIs.

The findings advance the conversation surrounding the lived experiences of Black transfer students by providing nuanced, in-depth insights into how racism, both overt and subtle, affects Black transfer students' sense of belonging within HWIs. While existing literature highlights pervasive issues of racism and microaggressions, the findings offer

concrete, personal narratives that illustrate these challenges in real-world contexts, ranging from face-to-face interactions to online engagements, thereby humanizing the abstract concepts often discussed in academic discourse.

Moreover, the findings underscore the emotional and psychological toll that racism imposes on Black transfer students, exemplified through stories like Fynn's account of witnessing institutional responses to racist incidents and Charley's experience with racial microaggressions in online discussions. The participants' narratives reveal how systemic racism is normalized within HWIs, often going unaddressed, which directly hampers students' feelings of safety, support, and inclusion. Additionally, by highlighting the experiences of stigmatization, tokenization, and the lack of institutional support, the findings emphasize the urgent need for systemic reforms that foster genuine belonging and respect.

Furthermore, the findings expand the conversation by illustrating the intersectionality of race and transfer status, revealing how Black transfer students often face compounded vulnerabilities, such as feelings of invisibility, hypervisibility, and being dismissed by staff, thus calling attention to specific structural barriers that hinder their transition. Focusing on the lived realities of Black transfer students, guided by Critical Race Theory (CRT), underscores the importance of addressing systemic inequities, not only at the individual level but also within institutional practices and cultures.

In sum, the findings deepen the understanding of how racism manifests and persists in higher education environments, emphasizing the importance of representation, respectful dialogue, institutional accountability, and culturally responsive support

systems. The findings advance the conversation by advocating for a transformative approach that acknowledges and actively dismantles systemic barriers to create truly inclusive and affirming spaces where Black transfer students can thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

Personalized, Equitable, and Ecological Support

The findings align with and extend the existing body of research rooted in Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) framework, which, through a CRT lens, emphasizes recognizing and valuing the cultural assets of minoritized communities. While prior literature has highlighted the importance of social and cultural capital in student success (Luna & Martinez, 2013), our findings specifically underscore how diverse forms of support, ranging from personalized advising to community networks, serve as vital capital that Black transfer students leverage during their transition into HWIs.

By capitalizing on support and resources, the findings advance the conversation by illustrating that tailored, equitable, and community-based support mechanisms are not merely supplementary but central to fostering successful transfer experiences for Black transfer students. Participants' narratives reveal that individualized guidance, such as personalized academic advising and proactive communication, significantly enhances the confidence and sense of belonging of Black transfer students. This aligns with Cepeda et al. (2021), who emphasized that targeted support increases transfer student success by reducing uncertainty and promoting clarity about academic pathways.

Moreover, the findings extend the conversation by highlighting the interconnectedness of support sources, including faculty, peers, family, and employers,

and how these networks collectively function as forms of cultural capital within the CCW framework introduced by Yosso (2005). For example, participants expressed that strong relationships with supportive faculty, collaborative peer groups, and understanding employers create a resilient foundation that helps navigate the complexities of transfer and integration. The participants' insights reinforce the importance of viewing support as an ecological system, an idea supported by Chaudhry et al. (2024), which sustains Black transfer students through their transitional journeys.

Notably, the findings highlight the importance of institutions intentionally developing culturally responsive and accessible support structures. While existing literature calls for increased representation and support for minoritized students, the findings highlight the importance of specific practices, such as mentorship from Black faculty, peer networks, and family engagement, in transforming institutional environments into spaces where Black transfer students can thrive. This nuanced understanding advances the conversation by framing support not only as a resource but as an embodiment of cultural wealth that actively facilitates persistence, resilience, and success.

Navigating Challenges, Misadvising, and the Unknown at the HWI

Building upon foundational studies such as Laanan et al. (2010), which explored the complexities of transfer experiences from community colleges to four-year institutions, the findings both support and extend the existing understanding of the challenges faced by Black transfer students. Laanan et al. emphasized how inadequate support, misadvising, and unfamiliar environments impact student retention and adjustment, findings that resonate strongly with the narratives shared by participants in

this study. For example, many participants reported feelings of confusion, frustration, and emotional distress stemming from negative interactions with faculty and advisors, aligning with Laanan et al.'s (2010) research that highlights how these institutional shortcomings hinder academic success and contribute to a sense of alienation.

However, my work pushes the conversation forward by delving deeper into the nuanced, emotional, and systemic dimensions of these experiences, particularly for Black transfer students. While Laanan et al. (2010) addressed the general transfer process, my findings foreground the specific ways in which race, racialized interactions, and cultural disconnects exacerbate these challenges. For instance, stories like Ginnie's reveal how a negative faculty encounter at the community college left a lasting impact on their motivation, illustrating how early experiences of misadvising and racial bias shape transfer trajectories. Similarly, narratives about limited faculty engagement and inadequate advising highlight systemic gaps that disproportionately affect Black transfer students, emphasizing the urgency of culturally responsive support structures.

Furthermore, the findings highlight the emotional toll, including feelings of shock, confusion, and fear, that often accompany these systemic barriers. Participants' experiences of being lost on campus, late arrivals, or feeling unsupported during orientation or initial interactions at HWIs reveal a gap in institutional practices that are often overlooked in broader literature. The participants' emotional experiences illustrate how systemic shortcomings become tangible in everyday life, underscoring the need to shift from conventional measures of success and retention to more comprehensive, culturally responsive strategies.

In advancing the conversation, the findings underscore the importance of addressing the systemic and interpersonal barriers that impede Black transfer students' sense of belonging and agency. By highlighting specific instances of misadvising, faculty disengagement, and lack of orientation support, the findings advocate for institutional reforms that prioritize culturally informed advising, proactive engagement, and inclusive onboarding practices. The insights shared by participants call for a shift from viewing transfer challenges solely as individual obstacles to recognizing them as systemic issues rooted in institutional neglect and racial inequities.

The findings also confirm the difficulties of the transfer process but extend the dialogue by centering the racialized experiences, emotional impacts, and systemic deficiencies that uniquely affect Black transfer students. Moving the conversation forward, it advocates for intentional, culturally responsive strategies that foster belonging, support, and success, transforming HWIs into environments where Black transfer students are not only supported but truly valued as integral members of the campus community.

Agentic Advocacy: Self-Advocacy, Independence, and Going Above and Beyond

The findings align with and deepen the insights from Dancy et al. (2018) and Vaughn (2020), who emphasize that Black agency is rooted in the necessity to challenge systems that dehumanize and marginalize Black students. Vaughn's (2020) conceptualization of student agency, centered on intention, purpose, persistence, choice, and negotiation, resonates strongly with the narratives of participants in this study, particularly concerning their proactive strategies and self-advocacy during the transition. The findings confirm that, despite systemic barriers, Black transfer students actively

exercise agency to shape their educational pathways, often in opposition to institutional shortcomings.

Building on prior research (Vaughn, 2020), my work highlights how systemic inequities, such as restrictive transfer policies, limited institutional resources, and a lack of culturally responsive support, prompt Black transfer students to develop strategies of agentic advocacy. These strategies include self-sufficiency, proactive decision-making, and resilience in navigating complex institutional landscapes. The emergence of agentic advocacy as a key theme confirms and extends the understanding that Black students do not passively experience transitions; instead, they often must assert themselves to overcome systemic neglect and marginalization.

A significant contribution of this research is its focus on how Black transfer students' awareness of systemic gaps, such as the absence of a safety net, shapes their approach to transition. Participants like Angel exemplify this proactive stance, emphasizing independence, strategic planning, and resourcefulness in managing their academic and financial trajectories. Angel's narrative, in particular, advances the conversation by illustrating how self-advocacy and self-reliance are not merely individual traits but forms of resistance that challenge the systemic structures designed to overlook or exclude Black students.

Furthermore, this work advances the conversation by illustrating that agency among Black transfer students is often characterized by deliberate choices to operate independently, sometimes in opposition to institutional support systems, thereby highlighting the importance of fostering environments that recognize and cultivate such agency. For example, participants' stories about going "above and beyond" to access

opportunities or secure financial stability demonstrate that proactive, strategic action is essential for navigating systemic barriers. The participants' narratives reinforce the idea that resilience and agency are vital tools in resisting oppressive structures, aligning with and expanding upon the frameworks proposed by Vaughn (2020) and others.

By foregrounding the importance of agentic advocacy, my research emphasizes that supporting Black transfer students requires more than just providing resources; it necessitates recognizing their active role in shaping their educational journeys. This perspective pushes the conversation beyond deficit models that portray Black transfer students as passive recipients of support, instead framing them as empowered agents capable of resistance and strategic action. Ultimately, the findings advocate for institutional policies and practices that not only acknowledge but also actively support and amplify the agency of Black transfer students, fostering environments where they can thrive as active participants in their educational trajectories.

The Blueprint: Key Strategies for Transfer Success

The findings affirm and extend foundational work by Yosso (2005), who identified resistance capital as a vital form of cultural wealth that communities of Color, including Black students, draw upon to challenge systemic inequalities. My findings reinforce that Black transfer students actively utilize resistance capital, as manifested through oppositional behaviors, collective activism, and strategic resistance, to navigate and contest the inequities present within HWIs. Participants' narratives of engaging in collective resistance, advocating for change, and challenging campus norms confirm that resistance capital is a dynamic, vital resource for fostering a sense of agency and belonging amidst hostile environments.

Moreover, the findings advance the conversation by illustrating how resistance capital functions not only as a form of cultural wealth but also as a form of strategic agency that empowers Black students to carve out spaces of belonging and influence within predominantly white institutional contexts. For example, participants' accounts of mobilizing Black communities, influencing campus climate, and responding to systemic racism demonstrate that resistance is an active, intentional process rooted in cultural legacy, precisely what Yosso (2005) describes. The participants' narratives exemplify how resistance capital can be leveraged to foster collective resilience and social change, especially in times of heightened social unrest or institutional resistance.

This work also confirms the importance of community, familial, peer, and student organizations as a central pillar supporting Black transfer students' efforts to resist and persist. Studies by Jones and Reddick (2017), Sulé and Brown (2023), and Murillo (2024) have highlighted how community networks sustain Black student agency and foster a sense of belonging through collective resistance and affirmation of identity. The findings align with these perspectives, emphasizing that the community acts as both a foundation and a catalyst for resistance, enabling students to challenge systemic barriers and create spaces of affirmation within HWIs.

The findings advance the conversation by emphasizing that resistance capital is not solely about opposition; it also involves proactive strategies for survival, advocacy, and navigating institutional challenges. Participants demonstrated resourcefulness and agency through self-advocacy, strategic decision-making, and collective activism, all of which exemplify how resistance capital operates as a multifaceted tool for overcoming systemic barriers.

Furthermore, by highlighting how resistance capital manifests during moments of social unrest, such as campus protests, activism, and collective advocacy, this study underscores the critical role of cultural wealth in fostering resilience and community solidarity. This perspective shifts the narrative from viewing Black students' experiences solely through a lens of deficit and victimization to recognizing their active, intentional efforts to resist marginalization, thus enriching the ongoing discourse on cultural wealth and agency in higher education.

The findings confirm the centrality of resistance capital as a form of cultural wealth that empowers Black transfer students to challenge systemic inequities. Moreover, the findings advance the conversation by illustrating how resistance is both a collective and individual act, rooted in community and legacy, and how it can be harnessed to foster social change within HWIs. The participants' insights advocate for institutional recognition of resistance capital as a vital resource, emphasizing the importance of supporting Black students' agency in the ongoing effort to create more equitable and inclusive higher education environments.

Practical Implications

The findings of this study have significant practical implications for higher education institutions, particularly those serving diverse student populations, including community colleges and HWIs. These implications underscore the importance of adopting holistic, culturally responsive practices that recognize and nurture the unique experiences, strengths, and agency of Black transfer students. Institutions must prioritize the development of inclusive policies that explicitly acknowledge the systemic barriers Black transfer students face, such as limited representation, racism, and feelings of

alienation. As the findings reveal, the emotional toll, manifested through confusion, frustration, and isolation, necessitates proactive institutional efforts to create welcoming environments. This includes integrating diversity, equity, and inclusion, and belonging initiatives into campus culture, ensuring that staff, faculty, and administration are trained in culturally responsive practices that affirm the identities and experiences of Black students. Establishing policies that promote consistent representation, mentorship, and anti-racism practices can significantly enhance students' sense of belonging.

One of the key findings is that Black transfer students exposed to program supports early in their transfer journey benefited from stronger peer and faculty connections. Community colleges and HWIs should implement early outreach initiatives, such as transfer workshops, orientation programs tailored for transfer students, and pre-transfer advising, that connect students with faculty mentors and peer networks before or during the transition. These programs can foster a sense of community, provide vital information, and empower students to navigate academic and social challenges proactively.

Institutions must recognize the significance that advising plays in the successful transfer experiences of Black transfer students. Findings indicate that misadvising, lack of personalized support, and limited faculty engagement undermine students' confidence and transition success. Institutions should prioritize hiring and training advisors, both at community colleges and HWIs, who are culturally knowledgeable and aware of the systemic challenges Black transfer students face. Implementing proactive advising models, such as regular check-ins, tailored academic planning, and transparent communication about transfer pathways, can mitigate confusion and foster trust.

Institutions must address campus climate and representation. The research confirms that representation, including faculty, staff, and student role models, has a significant impact on the sense of belonging among Black transfer students. Higher education institutions should actively recruit and retain Black faculty and staff, create mentorship programs, and promote leadership opportunities for minoritized students. These efforts help challenge the pervasive presence of Whiteness in campus spaces, create visible signs of institutional commitment to diversity and inclusivity, and provide Black students with relatable role models and advocates. Such strategies are vital for combating feelings of exclusion and fostering a campus climate that celebrates cultural wealth and resilience.

Institutions should support the emotional and psychological well-being, recognizing the emotional toll of systemic racism, microaggressions, and social isolation. Institutions must implement support systems that address psychological well-being. This includes accessible mental health services, peer support groups, and culturally affirming counseling that validates the lived experiences of Black transfer students.

Higher education institutions should leverage community and social networks as a form of cultural capital. This study highlights the importance of community, familial, peer, and organizational support as a form of cultural wealth that enhances the resilience and resistance of Black transfer students. Higher education institutions should facilitate the development of student organizations, affinity groups, and community-based programs that foster collective identity, activism, and mutual support. Partnering with local communities and organizations can further extend these support networks beyond campus, reinforcing students' sense of belonging and agency. Another practical

implication is that, given the role of social media highlighted in the findings, institutions can strategically leverage digital platforms to foster community, share resources, and promote visibility of Black student voices. Creating online spaces for peer connection, resource sharing, and advocacy can supplement in-person efforts and reach students who may feel disconnected or marginalized.

Finally, based on the emergent “Blueprint” guide from this study, institutions should develop comprehensive transition support models that address not only academic advising but also social integration, emotional support, representation, and information sharing. This blueprint can serve as a guide for designing programs that prepare students holistically, aligning institutional practices with the strengths and resilience demonstrated by Black transfer students.

Adopting these culturally responsive, strengths-based strategies can transform the transfer experience for Black students. By recognizing their agency, cultural wealth, and resilience, institutions can create environments that not only facilitate successful academic transitions but also nurture emotional well-being, foster a sense of belonging, and empower students to resist systemic inequities. These practical steps are essential for cultivating equitable, inclusive higher education spaces where Black transfer students are supported to succeed academically, socially, and emotionally.

Reflective Considerations

Throughout this study, I have been deliberate in my choice of language when discussing the literature and findings. As Williams (2023) observed, “I resist using language such as limitations when engaging in identity-centric work” (p. 77); however, I want to be transparent about the scope of my study. In this context, I offer reflective

considerations about my study, laying the groundwork for potential directions in future research. One reflective consideration is that the present study did not account for the participants' varied backgrounds, including age, enrollment status, and relationship status. These differences may introduce variability that is not fully accounted for in the analysis, making it challenging to draw clear connections between experiences and outcomes without further exploration. Another reflective consideration is that, while the study enhances our understanding of the transition experiences of Black transfer students, it captures only a specific moment, spanning from their transfer from the community college to the conclusion of their first semester. Another reflective consideration is that, although the sample exhibited some geographical diversity, future research should investigate institutions across different regions to examine how varying cultural and political climates may further influence campus environments, thereby affecting the experiences of Black transfer students. In the following section, I will discuss considerations for future research.

Directions for Future Research

One recommendation for future research is to conduct longitudinal studies that track the experiences of Black transfer students throughout their academic journeys. Such studies can provide valuable insights into the long-term effects of various support systems, advising practices, and peer networks on student retention and graduation rates. Understanding how the transition process evolves over multiple semesters can help institutions develop targeted interventions that adapt to the changing needs of students.

Additionally, expanding the research sample to include diverse community colleges and HWIs across different geographical regions could provide a broader

understanding of how cultural and institutional contexts shape the experiences of Black transfer students. Cross-institutional comparisons may reveal the best practices and successful strategies employed by HWIs that effectively support Black transfer students, enabling greater knowledge sharing and collaboration across educational networks.

Lastly, deeper qualitative inquiries that explore the various identities of Black transfer students, taking into account factors such as socioeconomic status, gender identity, and age, could yield richer insights into how intersecting identities influence the academic experiences and access to support of Black transfer students. This exploration can help inform more holistic frameworks that center the lived experiences of Black transfer students and advocate for systemic institutional change that promotes equity and inclusion.

By pursuing these research directions, scholars can further illuminate the complexities of Black transfer students' experiences in higher education, contributing to ongoing discussions on policy reform and the development of support systems designed to foster academic success, belonging, and empowerment for Black transfer students.

Concluding Thoughts

Reflecting on my journey, I was driven by a personal desire to understand the unique experiences of Black transfer students navigating HWIs. My transition was marked by challenges that often mirrored the complexities faced by participants in this study. Through the collective narratives, I discovered that the emotional and academic hurdles faced by Black transfer students are not just individual obstacles but part of a broader, systemic landscape that necessitates change. This research serves as a strategic

"Blueprint" designed to guide educators and administrators in creating more inclusive and supportive environments for Black transfer students.

As highlighted in the findings, the experiences of Black transfer students are significantly influenced by factors such as feelings of confusion and cultural shock, which can often impede their academic and social integration. Institutional structures and cultural barriers contribute to a sense of disorientation, underscoring the importance of clear communication regarding processes such as credit transfers and financial aid. Participant insights highlighted the need for practitioners to reevaluate communication strategies and provide robust support systems that simplify navigation through these often overwhelming academic environments.

The emphasis on emotional well-being highlighted the significant impact of mentorship and peer support in fostering a sense of belonging. Through my own experiences and participant narratives, I have come to realize that emotional support is not simply an added benefit; it is crucial to student success. Administrators and staff must prioritize establishing peer support programs and mentorship opportunities that resonate with the lived experiences of Black transfer students. By doing so, administrators and staff can cultivate a community where Black transfer students feel valued and understood, reducing feelings of isolation and enhancing retention.

In conclusion, the findings of this research converge on a pressing imperative: for practitioners within higher education to reimagine and redefine their approaches towards supporting Black transfer students. It is through intentional action and reflection, guided by the Blueprint that emerged from this study, that we can begin to dismantle the barriers Black transfer students face. By fostering a holistic and inclusive environment—one that

recognizes the unique experiences of Black transfer students and actively supports them—we can pave the way for future Black transfer students to navigate their educational journeys with confidence and resilience. As we look ahead, I remain hopeful that the collective commitment to these changes will create a transformative impact, inspiring the next generation of scholars.

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Appendix A

Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

Date: 7-23-2024

IRB #: IRB-FY2024-378

Title: "What You Know About Transferring?": Exploring Transfer Experiences of Black Transfer Students at Historical White Colleges and Universities

Creation Date: 6-12-2024

End Date:

Status: Approved

Principal Investigator: Raenece Johnson

Review Board: OU IRB

Sponsor:

Study History

Submission Type	Initial	Review Type	Exempt	Decision	Exempt
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Key Study Contacts

Member	Raenece Johnson	Role	Principal Investigator	Contact	rdjohnson@oakland.edu
Member	Raenece Johnson	Role	Primary Contact	Contact	rdjohnson@oakland.edu
Member	V. Thandi Sule	Role	Co-Principal Investigator	Contact	sule@oakland.edu

Appendix B

Information Sheet for Exempt Research

What you know about transferring?: Exploring transfer experiences of Black transfer students at historically White institutions (HWI).

Introduction

You are being asked to be in a research study that is being done by Raenece Johnson under the direction of Dr. V. Thandi Sulé, Professor of Higher Education and the Coordinator of the Masters in Higher Education Program at Oakland University, the faculty advisor for this project.

Your decision to participate in this study is voluntary. You can stop your participation at any time or skip any part of the study if you are uncomfortable. Your decision will not affect your present or future relationship with Oakland University, the researcher, the Department of Organizational Leadership. If you are a student or employee at Oakland University, your decision about participation will not affect your grades or employment status.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this research study is to explore the transfer experiences of Black transfer students who transferred from a 2-year community college to a 4-year historically White institution (HWI).

Who can participate in this study?

You are being asked to participate in the study because you are 18 years or older, identify as Black/African American, transferred from a 2-year community college to a 4-year historically White institution, and completed the first semester after transferring to the historically White institution.

What do I have to do?

You will be asked to complete a screening survey about your transfer experiences from a 2-year community college to a 4-year historically White institution. The screening survey will be completed online via Qualtrics and will take 5 minutes.

Appendix B (cont.)

Information Sheet for Exempt Research

After completing the screening survey, you may be selected to participate in a 60 to 75-minute interview online via Zoom. Before the online interview, selected participants will be asked to complete a demographic questionnaire online via Qualtrics, which will take 5 minutes. To safeguard the confidentiality of our participants, we will assign pseudonyms to all individuals participating in the research.

The interviews will be audio recorded to transcribe only and will be destroyed after completion of the study.

Where will this study take place?

This study will take place online at a time and place of your choosing. The screening survey and demographic questionnaire will be administered via Qualtrics. After completing the screening survey, you may be selected to participate in a 60 to 75-minute interview online via Zoom. Before the online interview, selected participants will be asked to complete a demographic questionnaire online via Qualtrics.

How long will I be in the study?

Participation in this study will not require extra time beyond:

- 5 minutes for the screening questionnaire to determine eligibility

If selected to participate in the study:

- 5 minutes for the demographic questionnaire
- A 60 to 75-minute interview over Zoom
- A 60 to 75-minute follow-up meeting over Zoom

Are there any risks to me?

There may be a risk that someone who is not part of this research may accidentally see your personal information. We will try to make sure that this does not happen by keeping your research records as confidential as possible. When the results of this research are published or presented at conferences, no information will be included that personally identifies you. To minimize these risks, participants will be provided with state and national resources such as 988, the National Hotline For Mental Health Crises And Suicide Prevention.

Appendix B (cont.)

Information Sheet for Exempt Research

Are there any benefits to me?

The possible benefits to you for participating in the research study may allow you to experience the empowering benefits of sharing your story. By sharing your experiences, you may gain a sense of control and ownership over your journey and potentially uncover new insights and perspectives that can help you navigate future challenges. Additionally, your input will contribute to our understanding of the transfer process from the perspective of Black college students.

Will I receive anything for participating?

After completing the study (screening questionnaire, demographic questionnaire, Zoom interview, and follow-up meeting via Zoom), the participants will receive a \$10 Amazon e-gift card.

What if I want to stop participating in this study?

If you want to stop participating in this study, you should contact the researcher, Raenece Johnson, rdjohnson@oakland.edu, 810-279-0399 or Dr. V. Thandi Sulé, sule@oakland.edu, (248) 370-4339, the faculty advisor for this project.

Who do I contact if I have questions about this study?

Raenece Johnson, rdjohnson@oakland.edu, 810-279-0399, or Dr. V. Thandi Sulé, sule@oakland.edu, (248) 370-4339, the faculty advisor for this project.

For questions regarding your rights as a participant in human subject research, you may contact the Oakland University Institutional Review Board, 248-370-4898.

Print name of participant

Signature of participant

Date: _____

IRB #: 2024-378

Approved Version Date: 7/22/2024

Appendix C

RESEARCH RECRUITMENT/ADVERTISEMENT

I am a Ph.D. candidate in the Educational Leadership program at Oakland University, working under the direction of Dr. V. Thandi Sulé, professor and coordinator of the Higher Education Degree Programs at Oakland University. I am conducting a research study to explore the transfer experiences of black transfer students who transferred from a 2-year community college to a 4-year historically white institution (HWI).

I am recruiting individuals who are:

- 18 years or older
- Identify as Black/African American
- Transferred from a 2-year community college to a 4-year historically white institution
- Completed the first semester after transferring to the historically white institution

What do I have to do?

- Participants will be asked to complete a screening questionnaire online via Qualtrics, which will take approximately 5 minutes.
- After completing the screening questionnaire, participants may be selected for the study.
- If selected, participants will be asked to complete a demographic questionnaire, which will take approximately 5 minutes online via Qualtrics before the interview.
- After completing the demographic questionnaire, a 60 to 75-minute interview will be scheduled, which will take place via Zoom at a convenient time for the participant.
- After the interview, a 60-75-minute follow-up meeting will be scheduled via Zoom at a convenient time for the participant.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. Upon completing the research study (screening and demographic questionnaire, Zoom interview, and Zoom interview follow-up), the participant will receive a \$10 Amazon e-gift card via email.

The screening and demographic questionnaires will be conducted online through Qualtrics, and the interview and interview follow-up will be conducted via Zoom.

To participate in this study, please complete the screening questionnaire [here](#). If you are selected to participate, we will contact you to have you complete a demographic questionnaire and schedule an interview at a convenient time for you.

Click here for the screening questionnaire

If you have any questions about the research, please contact me at rdjohnson@oakland.edu or 810-279-0399 (cell) or Dr. V. Thandi Sulé, sule@oakland.edu, (248) 370-4339, the faculty advisor for this project.

Appendix D

Structural Codes, In-Vivo Codes, and In-Vivo Code Definitions

Structural Code	In-Vivo Code	Definition
I'm pretty proactive. So it was pretty simple. As long as you give me a list of instructions and everything makes sense, I pretty much handled it myself.	Proactive Approach to Transition	Handling challenges and taking initiative during the transition, such as scheduling, advising appointments, and attending transfer orientation. Self-advocacy during the transition process.
I did not have a good experience with a professor at the community college. I wanna say kind of like left such a bad impression on me that I did not go back to school for four years.	Not A Good Experience	Having a negative/difficult experience during the transfer process, including but not limited to advising, faculty, other college students at the community college or HWI. Participants experiencing barriers or challenges to transition.
I don't know the tokenism again or not, but that's when I noticed, especially the black professors really bringing me underneath their wings.	Token	Experiences of being either hyper visible or invisible at HWIs, where individuals frequently felt they received support simply because they were the only Black student, or conversely, felt excluded and faced challenges in establishing a sense of belonging.
I did expect to see the representation of the diversity to be more than what it was, and I didn't see that.	Representation	Participants saw Black faculty, staff, and other college students in predominantly White spaces, emphasizing the connection and feeling of welcome at HWI when there is representation.
It's up to you to make your voice be heard, you know, and make us feel comfortable with saying, we got a right to be at this table and not just be happy to be in the room peeking through the windows to see where we fit in.	My Voice Should Matter	Reflects the participant's assertion of their importance and validity in discussions, emphasizing the need for respect and representation in spaces where they feel minoritized and compelled to fight for their rightful place in predominantly White spaces at an HWI.

Appendix D (cont.)

Structural Codes, In-Vivo Codes, and In-Vivo Code Definitions

Structural Code	In-Vivo Code	Definition
I kept calling because I was confused. The HWI do run differently than the community college.	Confusion	This describes participants' feelings during the transition. Some participants had difficulty navigating the overall transfer process, including advising, transfer credits, financial aid, purchasing books, and getting to class on campus.
There's a lack of, individualizing each person's plan after college.	Individualized Plan	Emphasizes the importance of tailored guidance and resources to support diverse student needs and choices.
I was telling her, that's not what I'm really looking for. I'm really about getting this degree done and getting out in the world, like I don't care about that. That's when nontraditional was mentioned.	Nontraditional	Emphasizes participants' focus on achieving their degree rather than participating in social aspects at HWI, such as student organizations. It recognizes nontraditional college student identities, including first-generation, professional (working) students, and older students.
I was angry. I was hurt that this day and age, we are still at this place, especially a place, an institution of higher learning, that we're still here and that racism is normalized.	Racism	Describes participants' experiences discussing race at the HWI. These experiences can include microaggressions, racism, discrimination, conversing with others about their race/culture, and witnessing conversations about racism.
Getting actively involved on the social media platforms, that are directly related to the class that I'll be graduating in.	Social Media Engagement	Using social media for student engagement, peer support, and guidance throughout the transition.

Appendix D (cont.)

Structural Codes, In-Vivo Codes, and In-Vivo Code Definitions

Structural Code	In-Vivo Code	Definition
I honestly thought that adjustment would have been a lot different. Transitioning. But it didn't turn out that way.	Transition Adjustment	Transfer expectations during the transfer process include expectations that they would receive communication on the transfer process, advising support, and have a smooth transition.
You know, I would say the vibe that I received from the teachers were more so, you know, come to class, do your stuff and that's it...So faculty members didn't really play a big role. There was an orientation that was offered at the [HWI].	Faculty Didn't Play a Big Role	Faculty having little to no involvement throughout the transition.
	Orientation	Participants' experiences and perceptions of their transfer orientation at the HWI. This includes participants who did not feel motivated to attend orientation or could not participate because they had other obligations.
Yeah, it's like everybody else is doing. Like, I'll figure it out. I'm pretty self-sufficient.	Self-sufficient	The participants' determination to navigate college independently, self-motivation, goal-orientedness, and ability to figure it out independently throughout the transition.
I didn't really lean on anyone and no one really offered me anything.	Didn't Lean on Anyone	Experiencing minimal family support, whether financial or emotional, throughout the transition.
We need to be equitable in these spaces.	Equitable	Participants recognize diverse needs at HWI and the various needs of students from diverse backgrounds.

Appendix D (cont.)

Structural Codes, In-Vivo Codes, and In-Vivo Code Definitions

Structural Code	In-Vivo Code	Definition
I can say I had a lot of support...or even just the employees that I was working with that were in my department, or even some of the other clinical staff in other departments.	Employer Support	Recognizes the support from the participant's employer, such as a flexible schedule, time off, and being celebrated by colleagues throughout the transition.
She [mom] was adamant about us going to school and we were as well. And so she's always been supportive.	Supportive Family	Recognizes the support from the participant's family, such as sharing their lived experiences of college, providing emotional and/or financial support, and celebrating their accomplishments. This in turn motivates participants throughout the transition.
I can't remember a single soul that I met and that I was able to build a relationship with.	Build Relationships	The ability or inability to build relationships with other college students, advisors, faculty, or staff throughout the transition.
I mostly worked with the social work program...They were incredibly supportive and they continue to be so supportive.	Program Support	The participant received support from a specific program, major, or department at the HWI throughout the transition.
I can say that there needs to be a better push for helping student engagement, student involvement on campus life, and why students should want to come to your campus instead of going to another campus.	Student Involvement on Campus	Participation in student organizations or other campus departments and services, such as the Multicultural Center and various student groups.
I had to go to fellow students in the program, and they would have to break it down to me in terms that I could relate to. And we would hold study groups.	Peer Support in Program	This includes the assistance provided by fellow peers in the program at the HWI, such as collaboration in study groups, group projects, or involvement in student organizations within the program.

Appendix D (cont.)

Structural Codes, In-Vivo Codes, and In-Vivo Code Definitions

Structural Code	In-Vivo Code	Definition
Most of my instructors in the social work program were very understanding as far as if I was having a problem or struggle, which didn't happen too often, but I felt very supported.	Support from Program Faculty	Support offered by faculty within the participant's program, major, or department at the HWI includes mentoring, classroom assistance, guidance with advising requirements, and preparation for career opportunities during the transition.
We're going to start from the top all the way to the bottom, because we start at that top. I think giving them everything that we give you, don't sugar coat it. Give it to 'em because I think that they need to hear that.	Holistic Approach	Participants emphasized that this information should be shared with everyone involved in the transition process, including high school counselors, college faculty and advisors, and Black transfer students.
I knew also that there was no safety net...I knew there was no going back. So that was another push for me.	No Safety Net	Highlights the participant's awareness of their lack of a safety net such as financial support from family, which was a motivating factor throughout the transition.
I did have an advisor, but they didn't necessarily know like the nitty gritty of, you know, what the transfer process is.	Advisor Didn't Know	This highlights the lack of adequate advising or support from advisors at the community college or HWI during the transition.
The university was great. We went through my classes one by one. The advisor blocked out time and this was before I was even a student before I had even applied. So they were great.	Advisor was Great	This includes support from an advisor at the community college or HWI throughout the transition.

Appendix E

In-Vivo Codes, Pattern Codes, and Pattern Code Definitions

In-Vivo Code (subthemes)	Pattern Code (Theme)	Definition of Theme
Representation My Voice Should Matter Token Nontraditional Racism Cultural Shock	Belongingness	Captures the experiences of participants who feel minoritized and underrepresented at HWI. Highlights challenges in seeking belonging, emphasizing the significance of diversity and representation in creating a supportive community.
Individualized Plan Equitable Employer Support Family Support Program Support Faculty Support Peer Support Advisor was Great	Capitalizing on Support	Highlights the essential role of different support systems in facilitating participants' transitions. Encompasses assistance from faculty, advisors, peers, employers, and the community..
Not A Good Experience Confusion Faculty Didn't Play a Big Role Build Relationships Advisor Didn't Know	Shock and Confusion: Navigating the Unknown	Reflects the obstacles and difficulties encountered as they transitioned to higher education, including feelings of confusion, inadequate support, and negative advising experiences. Highlights the complexities of navigating the transition process and the emotional toll it can take.
Proactive Approach to Transition Didn't want to go into debt Self-sufficient Didn't Lean on Anyone No Safety Net	Agentic Advocacy	Emphasizes the significance of agentic advocacy and independence during the transition process. Participants frequently felt the need to take initiative and manage their educational paths independently, especially without support from family or traditional safety nets.
Social Media Engagement Transition Adjustment Orientation Student Involvement on Campus Holistic Approach	The Blueprint: Black transfer student experiences that shape success	Offers guidance on transitioning with minimal obstacles, fostering engagement with the campus community, and disseminating information to better support Black transfer students in their pursuit of a successful transfer.