

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

THE TAPESTRY OF BLACK FEMALE LEADERSHIP:

A STUDY OF THE CULTURE OF STUDENT LEADERSHIP IN A LOCALLY-
SPONSORED, CULTURALLY-BASED STUDENT ORGANIZATION

A dissertation is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

by

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DEDICATION

for little black girls and boys

silenced by society

but empowered by us....

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ABSTRACT

THE TAPESTRY OF BLACK FEMALE LEADERSHIP:

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This study examines the culture of Black undergraduate student leadership at a baccalaureate-granting Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI). In this study, I utilize portraiture methodology to examine the meaning of Black female student leadership and experiences of Black female student leaders in a culturally-based student organization. The organization studied is unique in structure and mission. I ground the study in Rendón's (1994) validation theory, which examines the experiences and institutional support of underrepresented students. The study's purpose is twofold: a) to examine the student leadership development of Black female students, b) to investigate cultural experiences of Black female student leadership, including the cultural meaning of leadership for Black female students. I use portraiture as a method to investigate the outlined research purpose. This methodological approach will utilize a data collection and analysis process that involves: a) in-depth interviews, b) structured journaling, and d) data transcription.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Lost

She walked into the doors of the main administrative building lost and confused. Her freshman orientation leader directed her to the administrator building after she asked where she could pay for classes. Everything seemed so overwhelming. The doors were heavy and her backpack slipped from her shoulders. There were no familiar faces. No mother. No father. No brother or sister. She formed her lips to ask for help but she remained silent. She knew her orientation leader would not make a mistake in directing her to the appropriate resources. However, the only thing that seemed familiar was her class schedule. Her first class the next day was called “Theater of the African Diaspora.” She had no idea what the Diaspora meant, but she knew that other Black people would be in the class. Who else would be interested in a class focused on people of African descent?

She smiled at her schedule to only realize that she was lost.

Lost in a sea of White faces. Lost in the mainstream discourse of “bid night” and the next dorm party. She wanted the familiar.

As she circled around the halls of the administrative building, she turned and discovered the door of the Office of Multicultural Affairs. Suddenly, she didn't feel so lost, she felt at home. She was greeted by a Black student intern. His face seemed so relieved that she walked into those doors. As they faced each other, they both realized the familiar.

Introduction

This story is an allegory for Black students in unfamiliar college environments. Unfamiliar college environments are ones that significantly lack the cultural representation of Black students inside and outside of the classroom environment. Black students struggle to persist in unfamiliar college environments because of the lack of cultural understanding and support (Pattillo-McCoy, 2000). In fact, providing Black students with leadership and mentoring opportunities “improve [s] graduation rates through strong black student organizations that foster a sense of belonging among the African-American student population” (Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2006). While Black women graduate at a higher rate, by 2%, over Black men, they struggle to find their voices in organizations, like Black Student Unions, because of misogyny and Black male privilege (Pattillo-McCoy, 2000). This study seeks to illuminate the voices of Black women, who are struggling to share their stories in a male-dominated society.

Sedlacek (1999) examined the experiences of Black students at predominately White institutions (PWIs) and he revealed that Black student leadership opportunities are particularly successful in organizations that are connected to their cultural backgrounds. Black student leaders are more likely to have positive experiences on campus when they are connected to their cultural heritage. These connections can be seen in their “racial and community identity development” (Sedlacek, 1999, p. 543). Sutton and Kimbrough (2001) stated that, “minority students perceive that membership within multicultural organizations provides them greater opportunities to share their skills and talents with the African American community” (p. 32).

These findings affirm that Black student leaders' will have positive campus experiences when they are directly connected to other students of the same or similar cultural heritage. The focus of this study is on Black female student leaders' cultural leadership development at a Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs). This population has yet to be investigated in this institutional context.

Problem Statement

Black students are at high-risk for not being retained or persisting at institutions of higher education (Astin, 1993; Harper et al., 2009; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Tinto, 1987). While this study does not focus on retention and persistence, these outcomes are related to understanding the culture of Black student leadership. Astin (1993) revealed that Black students are more likely to succeed if they are involved as leaders and in campus activities, a finding consistent with the literature that demonstrates that student involvement is strongly related to retention and persistence. Much of the research surrounding Black student leadership and involvement has focused on their involvement in student organizations (Astin, 1984).

The research reveals multiple types of student organizations. One type of student organization is the traditional Historically Black Greek Letter Organizations (HBGLOs). HBGLOs, also known as the Divine Nine, are student organizations founded by Black students at HBCUs and PWIs dating back to 1906. The Divine Nine are comprised of nine non-profit traditional and historical Black fraternities and sororities (Ross, 2002). These organizations are grounded in the philosophy of understanding Black national and transnational Black culture, serving and supporting Black communities and providing a

common cultural network of support for Black undergraduate students, graduate students, and alumni (Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998).

While HBGLOs are full of rich history, these organizations are struggling to remain relevant on PWI and HSI campuses. These organizations, because of their history of hazing and secretive pledge systems, have been categorized as a threat to the safety of Black students on college campuses. As a result, students who have a desire to be in these student organizations often find themselves in an internal struggle. Black undergraduate students desire to find a place that fosters a life-long cultural bond but also provides physical and emotional safety. The problem is that these organizations are rare (Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998).

While there are organizations like Black Student Unions (BSUs) that provide students with cultural student leadership opportunities, these organizations do not provide consistent involvement opportunities for alumni (Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998). BSUs were born from the Afrocentrism movement in the 1960's and 1970's. Afrocentrism is defined as the centrality of African cultural traditions in Western and American societies (Kershaw, 1992). African cultural traditions are connected to the history of these societies. Afrocentrism seeks to promote African cultural self-awareness and discovery and this underpinning is the philosophical cornerstone of organizations like BSUs (Kershaw, 1992).

As both BSUs and HBGLOs emerged and developed as more popular student organizations, we know more about them in the empirical literature. What we know less about relates to Black students who are searching for cultural leadership opportunities outside of BSUs and HBGLOs. Within the context of Hispanic-Serving Institution and

commuter campuses, where Black students may not be the majority or minority, this issue has yet to be explored.

While there is much research on the experiences of Black student leaders at Historical Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and PWIs, there is a lack of research of these students at other institutional types. Specifically, there is a lack of research on Black student leadership experiences at Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), particularly HSIs that are commuter campuses. HSIs receive this institutional status by being accredited and nonprofit, having 25% of their full-time equivalent students identify as Latino/a or Chicano/a having at least 50% of the Latino/a and Chicano/a students as low income (Benitez, 1998).

Purpose and Significance of Study

The purpose of this study is to examine Black student involvement and cultural leadership development through the conceptual lens of validation, which reaches beyond the Eurocentric conceptualization of student involvement (Rendón, 1994; Tinto, 1987; Astin, 1984) and examines the validating experiences of underrepresented students. The study's purpose is twofold: a) to examine student leadership development of Black female student leaders and b) to investigate cultural experiences of Black female student leadership, including the cultural meaning of leadership for Black female students at a Hispanic-Serving Institution with a high commuter student population.

The significance of this study is multilayered and dynamic. First, this study will contribute to the overall dialogue regarding Black student leadership and involvement in Hispanic-Serving Institutions. This work directly relates to the hope that student affairs practitioners will connect to these voices and use the results of this study in providing

support to Black students. Second, the research participants will benefit from this study for reasons related to the methodological nature of the study. Members of the student organization under study will be able to use this dissertation as a part of their current dialogue and historical collection. Members will be able to express their experiences to associate students' administrative leaders. This type of document may provide opportunities for future institutional support for membership opportunities at the university.

The significance of this study also lends itself to both the empirical and conceptual literature. As stated earlier, there is a lack of empirical literature focused on Black student leadership development at Hispanic- Serving Institutions, particularly at HSIs with a higher percentage of students who commute to campus.

Additionally, this study will add to the discourse on the conceptual literature of validation theory. Black students are struggling to persist in the university setting. The significance of this study is to understand, facilitate, and support the national and transnational dialogue and empirical research about Black student leadership development, while also illuminating what is not seen in the larger body of work. The larger body of work does not include the voices of Black women in locally sponsored culturally based student organizations at Hispanic Serving Institutions.

Research Questions

This study will evaluate the following research questions, which support the investigation of Black student involvement and culture of leadership development in locally-sponsored, culturally-based student organizations.

1. What is the meaning of student leadership from the perspective of Black female undergraduate students in locally-sponsored, culturally-based student organizations at Hispanic-Serving Institutions?
2. What is the experience of Black female undergraduate students who participate in locally-sponsored, culturally-based student organizations at Hispanic-Serving Institutions?
3. How do these organizations validate the experiences of Black female students within the context of Hispanic-Serving Institutions?

Conceptual Framework

This study relies on Rendón's (1994) validation theory, which approaches student involvement and engagement through a non-Eurocentric approach. Her work is reliant on student development theory that supports, but challenges, the practice of encouragement and affirmation (Terenzini et al., 1994). Rendón (1994) indicates that there are in which faculty and administrators can refute competitive environments that encourage students to refuse support from friends, students, and college entities. These types of environments are harmful to the non-traditional populations such as "working-class women and minorities" (Rendón, 2002, p. 644). Non-traditional students, like Black students, are experiencing invalidating experiences from all spectrums of possible support (Rendón, 2002).

Validation theory acknowledges the limitations of Astin's (1985) student involvement theory. The main limitation of Astin's theory is that by not acknowledging students' different racial backgrounds, he is assuming that all students are familiar with how to get involved in campus life. Validation theory removes the pressure of student

involvement off the students and places it on inside and outside agents. These agents should take a “proactive role” in students’ academic and personal development (Rendón, 2002, p. 645).

As research has noted, Black student success is also fostered by receiving validation from faculty and staff (Rendón, 1994). The concept of validation, unlike more popular student involvement theories, is grounded in Afrocentrism, a non-Eurocentric perspective. Although Rendón (1994) addresses the relationship between student-faculty interaction and an Afrocentric perspective, the issue of how this perspective relates to Black female student leadership remains to be studied. Black student leadership grounded in the philosophical perspective of Afrocentrism has yet to be exclusively studied at a Hispanic-Serving Institution.

Overview of Methodology

Coupled with validation theory, portraiture methodology positions this study to illuminate the voices from underserved and minority populations. This study will use portraiture methodology, which allows me to explore and illuminate the voices of marginalized communities, while also situating myself in the work. The portraitist situates herself in the work as a social justice advocate and approaches the work from the artist perspective (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997). The researcher is known as the artist and the participants are actors (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997). Chapman (2007) highlights that “portraiture methodology is used when a researcher wishes to produce a full picture of an event or person that tells as much about the subject as it does about the researcher, or portraitist” (p.157).

The use of portraiture methodology requires me to constantly explore and position myself within the process of reflexivity. This process uses introspection and intrapersonal analysis to paint the artist in the overall portrait. English (2000) critiqued this methodology, expressing concerns of this holistic and singular depiction of the truth. He has asserted that ultimately portraiture is a positivist methodology that only presents the perspective of the researcher. The researcher is tied too intimately in the work and it shields the researcher from seeing her own biases. However, portraiture methodology is grounded in an epistemological view of knowledge. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) explains,

Throughout the creation of the portrait, the portraitist reaches beyond the site for input from multiple sources, draws upon the insights derived from prior research, and keeps a watchful eye on the relevance of contextual details to the developing whole. This attention to parts and whole assures that context not only sets a physical site, but also situates the subject or site in relevance to philosophical roots directions, ideological and historical past, and practical plans for the future (p. 70).

This epistemological knowledge is also developed by focusing on the actors' voices. The portraitist listens for the voice of the actors by listening to their stories and their gestures. She documents and observes with genuine intensity, even capturing the moments of silence. The language of the actor becomes the brush to piecing together the tapestrial whole.

The case selected for this study is Alpha Nu Kappa sorority at California State University-Northridge. Through critical case analysis, the portraitist is committed to the

work and the relationship with the actors (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997). Critical case analysis allows me to transfer the findings to other cases (Patton, 1990). I am committed to the relationship with the sisters of Alpha Nu Kappa because of our cultural similarities and a long-term relationship with some of the sisters through my professional work in student housing. Members of Alpha Nu Kappa sorority have voluntarily committed their time to this study through structured email communication and written verification.

The data collection and analysis processes in portraiture are multilayered. The data collection process is threefold: participant observations, participant structured journaling, and in-depth interviews. The data analysis process involves interpreting and scrutinizing the data for emergent themes. The portraitist illuminates and identifies multifaceted voices by identifying the outliers and finding coherence in the setting, looking for metaphors and symbols, and finding significance in those symbols and metaphors. Lastly, the values of the actors and their institutions are identified (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997).

Limitations

The limitations of this study are methodological in nature. This is a single site study of a case that is extreme and unique. Alpha Nu Kappa is the only sorority of its kind at California State University-Northridge (Club & Organization Directory—California State University-Northridge, 2011). Due to this limitation, other researchers or portraitists may find difficulty to applying this study to other sororities and fraternities on their campuses. In addition, this study only observes active student members of the student organization. The portrait created from these voices will not include all of the

members of the student organization. These aspects limit the study because some voices are excluded from the data.

Delimitations

The parameters of the study include a description of student experiences rather than causal relationships. The study's findings are unique to the sorority's organizational structure and the relationships examined through a unique methodological perspective. Other researchers, in a similar context, may find the study limited in its ability to be generalizable or transferable. This study does not seek to develop new theory to apply to other cases. Rather, this study intends to examine the voices from an underrepresented population and seeks to understand perspectives regarding student leadership and culture in a non-Eurocentric context.

Further, this study does not examine persistence or retention. Accordingly, and this study is not intended to study institutional factors that hinder or foster student persistence. This study only examines the degree of intimacy between active sorority members in order to examine perspectives of leadership as they relate to the development of leadership narratives, culture, and validation. The parameters of this study are intended to illuminate the voices from an underrepresented population and their stories may inform other research studies regarding retention. However, this study is not grounded in the understanding of institutional retention or persistence.

Operational Definitions

This study utilizes the following operational definitions:

Michigan State University defines associated students as an organization “nonpartisan in its politics” (Michigan State University, 2011). This campus entity is

funded by student fees. This organization provides institutional, local, and community involvement opportunities for students, staff and faculty. I will refer to organizations supported by associated students as locally-sponsored student organizations. These student organizations are fiscally and constitutionally governed by associated students. Organizations that are locally-sponsored can vary in interests and participation. Sutton and Kimbrough (2002) provided a context for understanding multicultural organizations. However, the organization in this study has a particular focus on one culture and not multiples ones. I define organizations that focus on one particular culture as culturally-based organizations. These organizations are defined as one which its members are from a common racial and ethnic background

As a part of the methodological approach to this study, participants are named as they identify (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1999). While there is much debate over the term bisexual as a definition of sexual preference, Morgan (2009) simplifies the definition as a man or woman who is romantically attracted to both men and women. In addition, gay refers to male-identified individuals who are attracted to other male-identified individuals. University of California-Berkeley's Gender Equality Center defines transgender as "people whose psychological self ('gender identity') differs from the social expectations for the physical sex they were born with" (UC-Berkeley, 2011). However, while these terms fit in the realm of understanding gender identity and sexuality, the term Queer is rooted in a political context. Queer is a political statement, as well as a sexual orientation, which advocates breaking binary thinking and seeing both sexual orientation and gender identity as potentially fluid (UC-Berkeley, 2011). Rooted within queerness are self-identity definitions. Masculine of Center (MoC) is a politically

charged self-identity that was birthed from queer people of color communities. B.Cole of the Brown Boi Project explains, “Masculine of center (MoC) recognizes the cultural breadth and depth of identity for lesbian/queer womyn who tilt toward the masculine side of the gender scale” (The Brown Boi Project, 2011). At the intersection of queer identities lies other ways in which people define themselves. Race is another way in which people connect to their own cultural and historical backgrounds.

In the context of race, Davis (2001) explains that Black is not a representation of skin color but rather it is defined as a person of African-American decent. Asante (1984) defines Eurocentricity as the values, traditions, culture and ideologies of people of European decent. Jointly, this study explores Black women in education. This positioning of studying Black women invites Black feminist thought. Black feminism is the elimination of all oppressions, including racism, sexism and classism. Blackness is connected to all forms of oppression and Black feminist illuminate these realities through the exposing stories of ordinary Black women. These ordinary Black women share stories of community, self and society (Hill Collins, 1991).

The next set of definitions relate to college and university populations and definitions. Stewart (1983) defines commuter students as those who do not hold residential status at a college or university. Benitez (1998) describes Hispanic Serving Institutions as a university or college’s student population that has 13 percent or more of its population of people of Latino/a, Hispanic, Chicano/a decent. Moreover, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) defines underrepresented as people who identify as African-Americans, Chicano/Latinos, Pacific Islander and Native Americans as on college campuses. Lastly, Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) examine several

dimensions of student change and growth by exposing multiple perspectives of college environments. They describe college environments as external and internal institutional conditions that affect intra-individual growth. Students interact with environments through institutional symbols, rituals, cognitive stimulation and organizational structures. Person-environment theories explore external, physical, aggregate characteristics, and student's interpretations of the behavioral and psychological external world (Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991).

Organization of the Dissertation

The dissertation will be organized into five chapters: introduction, literature review, methodology, results, and discussion. The introduction provides the significance of the study, its research questions, an overview of the conceptual framework and methodology, the limitations and delimitations of the study. The literature review outlines the empirical knowledge that supports this study. The methodology chapter explains the research tradition of the study, data collection process, data analysis process, and the varying roles of the researcher. The results chapter exposes the main findings of the research. Lastly, the discussion chapter lends itself to a discourse regarding thoughts, perspectives and suggestions for future studies regarding Black student cultural leadership development.

Summary

This chapter introduced the research purpose, significance, and questions of this study. In addition, the chapter presented both the conceptual and methodological frameworks that guide this study. In summary, this study aims to investigate the leadership development of Black female students who participate in locally-sponsored,

culturally based student organizations through validation theory, a non-Eurocentric, conceptual framework.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study is to examine Black female cultural leadership through the perspective of Afrocentricity, conceptual lens of validation theory and the methodological approach of portraiture. The perspective of Afrocentricity is used to position the conceptual framework. The review of literature will highlight essential research that informs research problem, purpose, and questions. The chapter organization includes: a review of empirical literature, review of conceptual framework, and a summary of the chapter.

Review of Literature

Student Engagement

Black student engagement studies after the year 2000 have focused on the relationship between student affairs professionals and faculty (Harper et al., 2009), institutional quality (Pascarella, 2001), and peer-to-peer interaction (Ancis et al., 2000). Mostly, Black students have been compared to the dominate group, White students. If examined, there are limited qualitative studies on Black students at Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs). In understanding student engagement, commuter and residential populations must be explored in order to understand minority and Black student engagement.

Harper et al. (2009) suggests that there has been limited exploration on the “benefits of engaging diverse student populations” (p. 7). The researchers assert that “these solutions must be grounded in students’ actual experiences, reflective of their unique backgrounds and interests, and designed with both broad and specific implications in mind” (p. 7). Harper et al. (2009) research examines several minority student

populations including, LGBT students, international students, and commuter populations. However, there is not an extensive qualitative examination of Black students at HSIs.

There is much research on commuter populations and the benefits and challenges of engaging those students (Harper et al, 2009; Pascarella, 2001; Kuh et al., 2001). However, we know little about Black students in student government sponsored organizations. The organizations that are typically explored include Black Student Unions (BSU) and Historic Black Greek Letter Organizations (HBGO) (Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998). The typology of student engagement reveals data from national surveys and reports, like NSSE (Pike & Kuh, 2005). These studies reveal the powerful dynamics of institutional type on student engagement. However, the surveys used in this study do not allow for student voice and student development to be explored in-depth.

Student engagement has been a convoluted phenomenon at commuter campuses, like California State University-Northridge. For many students, college is more than books and classes; it's an experience that fosters healthy student development. In fact, student engagement theorist, Alexander Astin (1999) suggests that the student learning and personal development that is associated with an educational program is directly related to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program. Thus, student learning is dependent upon the amount and quality of student involvement in university programs. It is a difficult feat to involve students that do not live on campus based upon proximity alone. Similar to Astin, I predict that the more students are involved in educational and social programs on campus, the more likely they are to appreciate their experience and persist within their choice of college or university.

In a research paper related to disengaged commuter students, Kuh et al. (2001) suggest that students who drive to campus are less likely to be involved than students who live on campus. While their sentiments echo the work of Kuh & Pike (2005), these researchers suggest that non-traditional age students, students of color, and first generation college students are less likely to be involved in activities outside of the classroom. They suggest that these types of students do not become involved because of competing priorities. These competing priorities could be caring for family members or dependents or having a job off of campus.

Student Success and Student Engagement

In the first few pages of the book, *Student Success in College*, Kuh et al. (2005) quote several student testimonies that reveal that faculty and student interaction led to their success in and outside of the classroom. One student noted that they felt “empowered” to become engaged on campus (p. 2). These student comments related success to feelings of empowerment and responsibility. These authors state that academic preparation and motivation are key indicators in higher student graduation rates (Kuh et al., 2005). According to these authors student engagement, support, and motivation assist in persistence rates. Kuh et al. state that student engagement has two main aspects that contributes to student success.

The first aspect is the amount of time and effort students put into their studies and other activities that lead to the experiences and outcomes that constitute student success. The second is the way the institution allocates resources and organizes learning opportunities and services to induce students to participate in and benefit from such activities (Kuh et al., 2005).

Academic achievement forms only one component of student success, with support of their educational institution in the form of activities that foster learning and service. Astin (1993) reveals that “learning and retention are enhanced when active rather than passive strategies are used” (p. 39). These active strategies include faculty and staff who are committed to learning that engages students in an environment that fosters peer-to-peer interaction and vocational and career counseling (Astin, 1993). These strategies are invasive, not in the negative sense, but rather with the purpose of empowering students to engage with other students and use campus resources. Pike and Kuh (2005) reveal impactful results from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). These results display a variety of factors that student’s reveal in this self-report survey. Institutions that placed an emphasis on student learning outside of the classroom both in their mission and learning outcomes were also putting policies and practices into place that encourage student engagement (Pike & Kuh, 2005). While their study did not reveal an association with pre-college engagement and the first year of college, the two theorists suggest that there is a relationship between small liberal arts colleges and student engagement.

Small liberal arts colleges, especially those that are completely residential have higher student engagement rates than commuter campuses (Pike & Kuh, 2005). *The College Student Report*, unlike the NSSE, provides information to colleges and universities regarding student engagement. The survey does not rank colleges and universities, but rather it reveals the types of activities students choose to engage in at their chosen college and university. For example, small liberal arts residential colleges are both interpersonally supportive and intellectually stimulating. Thus, students with

high engagement rates need support with interpersonal relationship development and constant intellectual stimulation. Interpersonally supportive institutions, like small liberal residential colleges, have high faculty and student interaction inside and outside of the classroom. Yet, large public research institutions with diverse populations had high levels of student engagement because of faculty involvement and high level of technology engagement outside of the classroom (Pike & Kuh, 2005). While the theorists' place an emphasis on the importance of diverse campuses in relationship to student engagement, Kuh, Gonveya, & Palmer (2001) suggest that there is a particular type of student that does not become involved. Students who are in unfamiliar environments, like Black students at PWIs experience significant student engagement barriers similar to commuter students.

Student Persistence and Student Engagement

Tinto (1987) provides compelling results when examining reasons behind students choosing to leave college. Student success is dependent upon social and intellectual factors. Yes, there are definitely instances in which students can persist if both factors are not involved. However, persistence rates are increased through enhancing both factors (Tinto, 1987). In addition to his study, Tinto examines possible factors in which students leave two-year institutions. While two-institutions differ from four-year institutions in their primary mission, they also struggle in the area of student persistence. One aspect in which students choose to leave is due to the lack of student engagement and connection (Tinto, 1987). When students do not feel connected to the university they find that barriers are more difficult to tackle, and are more likely to leave. One way students can feel more connected the college is through student involvement.

Involvement can include interactions with faculty or participation in a club or organization.

Student engagement can be viewed and implemented through several different theoretical frameworks. While many researchers dissect these pedagogies differently, there is an overwhelming consensus that student engagement aids in persistence efforts. Student engagement takes on several different forms and can be instituted through university sponsored programs. These programs can come in the form of learning communities both inside and outside of the classroom (Lenning & Ebbers, 1999). While commuter campuses struggle to create communities that foster student engagement, there is a lesson to learn from residential campuses. Residential campuses place an emphasis on developing programs that integrate academia and social interaction. These contributors act as partners at residential colleges, and both are needed to aid in student success.

In order for a commuter college to value student engagement it must first be willing to include it in the mission and values of the university. Student engagement can take on several forms and can transform campus culture. Learning and intellectual development can occur through programs that promote engagement and interpersonal development. Students' experiences must be transformed to include interactions with peers, programs, faculty, and administrators.

Student Leadership

There is a large amount of empirical research on Black student leadership in terms of involvement with student government and HGBOs. Astin (1984) reported that regardless of race and ethnicity, the more energy students put into their involvement the

more likely they are to be engaged and persist. However, Black student experiences with leadership development should be considered and not generalized. Black students have different needs (Allen, 1992). Most of the work surrounding Black Greek leaders has been conducted by Kimbrough. However, no research has been conducted on non-HGBOs that are locally supported by associated students at Hispanic Serving Institutions. The studies on Black student leadership have been dominated by researchers examining Black male student leaders and the Black Greek system (LaVant & Terrel, 1994.). In this chapter, student leadership will be examined by understanding Black student leadership and its context within the larger body of work surrounding general student involvement studies, minority and ethnic student leadership.

Student Leadership as Student Involvement

Alexander Astin (1993) explored student involvement in his study, *What Matters in College*. This study presented the question of “assessing how students are affected by their college experiences” (p. xii). The study examines college impact on contemporary students using survey research data for this study is both multi-institutional and longitudinal. Astin (1993) does not explore racial understanding extensively, but he concludes that there is an increasing desire for diversity and ethnic understanding. These desires are grounded in students attending cultural awareness workshops, campus demonstrations, and enrolling in ethnic studies courses. Astin concludes that students must intentionally seek out these outlets in order to interact with diversity education and multi-racial interactions.

Astin’s (1993) findings relate to Pascarella and Terenzini’s (1991) study of how college affects students. This work particularly focused on student development in

college. However, these researchers made discoveries regarding student involvement. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) discovered that students experience “cultural sophistication” through their involvement in Greek organizations, including honoraries (p. 307). Students learn through their involvement and this is a continuous process. As related to Astin (1993), the researchers discovered that students “must actively exploit the opportunities presented by the environment” (p. 51). Involvement is realized by the individual and a student must make choices based upon the available campus resources.

Astin (1993) and Pascarella and Terenzini’s (1991) works were pivotal in understanding college student outcomes and the importance of student involvement. However, minority student leadership was not extensively explored to consider the stories of these students as communal learners. There are theoretical models that consider the lives and experiences of minority students exclusively; including their experiences with student leadership.

Underrepresented Student Leadership

Leadership studies have two distinct empirical areas of research: industrial and postindustrial (Dugan et al., 2008). Postindustrial leadership embodies modern concepts of understanding leadership such as Greenleaf’s (1977) concept of leadership as servitude (as cited in Dugan et al., 2008). Leadership can also be a process and a model of collaboration (Dugan, et al, 2008). However, in 1996, the concept of the social change model of leadership was introduced by the Higher Education Research Institute. This concept promotes socially responsible leaders to institute change for the common good. The social change model has eight values: consciousness of self, congruence, commitment, collaboration, common purpose, controversy with civility and citizenship

(Dugan et al, 2008). These concepts are interwoven by three dimensions: individual, group, and societal.

The value of consciousness of self is grounded in the motivations that create action. These motivations are based on the awareness of emotions, attitudes, values and beliefs. Students should be able to articulate their priorities and have displayed that they are comfortable with the expression of self. The value of congruence associates behaviors with beliefs and focuses on integrity. Students' actions are consistent with beliefs and they treat others with genuineness and authenticity. The value of collaboration fosters group leadership and working together towards a common goal. Students are positively stimulated from different opinions and can find harmony in conflict. Finding harmony in conflict also relates to the value of controversy in civility. This value also emphasizes that conflict must be solved with civility and respect. The value of citizenship is inherently the deep belief that one has an obligation to his or her community. Change as a value is one that addresses the ability to adapt to evolving environments and the recognition between positive and negative change (Dugan et al, 2008). These values displayed certain implications for understanding the relationship between race and leadership.

Dugan et al. (2008) explained that while one's race does determine the values associated with leadership, concepts like "domestic culture and social leadership" influence understandings of leadership (p. 488). Black students reported consistent strength in the values of consciousness of self, controversy with civility, citizenship and change. These values are congruent to cultural values, such as collectivism. Black student leadership is fostered through the promotion of social change. Social change occurs

through the means of advocacy and education. Black students are able to advance through their education through the means of collaboration and a sense of community (Dugan et al., 2008).

Black Women in Leadership

Unpacking Black women in leadership is grounded in theories surrounding Blackness and feminism. Patricia Hill Collins (1990) produced several writings regarding Black feminist thought and empowerment. Hill Collins explains that Black feminist thought shares the stories of ordinary Black women who self-author their own realities regarding society, community and power. She asserts,

“Black feminist thought demonstrates Black women's emerging power as agents of knowledge. By portraying African-American women as self-defined, self-reliant individuals confronting race, gender, and class oppression, Afrocentric feminist thought speaks to the importance that oppression, Afrocentric feminist thought speaks to the importance that knowledge plays in empowering oppressed people. One distinguishing feature of Black feminist thought is its insistence that both the changed consciousness of individuals and the social transformation of political and economic institutions constitute essential ingredients for social change. New knowledge is important for both dimensions to change” (p. 221).

As described, Black feminism adds new knowledge to the understanding of oppression within society through individual and social transformation. Black women self-author by building community through their understandings of history and present lived realities. They challenge traditional notions of community by unraveling Eurocentric conceptions of power that ignore Black women's contributions to society. Black women recreate

communities of empowerment through their own innovative ways of resistance (Hill Collins, 1990). Black feminist thought is fostered by other Black women who validate their ordinary lived experiences and journeys into womanhood. Black feminist thought seeks to maintain wholeness, meaning it pushes against the dichotomization of Black women as agents of knowledge. Yolanda Moses (1989) exposes the realities of Black women in academic settings, by explaining their experiences with the dichotomization of Black women.

Within the context of higher education, Moses (1989) unpacks the lived experiences of Black women at Predominately White Institutions and Historically Black Colleges and Universities. She argues that stereotypes surrounding Black women create obstacles that are loaded with societal expectations for behavior regarding gender and race. She concludes that Black women, regardless of their institutional status, do not see their concerns as integrated with the campus' mission and goals.

Black women are situated to combat sexism and racism in systemic structures that are created to oppress them. Black women who are situated to combat these realities find themselves feeling isolated due to micro and macro hostile environments. These environments are considered hostile because there is a lack of knowledge regarding the experiences of Black women on college campuses. Black women experiences are compared to Black men's experiences and they are often not asked to self-author their own realities. When Black women cannot define themselves for themselves then they become less assertive than men (Moses, 1989).

From the findings of these researchers, it is clear that in order to combat these varying levels of oppression on college campuses, Black women are in need of

institutional support they seek to expose and explore their cultural experiences as it relates to their multiple identities, including their gender. Black women are in need of mentoring, empowerment, and institutional avenues in which they can share their own lived realities. One of the ways in which Black women have been able to author their own stories is the creation of Black Greek Letter Organizations.

Black Greek Leadership

Black students are able to gain a sense of community in Historically Black Greek Letter Organizations (Kimbrough, 1995). In regards to Black Greek Leadership, a seminal study on the intersection of race, gender, and sexual orientation, results demonstrated that students report lower numbers on the leadership concept of change and higher on the concept of commitment. Indeed, when researchers closely investigated the concepts of race, gender and sexual orientation, colleges whose majority population who are men scored lower than women's colleges. In addition, women's colleges scored eight out of ten in terms of constructs of leadership and Black students scored higher than Asian Pacific Islander, while sex orientation showed no variance. This study as it relates to Walter Kimbrough's (1995) examination of the self assessment of leadership development amongst Historic Black Greek Letter Organizations (HBGLOs) members provides a context for understanding communal leadership in culturally-based student organizations.

Kimbrough's (1995) study examined truths held by Black students regarding perceptions of HBGLO's and their role in leadership development. The study begins with an in-depth historical outline of these organizations. These organizations were created in the early 1900's as a means of providing Black student leaders with a community of like-

minded individuals. White fraternities and sororities did not admit Black students in their organizations, thus Black students created national Greek-letter organizations to provide a sense of community and acceptance amongst Black students. The first organization was founded at Howard University, a predominately Black college. Most of these organizations were founded at historically Black colleges. However, out of the eight HBGLO's, two were founded at Predominately White Institutions (PWI's) in Indiana. These organizations were created with a focus on brotherhood/sisterhood, service to the community, and scholarship. Similar to the Black students of the early 1900's, currently, Black students are reporting feelings of isolation at PWI's. Kimbrough (1995) explains that Black students are often looking for communal support and interpersonal relationships as a means of coping with tense racial climates at institutions of higher education.

In the 1980's, parents, faculty, and administrators pushed for a reform of HBGLO's policies regarding hazing and the pledge process. This push was fueled by an overwhelming outcry from people who suffered from poor hazing practices. This outcry resulted in a ban of hazing and the creation of policies protecting potential new members. However, regardless, of these policy changes, students are still reporting positive outcomes from participating in these organizations and view their participation as being a part of a movement (Kimbrough, 1995).

Kimbrough's study examined 61 students attending a rural PWI in the Midwest. There were 34 nonmember HBGLO and 27 members of HBGLO's. The research displayed Black students perceptions of leadership development, leadership skills, values and experiences. The researcher discovered that 54% nonmembers of these organizations

reported that being a part of a HBGLO would increase their leadership skills.

Interestingly, although not all students held positions of leadership in their organizations, 92.6% of students stated that they viewed themselves as leaders. However, because of some of the negative perceptions of HBGLOs, Kimbrough was unable to determine if these organizations unite or divide the Black community. However, because of their historical roots, these organizations are respected and seen as a part of the history of Black students in higher education. Similarly, Kimbrough and Hutcheson's (1998) investigated Black student leadership development in HBGLOs and their involvement in collegiate activities. The study compared Black student involvement at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and PWIs.

Black Greek Leadership and Institutional Type

Kimbrough and Hutcheson's (1998) work is quite similar to the previous study that was explored. However, this comparative study seeks to understand Black student involvement in campus-related activities and HBGLOs. The researchers are addressing the importance and relevance of these organizations, despite negative press and perceptions regarding their pledging practices. Student involvement is the base for student leadership. Black Greek leadership is one of the most visible cultural leadership opportunities on campus.

This study examined 1,400 students at one HBCU and one PWI. These students represented 50% nonmember and 50% members of HBGLOs. The leadership assessment scale (LAS) was developed for this study and it examines six leadership opportunities in student life: student government, academic clubs/honor societies, resident hall assistant groups, resident hall government, Black student groups, and student

ambassador/orientation groups (p. 100). 89.6% of HBGLO members reported that they perceive themselves as leaders and Black Greeks are more likely to be involved in all six leadership opportunities than nonmembers. Conclusively, regardless of institutional type, HBGLO members report higher levels of involvement than nonmembers. These members also have higher levels of confidence in terms of their leadership skills.

The research on minority and Black student leadership displayed the importance of culture and community in student involvement. HBGLO's provide students with leadership opportunities regardless if students are appointed into leadership positions. These organizations were created in a response to oppression in America and provide spaces for acceptance and identity development. These organizations are connected to the Afrocentric model in higher education because they promote change and community amongst Black student leaders.

Conceptual Framework: Afrocentricity Positioned within Validation Theory

As I began the initial research for this study, there were obvious gaps in the literature that did not address Black female leadership development at Hispanic-Serving Institutions. Due to this gap in the literature, I leaned into nonconventional literature regarding student leadership. In that search I discovered a direct linkage between Afrocentricity, validation, and portraiture. The linkage is found within the dynamics of story sharing as pedagogical developmental process for Black students. Murrell (2002) explained that African-centered education examines Blackness through community and symbolic culture. This examination is significant to learning and achievement.

Blackness in cultural development occurs by creating common links between individuals through story sharing. Pedagogy allows for the coupling of theory and

practice. Afrocentrism and validation are uniquely coupled to create a space to explore Blackness in a developmental context. This context celebrates the African tradition of story sharing as a common place of understanding and connection for Black students (Murrell, 2002). “Individualist American culture” is problematic for understanding Blackness and student development because it is rooted in Eurocentric knowledge production (p. 84). Black students learn through understandings of communication, connection, and broader contexts of cultural understanding. Afrocentricity has been examined in several fields in order to generate an understanding of Blackness both global and domestic contexts.

Afrocentricity

Afrocentricity as a model and perspective has been examined in the fields of Black studies, anthropology, and sociology (Milam, 1992). Researchers have used it to examine the thoughts, histories, and perspectives of people of African descent. However, there is limited research on its uses in Higher Education contexts (Schiele, 1994). Additionally, Afrocentricity has yet to been used as a tool to examine and frame Black student leadership at Hispanic Serving Institutions. Researchers have yet to use Afrocentricity to examine student leadership and engagement. As discussed earlier, Afrocentrism is connected to the stories of Black women’s lived experiences. As the artist and primary researcher, I found it necessary to couple validation and Afrocentricity to illuminate the realities of Black women on a college campus. Afrocentricity is not a conceptual framework, but it serves as an alternate perspective in understanding history, power, systemic oppression, and institutional structures.

Afrocentricity and Higher Education

There are two main works that highlight Afrocentricity in the context of higher education. Milam (1992) describes Afrocentric research methods as a tool of understanding non-Eurocentric perspectives. His work analyzes the critiques of Afrocentrism as a valid research method. He simply notes that during the 1980's, people were unfamiliar with this new perspective and were rejecting it either because of fear or a fundamental non-understanding. Asante (1980) introduced Afrocentrism to higher education after his intense involvement with the Civil Rights Movement. Milam's detailed outline of the dialogue regarding Afrocentrism as a social theory that refutes Eurocentric perspectives through the understanding of oppression and global social systems. Eurocentric theories, particularly those that are critical in nature, are too individualistic. Afrocentricity calls upon social theory to examine the "collective perspective of history and reality" (p. 7). Afrocentricity is a unique perspective that examines oppression from differing perspectives including race, class, gender, and sexuality. By abandoning Eurocentric knowledge, the researcher must critique all empirical research. This act of exploration positions the researcher as an activist and practitioner. Afrocentric knowledge positions the portraitist through her own exploration of self. Afrocentric research is found through the exploration of culture, history and ideals (Milam, 1992). Through this exploration of culture and history, researcher Jerome Schiele explored the Afrocentric perspective in higher education.

Schiele (1994) discussed the position of Afrocentricity in higher education. He begins this exploration with an in-depth discussion of higher education and Eurocentricity. Higher education in the United States was created for White-bodied

individuals. The founding principles of this institution of education are “ethnocentric and uninclusive” (Schiele, 1994, p. 150). The cultural perspectives of ethnic and minority groups were marginalized and excluded from the curriculum of higher education. The researcher argues that in order to diversify the critical perspectives in higher education, additional cultural perspectives must be included. Similar to Milam (1992), Schiele (1994) provides an in-depth exploration of the origins of Afrocentric thought. However, Schiele (1994) adds to the dialogue by explaining the Afrocentric model of higher education.

The Afrocentric model of higher education first begins with the understanding that higher education needs to be diversified on many institutional and structural levels. First, the relationship of the faculty and the student must contain an understanding of the cultural perspectives of all parties. The Afrocentric model promotes cooperation and harmony between faculty and students. This relationship does not involve elitism. Rather, faculty must understand the varying dynamics of class and must create learning environments that foster feelings of comfort and security. In addition, students must come to an understanding that faculty are attempting to create environments that cultivate learning and students should feel as though faculty desire them to reach their fullest potential (Schiele, 1994).

The role of faculty and staff, as defined by Schiele (1994), is grounded in Shakir’s (1989) philosophy of knowledge. This philosophy states that students must experience knowledge by feeling intellect (Schiele, 1994). Students must have an emotional response in the learning experience. Learning is a communal experience that draws upon students’ emotional connections and responses. Students and faculty must be connected to this

feeling intellect in order to properly position themselves in the Afrocentric model. In this model, faculty are change agents and the learning experience is transformative for students (Schiele, 1994). Faculty are in control of the information that is received and given. While, there is power in the relationship between faculty and students, the Afrocentric model positions faculty as advocates. The relationship between faculty and students is fostered through the understanding that information is equally shared. This information is shared through a common experience; the learning environment.

Milam (1992) and Schiele (1994) provide interesting perspectives when understanding Afrocentricity in higher education. These researchers and historians outline the concept of Afrocentricity. Additionally, these authors display Afrocentricity as a social justice perspective. This perspective calls for involved agents to institute change that is student centered and communal in nature. Afrocentricity, as a non-Eurocentric perspective calls upon researchers, faculty, and staff to introduce concepts and theories, like validation, in order to break down traditional notions of understanding behavior and knowledge.

Validation Theory

I argue that that Astin's (1984) description of student involvement are not enough for non-traditional students. By simply encouraging students to get involved, practitioners in higher education are assuming that all students have the knowledge of how to get involved. Additionally, not all faculty and administrators have the same standards and understanding of engagement. Rendón defines validation as "an enabling, confirming, supportive process initiated by in-and-out of class agents that fosters academic and interpersonal development" (Rendón, 1994, p. 44). Rendón's theory outlines six methods

of validation. The first element of validation is the process of institutional agents initiating contact with students. The researcher notes that non-traditional students often times do not reach out to faculty and administrators because of their past mistreatment from people in positions of power. Additionally, non-traditional students are often times unfamiliar with the inner workings and functions within higher education.

The second element in Rendón's theory is the acknowledging the importance of validation. Validation allows students to feel that have full capability in the learning process. Validation creates a "sense of self-worth" (p. 644). Similar to Astin's (1985) Eurocentric theory of involvement, validation must come before student development. Thus, validation should occur on a consistent basis and from several on-campus constituents. Fourth, academic excellence and personal growth are fostered through the support of several on-campus and off-campus "agents" (Rendón, 2002, p. 645). Next, validation is process that fosters student development. Validation is not the final answer to proper student development. Lastly, validation is highly essential the first year of a student's academic career. Validation should be employed within the first few weeks of the academic year (Rendón, 1994; Rendón 2002).

In this study, Black female students in a culturally-based student organization are being examined on multiple levels. I ask the research questions to discover what levels of support students are receiving from on-campus and off-campus constituents. Indeed, students' perspectives of student engagement and student leadership are at the crux of this study. However, validation is a key element of student development and involvement. The process of support for these students should be examined. I situate the study in a non-Eurocentric perspective, unlike Astin's (1985) innovation theory of

student involvement. This theory makes a general assumption that all students understand campus support units enough to decide if they want to get involved or not. However, Rendón's (1994) validation theory acknowledges that student involvement is dependent on the perspectives of student support inside and outside of the classroom.

Rendón (2002) outlines two types of validation. Interpersonal validation happens when students receive support from inside and outside of class agents that take intentional actions that supports the student's "personal development and social adjustment" (p. 645). Academic validation happens when these agents assist students to trust their own capabilities in learning and they gain confidence in their ability to be a college student. Unlike, Astin's (1985) theory of involvement, Rendón's (1995) theory of validation acknowledges while highly involved students will become more engaged with their in-class experiences, underrepresented students find difficulty in getting involved without assistance. Minority may have the desire to get involved, but they do know what questions to ask in order to jump start their involvement. Additionally, minority students do not want to ask questions that position them to feel inadequate or unintelligent (Rendón, 2002). In order to understand the position of student leadership, I must explore the literature of student engagement. Student engagement and student leadership are closely related.

Rendón (1994) asserts that Black student success is facilitated by receiving validation from faculty and staff. Conceptually, I connect validation to Afrocentrism because both perspectives investigate interactions and involvement from a non-Eurocentric position. Story-telling allows Blackness to be explored in a cultural context. As a researcher, I find intentional connections between these two concepts. The coupling

of these two concepts is unique to this study and intentionally positioned. Combined, these concepts position the portraitist to illuminate the voices of Black female undergraduate students at California State University-Northridge. I will interrupt the actors' stories from an Afrocentric perspective. As the artist, I share a common cultural heritage with the actors. I have an understanding of the actors' cultural and historical backgrounds, which uniquely situates the interpretation of their stories within validation and afrocentricity.

Summary

This chapter described the empirical and conceptual literature surrounding Black student involvement and leadership in multiple institutional contexts. The conceptual literature of validation and Afrocentrism was explored to further inform my position as the portraitist. This knowledge grounds the methodological approach of this study, which will be explored in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

As a Black Queer and Masculine of Center student affairs practitioner, I assume the roles of an artist and researcher in this study. As such, I am completely devoted to displaying the tapestric picture of leadership amongst students in locally-sponsored, culturally-based student organizations. I am interested in their development and validation as leaders. This study seeks to explore culture and leadership development amongst Black female undergraduate students. Specifically, the purpose of this study is to understand Black culture and leadership through the conceptual lens of validation (Rendón, 1994). As reviewed in Chapter Two, validation theory which reaches beyond the Eurocentric conceptualization of student involvement (Tinto, 1987; Astin, 1985) and examines the validating experiences of minority students.

Against the backdrop of a Hispanic-Serving Institution with a high commuter student population, the research questions developed for this study investigate the meaning of student leadership from the perspective of Black female undergraduate students in locally-sponsored, culturally-based student organizations. Secondly, the research questions will address the experiences of Black female undergraduate who participate in locally-sponsored culturally based student organizations. Lastly, the artist will explore how these organizations validate the experiences of Black female students.

This chapter outlines the methodological process of data collection, investigation, and the discovery and empowerment from the voices of an oppressed population in a Hispanic-Serving Institution university. The outline of this process is as follows: research questions, research design, setting and context, data and sample sources,

instruments and procedures, data collection, data analysis, the roles of the researcher, and summary.

Research Tradition and Design

This study uses critical case study analysis as a research design. Critical case studies are embedded with socio-cultural structures and patterns. These types of case studies inquire about the implications of oppression in cultural contexts. Additionally, critical case studies “seek to uncover how patterns of action perpetuate the status quo” (p. 106).

A case study is a thorough examination of a single site that is bounded by time and place (Merriam, 1988). These types of qualitative designs “seek to understand a larger phenomenon through intensive study of one specific instance” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 94). Case studies are “complex and multilayered” by nature and case studies allow for several different techniques for data collection and are dependent upon specific findings linked to a site (p. 104). Thus, case studies cannot be generalized and have a “particularistic focus” that seeks to solve “practical problems” (p. 105).

Within the context of this research design, I use portraiture as a methodological framework to understand systems of power and differencing aspects of culture by exploring diverse voices. These diverse voices are then woven together to create a tapestric portrait (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997). The process of portraiture methodology uses reflexivity and voice through a constructive approach that is embedded in Afrocentric thought (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997; Asante, 1980). These approaches emphasize the necessity of narratives and empowerment in Afrocentricity and portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997). Coupled with Afrocentricity,

portraiture uncovers that the understanding of African descendants' experiences and social construction must be separated from Eurocentric construction of race (Asante, 1980).

The methodology selected is a "form of ethnography that emphasizes the role of the researcher as an artist" (Waterhouse, 2007, p. 277). The artist is constantly reflecting and scrutinizing her own social positions through reflexivity (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997). Chapman (2007) stated, "in portraiture, our ability to provoke readers, participants, and ourselves into reevaluating our respective points of view is a small but meaningful form of social justice" (p. 159). By providing Black female undergraduate students a forum to share their voices and experiences, the portraitist is aiding in the battle against oppression. In thinking of the researcher's perspective of the social world, reflexivity attempts to situate the researcher as a critical examiner of their own social positions and biases (Swandnt, 2007). It is essential that the researcher abides by this orientating concept in order to affirm the participant's experience in the everyday world.

There are certain assumptions that portraiture studies hold. These assumptions include that "seeing and making sense of the social world can be understood as an art for matched to the artistic nature of that world" (Waterhouse, 2007, p. 277). As an artist, I am assuming that the stories that comprise the portrait are artistic in nature. Meaning, artists will share their stories that will ultimately paint portrait of lived experiences. Secondly, Waterhouse argues that the "portrait is the researcher's construction of lived, contextual and cultural setting" (p.277). The portrait produced will be from the lived cultural experiences from the artist and actors. Thirdly, Waterhouse asserts, "the people whom the researcher is meeting, observing, and relating to are the 'actors.'" The

participants in this study will be referred to actors in order to be consistent with portraiture methodology.

Portraiture utilizes the method of participant observations, interviews, dialogues, analyses, and critical critiques of traditional notions of processes and structures. The artist is essential to this process of research, and thus I must fully expose my truths: my history, biases, perspectives, intrapersonal revelations, and interpersonal connections. The fourth assumption of this type of research includes the artist's inclusion of voice, contexts, and relationships. It can be assumed that all of these aspects will be woven together to create one final portrait, a holistic depiction of the environment, personal contacts, relationships, emerging themes, and dialogues. Lastly, portraiture research searches for goodness and building strong alliances and relationships with the actors. Consistent with this methodological approach, this study is not looking for remedies or solutions to problems. Conversely, this work seeks to include and empower marginalized voices through the creation of a tapestrial whole (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997).

The artist seeks to understand and make-sense of actors' "contexts, culture and community" through the process of meaning-making (Waterhouse, 2007, p. 279). Waterhouse explains that meaning-making allows the researcher to expose the truth (s) of individuals who experience the world in very different ways. I hope to illuminate their internal and external stories of their experience as leaders in culturally-based organizations. This single case study investigates the culture of leadership that is developed amongst Black female students. I hope to inform research that reveals certain truths about Black student cultural leadership development in college environments.

Research Setting and Context

As a student affairs professional, I value the importance of the portraitist in selecting a research setting. Selecting a site first begins when considering and drafting the research questions, which must connect significantly to the review of literature in order to glean what has been written about comparable sites (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997). The connections of these two processes will then guide the portraitists to interpret the varying diverse perspectives regarding the site. These perspectives provide evidence regarding the emerging themes that occur during the study.

As the portraitist, I must expose my “personal contextual frameworks” in relation to the selection of the site (p. 67). As I am learning more about the culture that is developed amongst students in an Alpha Nu Kappa, I am gathering knowledge about my own ways of knowing and relations to Black women and these types of organizations.

As the artist, my research and work is cultivated by the participants. The evolution of the portrait is reliant on the actors, their stories, and my own use of reflexivity. Each portrait is created depending upon the reflexivity of the artist. Thus, each portrait is different and is reliant on both the artist and the actors. The voices of the actor and artist are interconnected and woven into the greater tapestric whole of the work. There are several types of use of voice that is deeply rooted in exploration and illustration. These types of voice include: “voice of witness, voices as interpretation, voice as preoccupation, voice as autobiography, listening for voice, and voice in conversation (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997, p. 87). The voices that I wish to illuminate through this examination those who are active members in Alpha Nu Kappa sorority.

As the portraitist, I remain focused on the theoretical connections to portraiture.

Considering these connections, I have chosen Miles et al.'s (1994) critical case sampling strategy. This strategy aligns with Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis' (1997) explanation the processes that shed light on the context. She states,

Throughout the creation of the portraits, the portraitist reaches beyond the site for input from multiple sources, draws on the insights derived from the prior research, and keeps a watchful eye on the relevance of contextual details to the developing whole. This attention to parts and whose assures that the context not only sets a physical site, but also situates the subject or site in reference to philosophical roots and directions, ideological, and historical past, and practical plans for the future (p.70)

Critical case sampling allows for the portraitist to carefully examine the systemic and relational social structures in a case and generalize those findings to other cases (Miles et.al., 1994). In order to critically examine the site, I must consider the gatekeepers involved.

The site I am interested in investigating is the locally-sponsored, culturally-based organization, Alpha Nu Kappa sorority. It is a local sorority specific to meeting the needs of Black female undergraduates in student housing at California State University-Northridge. Through the critical case sampling strategy, I selected Alpha Nu Kappa sorority because as a member of a historically Black sorority and Black woman I know the power of engagement involved in these types of organizations.

Alpha Nu Kappa sorority was founded two years ago by a Black professional staff member in Student Housing. The sorority was organically named Sister-to-Sister

because of its emphasis on connecting Black women to a community of familiarity and support. Alpha Nu Kappa is formally described as,

Alpha Nu Kappa strives to build camaraderie among black women in Student Housing. We help develop women to grow and pursue their passions while challenging them to take risks. We also focus on providing a positive outlet and safe environment for our women to talk about their issues and personal struggles. We also strive to create unity and a place where black women can come together, relate to one another, and build friendships (CSU-Northridge-Get Involved, 2010).

The sorority is woven into the fabric of California State University-Northridge and its core mission is to retain Black women at the institution. California State University-Northridge is a large public university in southern California in the heart of the San Fernando Valley. The university is commuter campus, less than 10% of its student population lives on campus (California State University—Northridge College Portrait: Student Housing, 2011). The majority of the student population in attendance do not identify as White. The university struggles to retain Latino and Black students. Retaining students of color is a major issue within the university. In 2008, 27.1% of Blacks withdrew from the university in their second term. In addition, an average of 20% of Latino and Mexican-American withdrew from the university in their second term (California State University-Northridge-Retention Study, 2008).

These statistics ring true to my own personal experience as a former student affairs professional at California State University-Northridge. I remember walking the halls of the residence halls and talking to Black students about their struggles with

maintaining a balance of family obligations, school work, relationships, and adjusting to campus culture. With the many conversations that I became involved, I have only witnessed one of those students graduate. This compelling observation leads to my own curiosity around learning the narratives of students in organizations that are culturally-based. I know that I would not have graduated from my undergraduate institution without the support of solid mentors, sorority sisters, and the Black Student Union. When reflecting on my collegiate experience, I think about the culture that was developed amongst the leadership of those organizations. That culture was one of communal trust and understanding. I am curious to see if my story aligns with those from similar experiences both in terms of student engagement and racially.

As a past employee of California State University-Northridge, I have connections with the president and several active members of the sorority. I used to supervise three of the members as resident advisors and I have assisted the sorority in their educational and social support of its members. I feel as a Black woman, I have a responsibility to mentor other Black woman. I also acknowledge my own positionality as a Masculine of Center woman. As an ally to all women, I know the importance of illuminating these narratives. Self-awareness is highly important in mentorship. I had powerful mentors and I know that they assisted in my own awareness of self. I feel as though my personal and professional connections with the organization allow me to understand the sororities' historical and experiential connections with the university. I have found memories of the formation of the sorority and their challenges around creating a distinct and unique presence at California State University-Northridge. As a part of negotiating and balancing my role as researcher, educator and advocate I must remain grounded in illuminating the

voices of these students. I recognize that as a portraitist, these roles intersect and should not be suppressed. They are integral to work of portraiture and my thoughts around these roles will be examined critically through constant self-reflection.

Data Sources

The sources of data in this study include the members of Alpha Nu Kappa sorority, document and archival data of the sorority, and visual and photographic images of the sorority, pictures of the sorority's signature events, and including interactions. The types of data will be collected through structured in-depth interview data, participant observations, and structured journaling. Furthermore, I used the method of critical examination to select the participants in this study (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997). The data will be selected through a sampling strategy that purposely connects the methodology to the theoretical framework, which I describe for below.

Elements of the Sampling Strategy

The majority of members from Alpha Nu Kappa sorority identify as Black, female, and leaders. Participants are selected based upon the availability of the members. The process for participant selection includes directly contacting the president of the sorority via email for access to the case. I have already had contact with many members of the organization because I have a past employment history with Student Housing. Thus, I have email addresses from past knowledge. Social networking sites also allow me to keep in touch with students from student housing. Some of the members of Alpha Nu Kappa are "friends" on Facebook. All aspects of this study are interconnected and thus the research questions and tradition are considered when selecting participants.

My research questions and tradition are connected to the critical examination of a participant selection that calls for the creation of a portrait that is interwoven with the artist and the actors' lived experiences. The sampling strategy serves as a tool to connect validation theory to the portraiture methodology through the means of illuminating multiple voices of students in culturally-based student organizations (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997).

Characteristics of the Sample

The sample is comprised of five to ten members of Alpha Nu Kappa Sorority. The sorority became a local sorority in 2009 and is recognized as an active student organization in the office of Associate Students. The members of Alpha Nu Kappa are all women and their ages range from 19-22. Members have varying majors and all members must maintain a 2.5 GPA to remain active members of the sorority. Only active members will participate in this study because their leadership experiences in the sorority are current and in progress.

Participants will be protected through the human subjects' protection protocol. All participants will be told their rights in the study in order for them to choose their status of participation. At any point, participants will have the right to not engage in the study. Addressing human subjects' protections will include having open and honest dialogue with their feelings about participating in the study. In all, I do not want to do harm against participants and my sincerity and transparency will be stated from the beginning of the study.

Research Instruments and Procedures

The study will utilize four main instruments. Those instruments include: the informed consent form, the research invitation, structured in-depth interview protocol, and the structured journaling protocol. Each instrument serves a particular and focused purpose. Their uses are pertinent to assist in the protection of all involved human subjects.

Informed Consent Form

The informed consent form outlines the participants'/actors' rights and the purpose of the study. The members of Alpha Nu Kappa who choose to be a part of this study must sign this consent form for their protection. The consent form is comprised of an introduction of the artist as participant investigator and the faculty sponsor, Dr. Nathan Durdella. The actors are given the contact information of both the principal investigator and the faculty sponsor. Additionally, the consent form details the study's purpose and what they should expect in time length from the interview. The interviews will be from 60-90 minutes in terms of procedures in this study. This form also includes the actors' potential benefits from the study, including a deeper connection to the voices of Black student leaders. Also, actors' are informed that there potential risks in this study because of nature of the interview. There may be some questions that they choose to refrain from answering, and they are informed that they have every right to decline or pass from answering those types of questions. Lastly, the consent form discusses their rights to withdraw from participating in the study and that this interview is protected through confidentiality. All parties involved, including actors, the principal investigator and the faculty sponsor must sign the consent form.

Research Invitation

The research invitation includes an introduction from the principal investigator and the intent of the invitation. The intent of the invitation is to gain participation from the invited pool of potential actors. This instrument also includes the purpose of the study and the nature of their participation. The nature of their participation includes an interview process and journaling activity that allows them to share their stories and narratives related to their experiences as a Black student leader. Potential actors are informed in this invitation that their participation is voluntary and that they will receive a ten dollar gift certificate from the California State University-Northridge's bookstore for their participation. The last section of the invitation includes the principal investigator's contact information.

Structured Interview Protocol

There are two research protocols for this study. The first protocol is a structured in-depth interview protocol, which first indicates my role as principal investigator and participants' rights. The protocol informs participants of the study and its focus is on the experiences of Black student leaders in locally-sponsored, culturally-based student organizations. The protocol includes the interview questions, which are divided thematically. The themes include: demographic information, leadership experiences, institutional and organizational engagement, diversity in higher education, definitions of leadership, thoughts on successes and failures, and concluding thoughts. The actors in this study are fully protected because they are thoroughly informed about their rights as a participant, the purpose of the study, the procedures involved in the study and all involved parties in the study.

Structured Journal Protocol

The second protocol is a structured guide for journaling. Similar to the interview protocol, the structured journal protocol reviews my role as a principal investigator and participants' rights. The journal is recorded electronically and will be stored on a protected flash drive. Participants must keep a weekly journal is sent through moodle every Monday. The journal is formatted so that participants can indicate the date, location, and time of their journal entry. The journal is structured in three main fields. These fields were determined by a review of literature and ask for participants to reflect on their relationships with peers, faculty, and advisors (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997).

Data Collection

The data collection process is one that is interconnected to my role as principal investigator and as a student affairs professional. As a Black Queer and Masculine of Center practitioner and portraitist, my most intimate and integrated role is that of participant observer (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997). There are three components to my process of data collection: participant observations, participant structured journaling, and a 60-90 minute structured in-depth interview. As the portraitist, I will also keep a structured journal that accounts my lived experiences during the research process. There will also be memos taken during the participant observations that account my own experiences.

Participant Observations

As a part of my pre-field activities, I have contacted the president of Alpha Nu Kappa sorority to discuss the research purpose and my desire to involve sorority members. I contacted the president via email. I already have a personal relationship with the president because of my past work in Student Housing at California State University-Northridge. While, I have never supervised the president, I have trained her during Student Housing's Fall and Spring Resident Advisor Training. As a participant observer, I must exude the value of transparency. I am here to learn about sorority members' experiences as student leaders and Black students at California State University-Northridge. I will observe sorority business meetings and social gatherings. As a part of that process, I asked for a list of planned activities and dates from the President of the sorority. With the president and other sorority officer's permission, I will observe two meetings. I will observe one structured business meeting and one social event. I desire to see a spectrum of student engagement. I will record all student interactions during these meetings and activities, the environment, and my own feelings during the observation. A good artist is aware of these settings and does her best to capture its' essence (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997).

Archival data will be collected with the permission of the sorority's leadership. I am collecting historical paraphernalia, including event flyers, pictures from events, and informational brochures. While this list is limited, I am also open to collecting any data that is deemed pertinent by the members. Thus, I will remain flexible in my collection of archival data.

Participant Structured Journaling

A structured journal is a part of the data collection process. The journaling is structured because these writings do not serve as a personal diary and its purpose is for data collection. Members of the sorority will be given an electronic journal via email one week before the activity and/or experience. Members will be asked to report their feelings and experiences around the activity. As a part of the structured journaling, members are to report the date and the time of the activity in order to accurately report their experiences. The journals are to be emailed to me directly and I will keep the data on a protected flash drive.

Structured In-Depth Interview

The structured in-depth interview will be for 60-90 minutes at California State University-Northridge at the participant's desired location. The data will be collected via audio recorder. The tapes will be locked in a safe provided by myself until it is transcribed by a professional transcriptionist. In order to protect the actors, a section of the reported data will be cross-checked by one of my doctoral student colleagues. The interview process will happen after the first participant observation in order to display my loyalty to the student organization and my dedication to the research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). The interview is structured with a set of questions and room for asking follow-up questions (Bernard, 1994). All interview questions are connected to the research purpose and questions. The interview questions are structured in order to illuminate the voices of a marginalized population.

My process for data collection is grounded in the belief that the voices of Black students should be valued and heard on multiple levels. As a non-staff member, I am

separate from their day-to-day experiences as Black students at the institution. However, as a past employee, I have heard first-hand the stories of pain, frustration, and triumph from Black student leaders. The data collection process is meant to highlight those voices.

Observation Guide

According to Spradley (1980) and Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997), I am involved in this study as a participant observer. As a participant observer I address issues related to my own biases and conflicts of interest. Both of these aspects are an instrumental role in data collection. Richardson (2003) explains that observation notes, methodological notes, theoretical notes and personal notes must be utilized within the data collection and analysis process. Woven together, these field notes become the artist's brush; allowing the portrait to surface. This surfacing acknowledges both my participant observer role and portraitist-researcher role. The guide was developed using Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis' suggestions for observations. I pose questions that are situated in the study's conceptual and empirical literature.

Data Analysis

Portrait methodology has a distinct and explicit process for data analysis. First, the artist must develop emergent themes from the data. Early in the analytical process, the portraitist attempts "to bring...bring interpretive insight, analytic scrutiny, and aesthetic order to the collection of data" (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997, p. 185). The artist must critically analyze the data by gathering, organization and evaluating it through the empirical process of narrative development.

Based upon the literature and the artist's own autobiographical journey, she can illuminate and identify the many voices. The artist has an agenda, to find goodness and to uncover new theoretical discoveries about Black female student leadership development. Before entering the site, there must be a written recording of the artist's adaptive journey. She is to record her own understanding of the case, which formulates a framework of understanding. She understands her own "intellectual, ideological, and autobiographical" themes through reflexivity (p. 186). The artist's own framework of understanding is referred to as the "anticipatory template" (p. 187). This template is used as data and is a part of the final portrait. As the artist, I must incorporate this template to see if other themes align with those that were anticipated.

An artist must anticipate the unexpected and fluidity of evolving student populations (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997). The artist is a listener and observer and analyzes all data, including recordings of her own senses. Discovering emerging patterns is a difficult feat but can be organized in such a way that the artist can easily identify emerging themes. First, the data is sorted, grouped, and classified in order to develop the narrative (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997). Notes and jottings from interviews and observations are outlined and classified in order to reveal categories and/or patterns. This process becomes a system, rather than a process of theorizing. This process can become chaotic, but the artist must become comfortable with not having control and allowing the multiple voices to account and illuminate actors' lived experiences (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997).

As a part of not having control, the artist must account for the information that is not easily categorized. In portraiture, the outliers are accounted for and considered

“alternative explanations” of lived experiences. Artists are constantly listening for voice, even the “deviant voice” (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997, p. 193). This type of voice allows for the artist to examine perspectives outside of norm. This process is a part of critical analysis. Listening for voice is at the core of data analysis. These voices can illuminate common themes, which are also known as “repetitive refrains” (p. 194). These refrains are named and noted because they give insight on the common experiences of participants.

The themes that emerge from the data are found from the actors’ use of metaphors and symbols. These metaphors and symbols are a part of the participants’ life, experiences and values (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997). These experiences can uncover institutional and cultural rituals; these aspects become a part of the portrait. After thematically categorizing the data into themes, the actor uses triangulation to critically analyze the data, including demographical information and observations (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997). As stated in chapter one, the portraiture methodology has “five modes of analysis” (p. 214) First, the artist must identify the refrains used by actors. Secondly, the artist identifies metaphors, rituals, and ceremonies that illuminate the actors’ lived experiences. Third, the artist must triangulate the data from a multiple sources and must “underscore the points of convergence” (p. 214). Next, the values of the actors and their institutions are identified. Lastly, the artist must identify the outliers and find coherence in the setting (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997).

These different levels of data analysis operate in a state of chaos and the actor must be settled in this reality. I will carefully listen to all voices, including the voice of those who are seen as outliers. The voice of the actor and the artists are analyzed. While

the data collection process is the central activity of the portraiture methodology, data analysis requires a large amount of energy, dedication, and organization.

Researcher Roles

My role as researcher is to investigate the culture of leadership amongst Black female students in a culturally-based learning community. In portraiture methodology, the researcher as artist searches for goodness and uncovers principles that enlighten the voice of the actors and portraitists (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997). My role as principal investigator is one that seeks to provide a historical, personal, and internal context to the previous literature regarding the topic of Black female student leadership four-year institutions. I will seek to illuminate and interpret the literature not traditionally or Eurocentrically. My role in relation to the research setting is a bit unknown right now. I know that I will be able to relate to the environment, because I was a student leader in college and that role attributed to my success and matriculation.

During this study, I have many roles to balance. The portraitist is both an advocate and a friend, and nestles these relationships in intimacy (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997). As an artist, I must acknowledge my roles by naming them. As a Black Queer student affairs professional, I see myself as an advocate to underserved populations. My own passions for the work in higher education are rooted in the philosophy of social justice. This philosophy has led to my utmost belief that all oppression must be ended through open and honest dialogue and understanding. I navigate these roles through my use of reflexivity, introspection, honesty, and transparency.

Researcher Bias

As a part of the portraiture methodology, the artist as researcher purposely “sketches herself” into the portrait (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997, p. 67). She does this early on by referencing the word “I.” She owns her biases and experiences early in the study.

As a Black Queer woman, I find myself led to this study because I come from the experiences of the oppressed. I know first-hand how oppression looks and acts within the United States, and I am familiar with the stories of the oppressed voices in this nation. The familiarities of these voices are my biases. I cannot ignore these voices and I know they are real. Because I can so easily relate to the actors, I am sure that my own biases will become known. I have a few options in my response. I can either run away from these experiences or take no ownership, or I can own these experiences and my socio-cultural position within the interconnected contexts of oppression. I choose to do the latter. I can address these issues with deep reflexivity and a constant state of journaling and jotting my thoughts.

Effect of Researcher on Case or Participant Reactivity

I truly believe because I come from a common experience as the actors that participants will react to my presence. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) explains, “in portraiture, the voice of the researcher is everywhere...” and my work is deeply rooted in “collected data and skeptical questioning” (p. 85). I will always have to examine my own biases and found evidence in the study. The research questions will be examined through a tight funnel in which my voice is “premeditated, retrained,

disciplined, and carefully controlled” (p. 85). My voice will never overpower the voices of the actors

Effect of the Case on the Researcher

There are several types of use of voice that are deeply rooted in exploration and illustration. These types of voice include: voice of witness, voices as interpretation, voice as preoccupation, voice as autobiography, listening for voice, and voice in conversation (p. 87). My researcher’s imprint will be left upon the lives of those involved and vice versa. I am deeply engaged in this topic because it represents my own academic success and struggles. I know first-hand the power of communal learning and how often the voices of the oppressed are silenced through institutional and systemic racism. I am affected by racism everyday and so are the actors of this study. This fact is the reality of the study and it deeply affects me, emotionally and professionally.

Countering My Assumptions

I will counter these assumptions and beliefs by owning them and using in-depth data collection as a method of constantly checking my own biases. This method includes creating and upholding the interview protocols. These procedures will connect the actor to the artist through relationship building and trust. My own biases will be recorded, noted, and named. I will also ask a colleague to assist in the method of peer reviewing the codes and themes used during data analysis. This process is known as research triangulation and it allows for the cross examination of data (Golafshani, 2003). The artist has biases and will have to expose these assumptions and come to realize they are real. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) explains, [...] voice in portraiture encompasses

these three orientations-of epistemology, ideology, and method” and the artist must reflect, name, and frame her “explicit interest in authorship, interpretation, aesthetics, and narrative (p. 87). As the artist, I will name my interest in all stated areas and reflect upon the how these interests are connected to actors and the portrait.

Countering the Effect of the Case on the Researcher

Portraiture methodology calls for the actor(s) and the artist to develop a relationship of trust, understanding, and reciprocity (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997). The researcher, as the artist, must establish boundaries with actor(s) and must foster an environment of reciprocity. These boundaries protect both the actor(s) and the artist. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis explains, “[...] it is the portraitist’s responsibility to define the boundaries and protect the vulnerability and exposure of the actor (p. 152). These boundaries are set up through honest dialogue in the beginning of the study and are maintained through reflexivity and the navigation of intimacy (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997). Navigating intimacy is a process in which requires the finesse of balancing the many roles of the artist. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis asserts,

[...] the portraitist navigates the distance, the depth and the intensity of the encounters by seeking a symmetry and reciprocity with the actors, by staying focused on the work, and by developing a contract (written or oral) with the participants that clearly articulates the commitments and responsibilities of the relationship (p. 153).

Reciprocity requires a relationship in which ambiguity is embraced. This reciprocity can be “named and explicit [or] fluid and implicit” (p. 153). In order to foster reciprocity, the boundaries, structure, and commitments of the relationship and the study

are stated from the beginning. As the artist, I must remain honest and clear about my expectations in order to counter the effect of the case on my own self-care and focus.

Summary

In summary, portraiture utilizes the method of participant observations, interviews, dialogues, analyses, and critical critiques of traditional systemic processes and structures (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997). This study utilizes case study analysis as a research design. The selected sample is unique and comprised of five to ten members of Alpha Nu Kappa Sorority. The data collection process has three components: participant observations, participant structured journaling, and a 60-90 minute structured in-depth interview. The structured in-depth interview will be for 60-90 minutes at California State University-Northridge at the participant's desired location. The data analysis process consists of gathering, organization and evaluating it through the empirical process of narrative development.

As an artist, my role includes as principal investigator is to provide historical, personal, and internal context to the previous literature regarding the topic of Black female student leadership four-year institutions. As a methodological process, I will encounter biases and assumptions. I will counter these assumptions and beliefs by naming them and using in-depth data collection as a method of constantly checking my own biases. Thus I must uphold the interview protocols. In data analysis, I will listen for artists many voices. There are several types of use of voice including: voice of witness, voices as interpretation, voice as preoccupation, voice as autobiography, listening for voice, and voice in conversation (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997, p. 87).

Methodologically, the actor(s) and the artist must develop a relationship of trust,

understanding, and reciprocity (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997). The artist must establish boundaries with actor(s) by fostering an environment of reciprocity.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The purpose of this study is to examine Black female student involvement and cultural leadership development through the conceptual lenses of validation and Afrocentricity. Validation seeks to unpack underrepresented student experiences in and outside of the classroom (Rendón, 1994). Coupled with validation, Afrocentricity highlights the communal and diverse lived experiences of Black people. In this study, I have positioned Afrocentricity within validation to expose the unique stories of Black women in a locally-sponsored, culturally-based student organization.

This chapter presents results of data analysis through composite and individual portraits. As part of a methodological approach that incorporates portraiture, I present four individual portraits to address Black women's leadership experiences at a Hispanic-Serving Institution, California State University-Northridge. As described in the previous chapter, portraits emerge from actors' lived realities that illuminate their leadership experiences on campus. In this study, individual portraits capture actor's voices and experiences, while composite portraits include the voices of inside-and-outside of classroom agents and the artist. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) affirm that portraits are created and then supported by evidence through empirical literature, symbols, art, metaphors, and the exploration of voices.

Before I present the individual portraits, I describe three overall themes that I observed across actors. Then, I present a portrait of California State University-Northridge's student housing to contextualize the actor's portraits. Next, I illuminate each actor's voice in a portrait to highlight their diverse experiences in a locally-sponsored, culturally-based student organization. Given that each of the actors experience the campus

in different ways, they describe their experiences with Alpha Nu Kappa in tandem with their descriptions of the campus climate. Thus, as a part of the entire portrait, actors' lived realities regarding climate are described in order to connect California State University-Northridge's portraits to the actors. Finally, I end the chapter by moving from individual portraits to the five modes of analysis of portraiture methodology. These five modes—identifying actors' refrains, illuminating metaphors, ceremonies and rituals, unveiling actors' points of converges, describing actors' values, and identifying outliers—serve to unpack the complexities embedded in the individual portraits.

Emerging Themes and Connections to Portraits: Commitment, Community, and Connection

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) explain that themes emerge from shared narratives of actors. As Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis argues, description of the themes is necessary in order to understand the actors' lived experiences. The shared narratives can be read on their own as separate stories that complete a portrait. Accordingly, thematic explanations assist readers' appreciation of the shared narratives of the actors because they contextualize the actors' experiences in a larger schema. This schema illuminates the complete portrait, which is explored in the next chapter. Here I identified three themes from an analysis of the actors' lived realities: commitment, community, and connection. The actors' connections to the themes are interwoven in the individual portraits. This technique uses the "language of the actors" and serves the objective of authenticity in portraiture methodology (p. 220). Through triangulation, I formulated these three themes by examining actors' language and searching for shared meaning. Throughout this chapter the themes are interwoven in the individual actors' portraits.

However, I provide a broader explanation of the themes below for readers to understand their development and connection to the portraits

Community

Women in Alpha Nu Kappa describe community through personal and organizational ways of connection. They are deeply connected to the organization and they rely on these connections to shape their definitions of community. Personal definitions of community were shaped through emotional connections between members. For example, when Aby described her first instances of meeting members in the organization during her recruitment process she described intense emotion.

Aby: I went and fell in love with the group that I met at the program.

Similar to Aby, Kimberly expressed deep emotions to describe her relationship with Fred, Alpha Nu Kappa's advisor.

Nancy: His charisma was out of the ordinary and I fell in love with his personality.

Kimberly described Fred as caring, and because of that care he is a part of her definitions of community.

Kimberly: Fred and I are close at heart. One time I needed a recommendation form and it was two days before the deadline. He did it for me. That was an example of him showing that he cared. I feel comfortable talking to him about anything

Similar to personal definitions of community, organizational definitions were described by actors' descriptions of collectivity. All of the actors referred to members in the organization as "we." This collectivity defines a larger context of community that

reaches beyond organizational expectations and day-to-day organizational practices.

Noelle explained community with her description of Fred's involvement with Alpha Nu Kappa.

Noelle: Fred makes sure we were involved with the execution of the day-to-day business.

Paralleling Noelle's experience, other members expressed members in Alpha Nu Kappa as "we." It was a rare case where actors used "I" as a descriptor of their organizational experiences. Community is shaped through this collectivity and actors remain involved in the organization because of their personal definitions. Community and connection are similar in nature because they are interconnected. Community cannot be defined without understanding how actors are connected to the organization.

Connection

Actors view connection as process that is self-motivated and inspired by inside-and-outside-of-classroom agents. This theme emerged through their collective definitions. Actors' desired to be a part of an organization is which they could see holistically see themselves. They each joined the organization because agents reached out to them and encouraged them to engage in the organization. Nancy explained her process of joining Alpha Nu Kappa,

Nancy: I learned about ANK from sister-to-sister. I attended a few meetings with my roommates, who are now members of ANK.

Actors who were involved in Alpha Nu Kappa, including Nancy, Kimberly, and Noelle, are connected to the organization because of their involvement in sister-to-sister.

However, their self-motivated connections are because of shared and common cultural

space. Kimberly shared her experiences in finding a place of belonging and connection. In Kimberly's portrait she revealed that she did not originally join an organization because she could not culturally identify. However, when she learned about Alpha Nu Kappa she felt an instant connection because members' Black cultural identity.

Connection is formulated through relationships with inside-and-outside-of-classroom agents. Actors feel connected with Fred and relate to him on many levels. Interestingly, actors describe disconnection through their relationship with faculty. Particularly, Kimberly discussed her lack of motivation regarding her major. She does not connect with the content or faculty from the department. Her portrait reveals this dynamic and is seen later in this chapter. Yet, I thought it was important to include this point because connection was also described through disconnections between actors and inside-and-outside-of-classroom agents. Actors' connection with members of the organization and Fred keeps them engaged and committed in their involvement.

Commitment

Actors' stories revealed the theme of commitment as a process that is self-defined and reproduced organizational expectations of involvement. Self-definitions of commitment were also seen through their connections with the organization. Actors' commitment is dependent on their deep involvement in the organization. Alpha Nu Kappa as a new locally-sponsored organization keeps members engaged because of its uniqueness. Particularly, Aby expressed her deep commitment to the organization because of its unique position as a new organization.

Aby's portrait revealed that she remains committed to the organization because of its uniqueness.

Aby: ANK has history and I wanted to be a part of that. You can be a part of a sorority that was founded in 1855 let's say but then again were you there when the constitution was written? Were you there to meet the founders? I knew it would hard starting something new because you have to be fully dedicated. But I wanted something new, I wanted history.

Aby's experiences aligned with founding members' sentiments of struggle and commitment. Currently, the organization is struggling to keep members engaged in involvement. In fact, Alpha Nu Kappa's president, Nancy, shared frustration around this struggle because as a commuter student, she travels to Northridge from south Los Angeles for Alpha Nu Kappa meetings. She expressed her frustration by explaining that she attended an organizational meeting where only three of the 15 members were present. In part, the founding mothers and Nancy remain committed to the organization because their organizational roles and expectations of those leadership roles. They have a responsibility to the organization because they committed to these roles. The portraits described later in this chapter illuminate their individual narratives regarding these experiences.

Commitment as a self-defined process interweaves connection and community. Actors are committed to the organization because they position themselves as a part of a community that is created through connections with members and inside-and-outside-of-classroom agents. These themes are interconnected and difficult to parse out because of these deep connections. However, I believe that exploring these themes in-depth will provide a broader context for readers to understand how they are seen in individual

portraits and the tapestrial whole. Below I explain how themes are used to narrate stories to create individual portraits.

The Artist Painting Individual Portraits: Using Themes to Narrate Stories

The portrait exposes the center of the actors' connection to their community and commitments. These connections are both self-motivated and advisor-inspired. All of the actors' struggled in balancing commitments due to the conflict between their own self-definitions and organizational expectations. Each portrait will explore these themes in tandem. Additionally, each portrait can be read as a narrative on its own or as a collective of narratives that create on tapestrial whole. On this point, Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005) explains,

The process of creating narrative portraits requires a difficult (sometimes paradoxical) vigilance to empirical description *and* aesthetic expression and a careful scrutiny and modulation of voice. It is a discerning, deliberative process and a highly creative one. The data must be scrutinized carefully, searching for the story line that emerges from the material. However, there is never a single story; many could be told. So the portraitist is active in selecting the themes that will be used to tell the story, strategic in deciding on points of focus and emphasis, and creative in defining the sequence and rhythm of the narrative. What gets left out is often as important as what gets included—the blank spaces, the silences, also shape the form of the story (p. 10)

In this study, the stories of the actors encompass community, connection, and commitment in different ways. As a whole, the stories create a portrait of Alpha Nu

Kappa sorority at California State University-Northridge. The themes are seen throughout the narratives and the modes of analysis.

Preface to the Portraits: The Artist's Narrative Outline

The stories below illuminate how these women work together to foster moments of success, triumph, and struggle situated within California State University-Northridge.

As portraits, these narratives expose goodness that highlights their current lived realities (Chapman, 2010; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983). Here I describe the context of individual portraits so that the readers can appreciate the goodness of the stories.

First, chapter one reveals the composite story *Lost*. This story is the artist's retelling of isolating experiences at an undergraduate predominately White institution in the Midwest. This story contextualizes the introduction of the study and serves to connect me as an artist to the actors' stories below. The next composite portrait entitled, *She's Not Supposed to be Here*, is an auto-telling of the artist's experiences as a Black student leader which further strengthens my connections to the actors in the portraits below. Following this composite portrait is *Birthing Pains*, which is a portrait that describes two of Alpha Nu Kappa's founding mothers' struggles with involvement and commitment as it relates to connection and community. Next, *Nancy's Individual Portrait* reveals her need to find commitment and validation from multiple agents inside and outside of classroom. *Noelle's Individual Portrait* exposes her realities surrounding the struggles of leadership in multiple organizations on campus. By contrast, *Kimberly's Individual Portrait* describes her experiences as a fourth year student who is faced with questions regarding her passions as she nears graduation. Lastly, *Aby's Individual Portrait* reveals

the realities of a Mexican-American's leadership experiences in a predominately Black sorority. A Descriptive Portrait of the Setting: California State University—Northridge

In portraiture, a full sensory description of the setting is needed in order to expose the “aesthetic sensibilities and empirical rigor” of lived cultural experiences (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005, p. 6). In order to understand their relationships to each other, their culture, and leadership, I must describe the environment in which these aspects are situated. The composite story is presented in italics because I use my voice and unique experience to describe the environment.

California State University-Northridge is a bustling campus, full of activity and familiar faces. My senses were heightened with this familiarity. As a past employee and current student at the university, the campus brings back so many memories of growth, learning, and joy. The university is situated in an urban neighborhood in the San Fernando Valley. When I drive onto campus, I pass by apartment homes, campus parking lots, administrative buildings and a campus police station. Architecturally, it is difficult to feel isolated on main campus. However, student housing is not central to campus. After parking on campus, near the College for Education, I have to walk about ten to 15 minutes north to student housing. On the walk, I pass by a multitude of trees, a soccer field, a couple of parking lots and I am greeted by campus security. Once I show my campus identification and express my purpose for being in housing, the security guard smiles and says, “I remember you. How have you been?” I smiled back and replied, “Not bad! Wow, a lot has changed in the past year or so.” We go back and forth for a couple of minutes and I notice that there are a line of students who need to come into housing, so I say my farewell and I pass through the black iron gates.

Student housing is full of cars, music and laughter. I remember just how happy I felt to see so many Black and Brown faces. It felt nostalgic and for a moment I was saddened because I knew my visit was temporary. As I continue walking, I pass by a community center, which is central to the first-year living area, known as the Suites. There are bike riders and walkers. As I continue walking, I pass by a red, white and black sign that reads Conference Services. I pause and I then notice that all of buildings are marked by their number, living learning community, and offices housed. This change to the aesthetics is new since my last visit. As I walk onto the main quad, I pass by my old apartment. I found myself walking quickly; not wanting to pause for too long, so my own emotions would not take over the true purpose of my visitation. On the main quad I noticed outdoor tables, a large parking garage and a full basketball court. The newly paved basketball court was full of life and competition. I looked to the left and walked to building 11. Building 11 houses honor students in their living learning community, it also holds a radio station and several meeting spaces, including a large conference room.

The large conference room on the first floor held a table that seated eight. The chairs varied in color and comfort. Once I walked in the conference room, there was a white board behind me with several sketches. One of the sketches was an unfinished math problem, while the other sketches were artistic in nature. To left stood a large television with a DVD and VHS player. In that moment, I wondered if this was an active resource for students or a storage unit for equipment. Lastly, across the television was an iron sink. The conference room was cold and the slightly cracked blinds allowed me to see who entered in and out of the main building. I sat down, took out my laptop, digital

recorder and I was greeted to a knock on the door. I was greeted by Nancy, who is one of the cast of actors described in the next section.

Individual Portraits: Introducing the Cast of Actors

The cast of actors displays descriptions of the active participants in the study. Each of their portraits will be shared as stories, but these descriptions provide a biographical lens to their identities in terms of education and culture. Each of their stories can be read on their own. Thus, I provide brief descriptions of the actors so readers can navigate the stories with ease. It is easy to get lost in the stories details and lose sight of the actors' backgrounds and individual contributions to portrait as a whole. Thus, their biographies are described below.

Nancy is an African-American fourth-year, senior at California State University-Northridge. Nancy was born and raised in Los Angeles. She is a second generation college student, in which her oldest sister was the first to attend college. She is currently the president of Alpha Nu Kappa sorority and is a sociology major.

Noelle is an African-American senior at California State University-Northridge. Noelle is not the first person in her family to attend college. Noelle was born in Victorville, California. She is a founding mother of Alpha Nu Kappa sorority and is a Music Industry Studies & Pan African Studies major.

Kimberly is an African-American senior at California State University-Northridge. She is a first generation college student from Los Angeles, California. She is currently the vice-president for Alpha Nu Kappa Sorority and is a Political Science major.

Aby is a Mexican-American, third-year student at California State University-Northridge. She is a first generation college student from Pasadena, California. She is currently a member of Alpha Nu Kappa sorority and serves as the social and academic chair. She is a sociology major with a minor in women and gender studies.

Jennifer is an African-American and founding mother of Alpha Nu Kappa. She was highly involved on campus as a Resident Advisor and working for the Matador Involvement Center. She is currently a graduate of California State University—Northridge.

Toni is an African-American and founding mother of Alpha Nu Kappa. She was a Resident Advisor on campus and a graduate of California State University—Northridge. She is currently applying to graduate school.

Fred is an African-American student affairs professional in student housing at California State University—Northridge. He has been at the university for four years. He is currently the advisor for Alpha Nu Kappa sorority.

A Portrait: “She's not Supposed to be Here”—An Auto-telling of my Story

Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005) argues that “the identity, character, and history of the researcher are obviously critical to how he or she listens, selects, interprets, and composes the story. Portraiture admits the central and creative role of the *self* of the portraitist” (p. 11). Accordingly, portraiture utilizes reflexivity as a method to expose my own “history—familial, cultural, ideological and educational—to the inquiry. [My] perspective, questions, and insights are inevitably shaped by these profound developmental and autobiographical experiences” (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997, p. 95). Waterhouse (2007) explains:

Reflexivity is the art of reviewing one's own assumptions, biases and values, and reflecting almost continuously on the effect of these on one's observations and evaluations and on the research participants. The values, beliefs and experiences of the researcher are integral to each decision made and relationship formed. The position, place, voice and person of the researcher is a matter that is implicit throughout every element and stage of the research, so that identifying this and making the implicit explicit is a key challenge (p. 282).

I ground my story in empirical literature regarding student involvement, student engagement, and the varying experiences of underrepresented students, in order to explain the paradoxical nature of portraiture and its connections to autobiographical truths. There is no doubt in my mind that my history and experiences connect me to this work in dynamic ways.

My name is Vanidy Michelle Bailey. I am an able-bodied Black, queer, Masculine of Center, Caribbean-American. I currently live in San Diego, California in a Black and Brown community called Grant Hill. My work consists of community connections in the non-profit realm and higher education. My professional work resides at the University of California—San Diego's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Resource Center as the Assistant Director for Education. As the Assistant Director for Education, I have direct responsibilities over the educational component of the center, four programming interns, large scale programming, departmental trainings and student development, including leadership development in student organizations. I love my job and its day-to-day challenge. It has certainly brought more joy than pain. But, I was greeted with pain upon my first month as an employee.

I was walking on the main street that leads to off campus street parking when a white pickup truck blazed past me. Suddenly, the passenger yelled out, “Black Dyke!” In that moment, I felt like the other. I was no longer on a campus with familiar Black and Brown faces. I was alone. But, something significant stood out in my moment of rage. My cultural and gender expressions leave me vulnerable to violence. In addition, my cultural and gender expressions have been central to my professional and educational paths.

I was the first-born child to a mother and father, both raised in New York. My mother was born in Jamaica and my father was born in Buffalo, New York. In my earliest years, my parents were equal victims of verbal and physical violence. As my family expanded and my parents became more involved in the Apostolic Pentecostal church, I experienced a multitude of oppression. I was only allowed to wear dresses and skirts, and my head was to be covered during church ceremonies. I do not want to paint a picture that I did not have good times in the church. I made many friends and I learned valuable lessons of unconditional love. However, the lessons of love I learned in the scriptures seemed disconnected from my treatment in the church. I knew from a very young age that I was queer. However, due to my own fears of rejection and shame, I remained closeted. It was not until I went to college and I was away from home that I felt comfortable to say I was Black and queer.

One of the reasons I became so comfortable in my sexuality, cultural, and gender expressions is because of the love shown to me by my mentor, the Director of Multicultural Affairs. I positioned how lost I felt in the first story that contextualizes the dissertation. I had many one-on-one conversations with my mentor. He became my

mentor because he saw my potential. I was highly involved on campus as a resident advisor, the Black Student Union, and student government and he pushed me to dream big. He introduced the idea of going to graduate school for higher education and student affairs. He connected me to professional networks in the field and graduate schools. He explained to me that higher education is not designed for people like me. Like me? Yes, a Black masculine queer woman with an agenda. My agenda was simple: education and access. I wanted access to institutions that were not designed for me. Institutions that sent out admissions pamphlets full of White faces and award winning programs. However, I did not accomplish these efforts alone. I had a mentor, Black Student Union mentors and English and Black student faculty members who validated my presence, experiences and institutional contributions.

A Portrait: Birthing Pains

I waited in the lobby of building 11. The residence hall was quiet. The hallways were bland and I sat on a stiff blue couch. As I sat nervously, reading over the interview questions I heard someone scream, “VANIDY!” I looked to my right and Jennifer and Toni walked quickly to give me a hug. I smiled. In that moment, I recalled dear memories of working with both women as Resident Advisors. Now, they are both graduates of California State University-Northridge. I paused and turned on my digital recorder.

Vanidy: What’s up!!!?

Jennifer: Nothing much! Just trying to survive, eating ramen every night.

Toni: Exactly!

Vanidy: Yeah, it’s tough out there in the real world.

Jennifer: Who are you telling!? I wish they would have taught a class on college graduate survival skills.

We all laughed. We talked about the struggles of new graduates. They both live in the Los Angeles area.

Vandy: So, why are you all here?

Toni: We're struggling right now.

Vandy: Yeah?

Jennifer: Seriously, we are. We don't know what's going on. So, we are meeting with all of the members of the sorority to talk about involvement and commitment.

Vandy: Really? Are all the founding mothers meeting with the member?

Toni: Yeah, we split the responsibilities.

Jennifer: We have a growing sorority but we're finding that only a few members are pulling their weight. There have been times when only two members show up to a chapter meeting. We don't know what's going on. I guess it's just birthing pains.

Toni: We just want to get to the root of the problem. So, we're meeting with everyone to send the same message. We want them all to be involved and committed.

Jennifer: It's not like we don't want the inactive members to leave the sorority.

We just want them to communicate to us and pull their weight.

Just as Jennifer was about to start another sentence, Kimberly walked in. We all paused. I was shocked. The sorority has been in existence for three years and they are already

struggling with involvement and commitment. I sat there and wondered about the root of these struggles. Are the sorority members burned-out? I was a highly active student in my undergraduate experience and I remember being burned-out on several occasions. In fact, many of my peers in my immediate circle who are Black also struggled with burnout. Involvement and deep commitment can cause burnout.

Nancy captures burnout when she shared, “I’m tired. I can’t do it by myself. I feel like I’m wasting my time sometimes. I live in L.A. and I only come to Northridge for ANK and class. If it’s only me and another sister showing up to a meeting, then I’m wasting my time.” Nancy is connecting her commitment and connection to others’ involvement. Validation connects institutional agents to fostering supportive environments for underrepresented students.

A Portrait: Noelle’s Story

I sat in the conference anxiously waiting for Noelle. Noelle was a Resident Advisor when I worked in housing at California State University-Northridge. As a Resident Advisor, Noelle was spunky, focused, and witty. She is also a founding mother of Alpha Nu Kappa. I have always known Noelle to be in a leadership role at CSUN. However, I was never able to work one-on-one with Noelle. She worked with a different staff team. Her supervisor at the time, Fred, is also the current advisor for Alpha Nu Kappa. I sat there anxious wondering if she was still as determined to graduate as she was when I worked there two years ago. When she walked in the door she greeted me with a hug. She smiled in disbelief and joy. Noelle’s story is one of simplicity. She revealed her leadership experience in a dynamic way.

With every word, Noelle smiled. She wore a black sweat shirt and blue jeans. Her hair was pulled back in a bun and she fidgeted with a pen. She glanced up at me and paused.

Noelle: My academic relationships at CSUN have definitely been interesting. I came into CSUN extremely motivated to just demolish any and everything that came my way, over exceeding in every goal that I wanted to reach. I am a music industry studies major and my main goal was to be a CEO of a major record label, but starting as an A&R for a record label, and it's so funny how as I continue to grow and as I continue to progress in this thing called life and journey through college I've seen things shift.

Noelle's Definitions of Struggle

I can relate to her reflections of growth. I remember feeling a constant shifting in my undergraduate experience. My motivation to attend classes and student organization meetings were dependent on my ability to manage my emotions around these shifts. College became a place where I learned how to struggle and define myself as a person based upon how I preserved through those struggles. Noelle's narrative is one of adaptability. She learned how to adapt to struggle.

Noelle: When it came down to me having specific struggles in school, there's going to be times when there may be things going on in your life personally and it makes it hard to balance school, and to balance your personal life. It was really difficult for me to run into personal issues and then for my school to just not be up to par. I had never been a failing student in my entire life but as life continued and things happened in college, there were some times where I had not done the

best and I ended having to re take a few classes. But, instead of being so hard on myself I realized life happens, and this bad grade doesn't necessarily define me.

Noelle paused again and I sat there engulfed in her truth. How often did I allow myself to be defined by my academic career? As a black woman, Noelle ran into struggles of balance. She struggled to balance her academics and personal life. I knew that without the support of mentors and peers, I would have struggled even more so. I needed a sounding board. I needed a group of people to push me towards my potential. Noelle and Fred had a special relationship because he supervised her as a leader in the resident halls and advised her as a sorority member.

Noelle: My advisor, Fred, presented me with a challenge, that fun challenge, like hey let me step out and do what I need to do to succeed, and he really pushes you to be the best that you can [...] Neither one of my parents have a B.A., it was always very important for me to just be a role model, not only for my family, for my sister, and just really setting the bar for accomplishing that goal.

Noelle received support from Fred and in return she saw her connections to her family. She is able to get through specific struggles because of inputs of supports and outputs of role modeling. She is constantly aware of her position as a Black woman at CSUN.

Noelle's journal: I would definitely say as Black women because there are certain struggles that we already come with and there are certain expectations of us not being able to succeed. I definitely want to demolish every stereotype that comes my way. Being music major, one of five or six black people that I can point out, I definitely felt that it was key and important for me to stand out and excel in my

classes. I definitely felt that pressure, not only as a woman but more as being a Black woman in class and being in a University setting.

Surely, based on Noelle's experiences, she deals with struggles inside and outside of the classroom. But, Noelle acknowledges the struggles by naming them and then redefining them. She refines them through dismantling stereotypes.

Noelle: As far as my leadership, basically following the same areas, there is a certain stigma that people have about black people or black organizations [...] us not being able to produce things, always being late, not being very well organized or well planned. I'm trying to demolish all of those stereotypes as well. I've basically been able to do that and I've seen other Black clubs and organizations able to do the same exact thing.

"Us." As a Black woman, Noelle recognizes the collective struggle of sustaining positive perspectives of Blackness in university settings. Noelle defines struggle and sustainability through her own understandings of community, connection, and commitment.

Noelle: Community, Connection, and Commitment

Noelle is a highly involved student leader. She finds community and connection through committing to multiple roles. Noelle is poised and responsive. During our many conversations, she reflected on her role as a student leader. She let out a deep sigh.

Noelle: There's a lot to being a student at CSUN and being able to be a student leader. Sometimes I don't necessarily take myself into consideration as being a leader, because I feel like everyone has a role being a leader in some aspect or another. But, overall being a student leader has been a really positive experience; it's allowed me to grow in an enormous amount of areas from being a Resident

Advisor and really experiencing new things and opening my mind and broadening my horizons as well as the diversity that is offered at this school. Whether that be a part of Alpha Nu Kappa, the founding mother of Alpha Nu Kappa and really thinking about being the change that I want see on campus as well as in the world. Noelle wants to change the world. She is a leader who can recognize struggle and use it as a tool in making change.

A Portrait: Kimberly's Story

Meeting Kimberly for the first time was an experience full of curiosity. While I have some familiarity with the sorority, I could not recall any memories associated with Kimberly. When I walked up to her she greeted me with a smile. She was leaning to the right as she held a book bag on her right shoulder. She wore black jeans and a red shirt. Kimberly has a shy personality. While she was friendly, she held her head down as I walked towards her direction. We walked together to our reserved room and realized that the door was locked. We both chuckled and I quickly looked at her.

Vanidy: Where to next?

Kimberly: Not sure. I like the satellite student union.

Vanidy: That sounds good to me.

We wandered to the satellite student union and found a small conference room. The small conference room's walls were an eggshell white and there was a wipe board of the left side of the room. The conference room had a small table in the middle of the room with six blue chairs around it. I sat closest to the door and Kimberly sat across. In the background I could hear a voice singing over a piano. I thought that perhaps there was a music practice room upstairs.

As I sat there, I wondered why this was my first time in the satellite student union outside of student staff training. I never had an issue utilizing spaces in my undergraduate experience. Perhaps, that was just it. I was no longer an undergraduate student. The student union was designed to support students in various ways. I was honored to be in the space with Kimberly. Kimberly is a fourth year student at CSUN and Alpha Nu Kappa is her only formal leadership experience since freshman year. She often struggled to find words to describe her experience at CSUN. I wondered about her relationship with faculty and staff. Her struggle to describe her experience was unsettling to me because of her fourth year status. For someone who is about to graduate, she did not display enough confidence to confirm that she had institutional mentors who fostered her leadership development. I was curious to learn more about Kimberly.

Kimberly: Community, Connection, and Community

Kimberly's journal: CSUN doesn't have any organizations like Alpha Nu Kappa. My leadership in this organization is very important because it might encourage other people to create their own student organizations. We need more diversity in fraternity and sorority life.

I remember wanting to be of something more my first year in college. I wanted to be a part of something particular, the black experience. However, I attended a predominately white college and Kimberly attends a Hispanic Serving Institution with a strong Black presence. Kimberly continued...

Kimberly: I was first introduced to clubs and organizations through orientation but I did not think about the African American ones. I didn't see many of represented, so I did not consider it. Well, I didn't see it at first. I stated going to

sister-to-sister meetings in the dorms. I thought, ‘maybe they are creating something for me.’ That’s when I first felt important. Then, I started to go to a lot of different sorority meetings but I didn’t think any of them were for me. They were mostly Caucasian or Latina. I didn’t know if I would fit into this, being the only black person, it’s kind of weird [...]. Well with sister-to-sister and ANK we can kind of relate because we all from the same cultural background.

Culture matters. Kimberly smiled as she reflected on finding a space for Black women at CSUN. Kimberly founded something where she saw herself. She found a place where she could relate to other Black women and have her daily lived experiences validated. As a member of a Black sorority and a past involved member of the Black Student Union, I found a sense of family with these organizations. I could see Kimberly’s joy radiating through her smile. For Kimberly, community and connection is found in cultural sameness. However, Kimberly shared her struggle with commitment as she revealed her lack of passion for her declared major.

Kimberly: This semester I let the classes I wasn’t interested in determine my drive to complete assignments and go to class. I have two male professors that I can’t relate to. It’s too much information in a lecture, I just feel like I can’t understand. I took it too personal and it made me angry. But, I realize I have to graduate. I am trying to figure out what I am going to do after graduation. I’m just realizing that I’m not passionate about my major and it’s a struggle to complete these classes. But, I’m about to graduate so now I have to do what I need to do to get by. I’m not that interested in political science to pursue it after graduation.

Kimberly is a fourth year student and has discovered that she is not passionate about her major in Political Science. I wondered about her mentors. Did she have any academic or organizational mentors? My mentor asked me struggling questions that pushed me to pursue my passions. Where were Kimberly's mentors? Kimberly reflected on her relationship with faculty members.

Kimberly: I don't have close relationships with faculty members. I've never been the type of person to talk to professors after class. People have always told me that when you get to college you should have those connections. But, I have one faculty member who I'm close with because I took two classes with her. She knew my name and she helped me a lot outside of classroom. I've had her since freshman year. She's the only faculty member who remembered me. I felt comfortable with her, she taught a sociology class and I was very interested in the subject. When I took her again, she actually remembered me.

Kimberly desires to be remembered. She wants to matter. Kimberly is a Black woman who wants to see herself represented in organizations. She is connected and committed to her self-defined community of Black women. She receives support from sorority members and a faculty member outside of the classroom. However, Kimberly's commitment is also defined through her involvement in Alpha Nu Kappa. While, the sorority struggles to define involvement and commitment, Kimberly is determined to see the organization succeed.

Kimberly: I could do more but we have personal things going on in Alpha Nu Kappa. We have membership and leadership issues. We are slowly falling apart. Why does everyone feel distant? We had a meeting where there were only three

people there and we have 15 members. It makes me question myself as a leader, like what am I doing? What am I leading? But, I feel like I'm a leader because I believe there still is hope. We will get through this. I will do whatever it takes for us to get through this.

Kimberly defines her commitment in conjunction with other members' level of commitment. She wants to see the organization succeed through members' increased and consistent level of commitment. Similar to Noelle, Kimberly looks at the collective "us" as it relates to Blackness.

A Portrait: Aby's Story

Aby's story is unique. She is the deviant voice. The voice that was unexpected. While this study focuses on the cultural and leadership experiences of Black women the illumination of Aby's voice was necessary. Portraiture searches for goodness and exposes narratives that add more color and breath to portrait.

Aby found community and family with Alpha Nu Kappa. She describes her bond with Alpha Nu Kappa.

Aby: We did a lot of peace talks with the girls because they had a lot of issues within themselves. We do sister weekends and we try to do this once a month, we will meet up for the weekend and do activities together.

Aby has found a sense of family by going on retreats with other women in the sorority. Aby identifies as Mexican-American. She is the only member of the sorority that does not identify as Black. Aby wanted to be a part of a community that was committed to starting something new on campus. She found a connection to the sorority because of its unique local status on campus.

Aby's journal: You can be a part of a sorority that was founded in 1855 let's say but then again were you there when the constitution was written? Were you there to meet the founders? Were you there to be the root of that sorority or fraternity that you're so interested in? I knew it would hard starting something new because you have to be fully dedicated. But I wanted something new, I wanted history. So that's why I joined Alpha Nu Kappa.

Currently holds the positions of Social and Academic Chair in the sorority. When I asked Aby to describe her experience in these leadership positions, her eyes widened and she sat straight up in excitement. I could tell from her body language that she was committed and connected to these positions.

Aby: We are involved in the Blue Bills program, in which we would go to a continuation school high school called Jack Lyndon in the Van Nuys area. We would advise the young ladies attending and on Fridays we would have our women talks. We would just sit in a circle and discuss any topics that we felt were needed. We did a lot of peace talks with the girls because they had a lot of issues within themselves. We also did the AIDS Walk and recruited men to support other Greeks in academics.

Aby describes her involvement as a collective process. She describes her leadership in conjunction with other members of the sorority by using "we." Aby is committed to work with other young women and other men in the Greek system. Her connection with other young women and men proves that her commitment transcends her relationships with other sorority members.

Meeting Aby

I checked the batteries and then turned on digital recorded. I sat there, anxious and waiting for the next interview. Aby was running five minutes late to the interview. I figured I would allow ten minutes to pass before I sent her an email as a follow-up to our missed appointment. I stood up and paced the floor. I walked over the window and looked out of the blinds. I never met Aby, so I did not have a visual to reference just in case I saw her entering the residence hall's door. My phone buzzed in my pocket. I reached for it and answered.

Vanidy: Hello?

Noelle: Hey, Vanidy. It's Noelle.

Vanidy: Hey, Noelle. What's up? Is everything okay?

Noelle: Well, no. It's Aby.

Vanidy: Oh no! What's going on?

Noelle: She was arrested.

Vanidy: ARRESTED!?

Noelle: Yeah. She's been there since last night. She was arrested at the Occupy

L.A. protest last night.

My heart sunk in my chest. I automatically felt my stomach fall. I was sad, confused, and concerned.

Vanidy: I'm so sorry to hear that Noelle. When you talk to Aby, please let her know I'm here as a resource. You both have my email and you can pass along my phone number to her if she would like to follow-up with me.

Noelle: Thanks, Vanidy. I will let her know. I will pass along her number just in case you would like to follow-up with her as well.

I hung up the phone and packed up my belongings in a dark silence. The next day, I was working in my office in San Diego. The phone rang and it was Aby's number. I quickly answered, stumbling to grab my digital recorder and a note pad.

Vanidy: Hello?

Aby: Hey Vanidy. It's Aby.

Vanidy: Oh my God, Aby! Noelle told me what happened. Is everything okay?

Aby: No but I'm doing better. I'm sorry I didn't show up for our interview.

Vanidy: Aby, I'm more concerned about you. How are you?

Aby: I'm okay. Just really tired. I spent the night in jail.

Vanidy: Oh wow...

Aby: Yeah. I was arrested for no reason. The police just wanted to prove a point.

They pointed in our direction and everyone who was in the area was arrested.

Vanidy: You were at Occupy L.A.?

Aby: Yeah and we were peaceful. The police are so corrupt. They laughed at us while we were in jail. We didn't eat. It was just a horrible experience.

Vanidy: Well, Aby please take care of yourself. Get some rest and don't worry about the interview. Do you have resources at CSUN that you can access? Legal services? A counselor?

Aby: Yeah, I do. I just want to sleep. But, I would still like to meet with you.

Same time and place next week, maybe?

Vanidy: Sure. No problem, Aby. Take care of yourself.

Aby: Thanks, Vanidy. Talk to you soon.

I sat there, distant and connected. I tried to think of what I could possibly do to help her. I could hear the pain and exhaustion in her voice. I was glad that we were able to talk and I appreciated that she called me as a follow-up to our missed interview. In that moment I felt a sense of nostalgia for my work in student housing at California State University—Northridge. I knew that I could do more in that capacity. I could be an institutional resource and an on-campus advocate. I remained present with her by jotting down my observation notes.

Aby: Community, Connection, and Commitment

The next week, Aby called me on my phone to change the location of the interview. I was willing to meet wherever she was comfortable. She suggested her room and I politely agreed. She met me outside of the residence halls. We walked together to her room. She wore a black CSUN sweatshirt and sweatpants. As she opened up the residence hall doors, she said, “I hope you don’t mind that we have to take the stairs.” I replied, “No, of course not.” We continued to walk to her room. The hallway walls were full of decorations and flyers. As we turned left down the hallway to her room, I noticed that there were a number of notes on her door. Then I realized that she was the resident advisor for the floor. We walked in the room and she apologized for the mess. I took out my digital recorder, note pad and interview questions. Just as she started to sit down, there was a knock on the door.

Aby: I’m sorry. I have to get that.

Vanidy: No worries.

Aby: Hey! How are you?

I could not make out the resident's words. But, Aby talked to him about the process for getting priority registration for classes. When she returned she seemed frazzled because her face was red and she apologized several times. I reassured her that I did not mind waiting and we would start when she's ready. She smiled and responded, "I'm ready."

She took a deep breath.

Aby: I learned about Alpha Nu Kappa from Noelle who is a founding mother. Noelle was my Resident Advisor. I bumped into her at a party and my friends left me, I was a freshman. I saw my Resident Advisor and told her that my friends had left me. She told me not to worry and introduced me to another founding mother, and told me that they would take me home. I enjoyed talking to them all. So after that night I saw Noelle during freshman convocation and ANK were having a talk at the women's center. I went and fell in love with the group. I laughed the whole time and forgot about all the problems that I had, it was a real experience. They started having movies nights and I attended. They asked if I would accept an invitation to an informational about ANK. They had also had interviews and I missed the first one because I wasn't sure if I wanted to join and there were other sororities that wanted me to. My family was against the sorority system, because of all the bad stereotypes, but I wanted to get involved on campus.

A Portrait: Nancy's Story

Nancy and I chatted in a cold room in the residence halls at California State University-Northridge. She wore a white knitted hat, a white coat, and gloves. She wore blue jeans. I was surprised she kept on her coat during on series of conversations. Nancy

is a stern, straight-to-the-point woman with particular vernacular that says, “remember me.” Her strong presence engulfed the room because it demanded your complete and utmost attention. Nancy’s story defines the struggle of Alpha Nu Kappa to find its place at the university. Nancy explores her commitment through her definitions of community and her connections to her upbringing and role as a student leader.

Nancy: Community, Connection, and Commitment

Nancy twisted her lips to one side and gazed at the ceiling as she reflected on her experiences as a Black female student leader at California State University-Northridge.

Nancy: My biggest problem has been trying to be me, perform my role as a leader, and trying to be understood at the same time. We are fighting about the status of Alpha Nu Kappa. Are we a sorority or are we a club? I commute out here to ANK meetings and there are was a time where there were only three members at a meeting. I don’t want to waste time or money on a meeting with only three people. The founders found this organization for a specific reason. And right now we’re not living out that reason. Perhaps it hasn’t been passed down. I joined the sorority for a reason, with a purpose and right now I’m not seeing it come into action.

Nancy has specific expectations for her self-defined space in Alpha Nu Kappa. She needs to see commitment from other sisters in the organization. She wants a reciprocal relationship with the organization. Nancy is lacking connection to the organization. She is a commuter student who travels over one hour to attend classes. She has a deep commitment to the organization because of her role as president and status as a commuter student. Yet, Nancy made a profound statement. She desired information to be passed

down to her. She wanted to feel connected to the founders and elder members through the ritual of information sharing. My drive and determination during my undergraduate years was connected to the constant connections I had with elder peers and mentors. Nancy has deep connections with her family and cultural upbringing. She constantly accounted about relating her upbringing to her current leadership status.

Nancy: Us as Black women, because of how we were raised, certain things we don't take in because we weren't raised that way. There comes a time when you're tired of being ignored and overlooked, so I have to be honest and speak my mind. I was raised to always speak my mind because you get walked over and overlooked. I'm from L.A (pause for breath) I'm from the hood. There are certain qualities that you develop because other people don't because of the environment you were raised. People may think by being honest I'm being bossy and mean, in order for us to understand each other, I can only be honest

Nancy had a strong presence and I definitely believe her presence is a direct reflection of her upbringing. Nancy explains that she was not impacted by CSUN as an institution, but rather by Black and Latina Greeks.

Nancy: Black people are so busy trying to compete with each other. We're so busy trying to paint this perfect picture and we don't take the time to get to know each other. We're always in competition, like ANK and the Divine Nine. It's a competition! Everybody wants something and if you've been raised with nothing, when you get it you're going to do whatever to keep it. When I first came into the sorority this was a big issue. I guess people in the Divine Nine don't believe we're a real sorority because we're new. People tell us that we weren't going to be

anything. It's like I said how we were raised. A lot of people in the Divine Nine their parents were in it to...it's legacy. It's like going to coming out shows. When it's time for roll call, they don't acknowledge ANK. But, when we go to a Latina coming out show, ANK is definitely represented. It's a competition thing. We are a predominately Black sorority, we only have one Latina member and maybe they see us as a threat. We're just trying to be ANK. If you grow up as an AKA or a Delta, that's what you're going to be. So, when you grow up and you see another organization, you don't want to know about it. You're going to stick with what you know.

Nancy is a part of the Greek community at CSUN. She sees herself connected to both Black and Latina communities. But, because of competition between historical Black Greek organizations and a local Black sorority, Nancy is disconnected from a sense of acceptance. Nancy once again shares the importance of information sharing through her reference to Divine Nine and legacy. Current Black Greeks of the Divine Nine are perceived to gain their information about Black Greek life from their families. Most members of Alpha Nu Kappa sorority are first generation college students. They did not have access to information about these organizations because they are university based. Yet, like Kimberly, Nancy wants to be noticed. Nancy defines competition by connecting it to cultural recognition. Nancy noticed that Divine Nine organizations do not acknowledge Alpha Nu Kappa at ritualistic coming out shows. However, the Latina sororities always acknowledge them. Nancy desires for information regarding Alpha Nu Kappa to be passed on. She wants the commitment from other cultural organizations to

acknowledge the communities that she represents. However, Nancy feels connected to the organization's advisor, Fred. He acknowledges her presence.

Nancy's journal: Fred takes the time to listen and I feel understood. And even if he doesn't agree with me, he tries to see things from my point-of-view rather than just shutting me down and making me feel like I was wrong. I love and appreciate him. We took the time to get to know one another and went to a few lunches. I feel like I can go to him for anything, even outside of ANK. I know that he will always be there.

Nancy knows that Fred is committed to her. Nancy does not feel a commitment from members of Divine Nine organizations. She is currently the president of Alpha Nu Kappa because her peers believed in her potential. She committed to a large leadership role because she was recognized and felt like she mattered.

Nancy: I got encouraged to run for president and I won. Multiple people encouraged me to do it. I didn't plan on being in a sorority, it just happened. I learned about ANK from sister-to-sister. I attended a few meetings with my roommates who are now members of ANK. From there, I became addicted. I used to go to sister-to-sister chats and I learned about the organization turning into a sorority. Then I heard it was only fifty dollars and I was sold.

I was tickled by her last statement. But, affordability is important to consider when committing to extracurricular activities. She felt considered on multiple levels and affirmed by the sorority. Her financial status as a commuter student was considered; in addition she had the support of multiple members in pushing her towards her role as

president. Nancy is connected to several circles in the CSUN community and she receives consistent validation.

A Portrait of the Actors: The Artist's Use of Portraiture Methodology's Modes of Analysis

The individual portraits described above provide the depth needed to explore the methodological modes of analysis. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) explain that portraiture methodology has “five modes of analysis” (p. 214). First, the artist must identify the refrains used by actors. These refrains are necessary to understand the actors’ complexities in communication. Second, the artist identifies metaphors, rituals, and ceremonies that illuminate the actors’ lived experiences. Metaphors are used as symbols of significance to the actors. These symbols of significance describe rituals that holistically bind the actors to each other. Third, the artist must triangulate the data from multiple sources and must “underscore the points of convergence” (p. 214). Individual portraits describe actors truth and goodness in significant ways, but their stories hold a collective truth. Fourth, the values of the actors and their institutions are identified. Values provide clarity for actors’ ways of describing goodness, truth, and collective knowledge. Lastly, the artist must identify the outliers and find coherence in the setting (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997). The artist searches for all possibilities of goodness, even those that lie outside of parameters of research.

Thus, the modes of analysis ground the portrait in the methodological literature that seeks to illuminate the dimensions of actors’ voices. These modes seek out goodness within the individual portraits and situate them on a larger landscape. Searching for goodness is key to data triangulation in portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis,

1997). While the stories can be read on their own, the depth of their stories lies in these modes of analysis. The actors' stories have meaning that illuminates their experiences across difference. In portraiture it is essential to highlight the points of difference and convergence across narratives (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997). Understanding how these women share their stories in a deeper context methodologically grounds the study.

Actors' Refrains

As the portraitist, I searched for the scattered chaos outside of the themes. I listened intensely at not just *what* the actors shared but *how* they shared their stories. There is an underlying pattern in how they shared their stories. The portraitist listens to the stories and then observes actions. These actions are known as refrains. These refrains are seen in "essential traits that define forms" and move across emotion (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997, p. 233).

When the women of Alpha Nu Kappa come together, you can tell that their bond is deeper than a peer-to-peer interaction. They are smiling, hugging, and laughing together. They inquire about each other's lives beyond, "how are you?" I remember watching two members talking together before an organizational meeting.

Jennifer: How are classes?

Kimberly: (sigh) Ugh!

Jennifer: What's wrong?

Kimberly: I don't want to even think about it. I have to study afterwards.

Jennifer: Well, you have to think about it. You're graduating in May right?

Kimberly: (nods)

Jennifer: (laughs) You better start thinking about it. We won't be meeting for too long.

Kimberly: No, it's fine.

Jennifer: No, it's not. You have to study, so I will talk to Toni about adjusting the meeting so you can study.

In this instance, Jennifer and Kimberly reached beyond organizational commitment by including commitment to academics. As they talked, their body language painted strokes of connection. Jennifer touched Kimberly's shoulder, while Kimberly's eyes remained fixed on Jennifer's face.

There was intense emotion in the room during my observations. When I walked in the room, familiar faces were overjoyed by my presence. I walked over to Noelle, Jennifer, and Toni. We hugged and laughed. There was a moment, a pause of nostalgia. We all looked at each other and realized the connection. I used to work in housing and each of these women used to be Resident Advisors. We all witnessed each other grow in leadership. As a new professional in the field, these three women saw me make mistakes and learn from them as well. From afar, I was able to see them learn and grow together as Black women and leaders. This connection is irreplaceable. The familiar keeps us connected and committed to one another, regardless of time and place.

Actors move through the familiar, occupying multiple places and spaces. Connection moves through multiple spaces and is not limited to particular spaces. Connection lives inside and outside of the classroom. Their refrains form and define connection through how they communicate with one another. Metaphors, rituals, and

ceremonies also emerged from the study, further illuminating community, connection, and commitment.

Actors' Metaphors, Rituals, and Ceremonies

Dear God. Thank you for bringing us together as sisters. We come to you asking for direction. Asking for direction for commitment and involvement. Give us the direction, Lord. We thank you for all things and ask that you stay with us as we leave the meeting. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Before each meeting, women gather together in laughter and a sisterly bond created through secret sorority rituals. One ritual in which I was granted permission to view was the opening meeting's prayer. Prayer connects the sorority to Christian values and rituals. Before each prayer, the women search intensely around the room, looking for who will lead the prayer. The prayer is typically led by someone who is encouraged by another member to lead. Prayer is a shared communal value because every member participates. They all bow their heads and close their eyes as they hold hands. This ceremony and ritual is a metaphor for community, connection, and commitment.

Prayer is a communal ritual for the women of the sorority. They join together in community to share a common bond by holding hands and joining together in unity. They trust each other to lead the prayers and set positive intentions for the upcoming meeting. Prayer connects the women to a larger Christian community. While, I do not know if all of the women identify as Christians, each of them participated in the ceremony and ritual. This bond displays trust in a process that integrates religious ceremonies to organizational business. After the prayer, the energy of the room shifts. What once was a bustling room full of laughter and hugs is now calm and focused. Women are committed to this

ceremony and ritual because it grounds them in a shared bond that provides a sense of focus for their meetings. Actors value prayer as a ritual and ceremony and it symbolizes their connections to something greater than themselves, something that connects them universally.

Another holistic connection between actors is the butterfly as a symbol and metaphor. In every observation I saw the butterfly. It was on promotional materials, internal sorority documents, and members' paraphernalia. The butterfly is the mascot of the organization. Its' wings contain the colors of the organization, chocolate brown and blue. The butterfly as a symbol represents the growth of the organization. Similar to butterflies, the organization is fragile and concurrently experiencing a metamorphosis. The organization is young and struggling to survive on campus. Alpha Nu Kappa started as the sister-to-sister support group and now it has grown a locally-sponsored student organization on campus. Women are committed to Alpha Nu Kappa and endure the pain associated with growing a new student organization. They value its growth by acknowledging this pain. Actors remain involved because of their deep commitment and connection to the sorority. Their values also keep them deeply involved and committed to the organization.

Actors' Values

Women in Alpha Nu Kappa are deeply connected and committed to their involvement in the organization. Their values are seen through these themes. Overall, they value deep commitment and involvement. Their commitment and involvement is seen through their definitions of community. However, their definition of community as it relates to the institution or self-defined community determined how their experiences

are validated. In short, their experiences are contextually validated. Actors' find community and connection through their personal, organizational, and institutional experiences. They define the value of commitment individually and through involvement with different student organizations on campus, including Alpha Nu Kappa. Noelle, as a Music Industry Studies major is highly involved in several student organizations. She juggles these multiple commitments because of her leadership is connected to her passions. Their self-motivation and advisors' inspiration builds community between actors and intrapersonally.

Noelle: I'm also involved in the Hip Hop Think Tank. Hip Hop Think Tank is basically a student club organization on campus at CSUN and basically its main focus is producing and showcasing the five elements of hip hop which is; b-boy, deejay, m.c., graffiti as well as knowledge. Basically making sure that there's a different light that is shown for hip hop. We do that through the student club organization.

I could tell she valued this leadership experience because she sat up and smiled when I asked her to describe her multiple leadership experiences. Aby, who is a Mexican-American student, discussed her value of commitment and its connections to culture when she described her involvement with the student group, Lucia.

Aby: I was in Lucia which is the Spanish club here at CSUN. But the people weren't really committed, there meetings didn't include setting goals and people weren't taking it seriously, I didn't see anyone taking leadership of it and although I started to it didn't seem like people appreciated it.

While Aby found a connection to Lucia because of cultural roots, she withdrew her involvement due to members' lack of commitment. Aby values both culture and involvement. Commitment is more than involvement and reaches beyond assigning leadership roles. Commitment is seen through constant investments which are defined by the actors.

Actors' values of commitment lied in their own experiences and connections with community. They defined how they value community differently, but they each were driven to succeed due to their own self-definitions of community. Community is a complex entity to describe but it consists of personal, organizational, and institutional investments. Community is a large part of how women in this organization view their involvement. They are a part of a local and global community that consists of important agents from institutional and organizational involvement. These agents include family, peers, advisors, and mentors. Described agents maintained their relationships with the actors through constant and consistent validating investments. Relationship maintenance is interconnected through community, connection, and commitment. While Aby is a first generation college student, she describes her family's connection to the university community.

Aby: My mom is huge on diversity and we both wanted me to come to CSUN because the diversity is amazing. [...] My parents always taught me to be open minded and never neglect any other culture. My cousin enrolled at UCSB and within the third day she called me saying that she hated it. She wouldn't leave her room, she cried all the time because she wasn't used to be surrounded by a mostly white population and we ended up moving her out immediately. It just goes to

show how diversity and culture is extremely important because things can clash. Just for a day or second if you don't like the atmosphere because of culture that says a lot.

Aby attended California State University-Northridge because of her relationship with her family and their value of diversity. The value of diversity and culture was shared among the actors. Kimberly did not involve herself in organizations until she realized that there were organizations exclusively for Black students. She wanted to see her cultural heritage represented in organizations:

Kimberly: I was first introduced to clubs and organizations through orientation but I did not think about African American ones. I didn't see many of represented so I did not consider it.

Noelle also shares her thoughts on culture and diversity.

Noelle: I've definitely run across some good and challenging things as a Black woman who's a student leader. My parents always told me that race isn't the most important thing, know your heritage and be proud of who you are. But it wasn't until my first Pan African studies class that had really taken my culture and the pride for my culture to a totally different level. Which ultimately has me as a Pan African studies double major.

Noelle's classroom experiences and relationship with her family defined her value of diversity and culture in the university setting. Diversity and culture are values that are also attached to community, commitment, and connection. Community involves the constant investment of agents, including peers and family. Peers and family have influences actors to choose majors and leadership positions based upon their cultural

representation. Actors remained committed because they holistically see themselves in these culturally-based organizations. They are connected by their shared cultural bonds and value of diversity. While actors had many commonalities, there was one outlier in the study that is important to describe. Outliers also shape the portrait because they contribute to the tapestraic whole (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997). The next mode explores the outliers in the portrait.

Outliers in the Portraits

Nancy's feelings around competition in the Black community were an outlier in the portrait. Nancy was the only actor to discuss Alpha Nu Kappa's relationship with historical Black Greek Letter Organizations, also known as the Divine Nine.

Nancy expressed that Divine Nine members do not support Alpha Nu Kappa events. She highlighted that she felt more support from Latino Greek Organizations. She felt represented and respected because Latino Greek Organizations recognize Alpha Nu Kappa in new member rituals, such as coming out shows. Coming out shows are where new members are introduced to the campus community through performance. Interestingly, Nancy is connected to Latino students on campus because they acknowledge and validate her. Nancy's experiences of competition are unique and deviate from other actors' experiences.

Another outlier in the portrait, or the "deviant voice", was Aby's experience as a Mexican-American student in a predominately Black sorority (p. 223). At first, I wanted to exclude her voice from the study because of her cultural heritage. However, portraiture seeks to illuminate multiple voices, especially the voices that may be silenced (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997). While this study is focused on the experiences of Black

women in locally-sponsored, culturally-based organizations, Aby's involvement is important to highlight. She is the only non-Black member of the sorority. I was curious to hear her story. She was different, and I value difference and so does the methodology. How could I exclude a marginalized voice when much of my lived experience is outside of the margins? She describes her cultural roots in connection with her immigrant parents.

Aby: Both of my parents are Mexican from Guadalajara, Jalisco and I was born in Pasadena so I identify as Mexican American.

However, while her cultural identity was different from other members in the sorority, her portrait still revealed areas of convergence with other actors, as I detail below.

Points of Convergence across Portraits

Seeking for convergence is found in the depth of the emerging themes. Emerging themes are “instances of mattering” as it relates to culture and culture. The instances of mattering share goodness as it relates to actors' lived experiences. As the portraitist, I exposed relevant dimensions which are “areas of mattering.” These areas of mattering are seen through my expertise and artistic lens (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997, p. 219-220).

Emergent themes are important to identify. However, convergence reaches beyond thematic exposure. Convergence is about relevance (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997). Each of the actors revealed stories around the central themes of commitment, community, and connection. However, belonging is the common relevant factor amongst the actors. The actors are committed and connected to each other through self-defined community because they want to belong. Belonging seeks for validation and

commitment from a multitude of inside and outside of classroom agents. Belonging as it relates to validation is explored in the next chapter.

Summary

This chapter presented the results of data analysis related to the cultural and leadership experiences of multiple members from Alpha Nu Kappa sorority. The themes of community, connection, and community were explored as they related to the narratives of the actors. Throughout the chapter, the artist unpacked the diverse experiences of actors inside and outside of the classroom. Chapter five will explore the themes through the conceptual lens of validation coupled with Afrocentrism by illuminating the entire portrait.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The previous chapter results section illuminated the individual themes that emerged from the shared narratives of actors' and portraiture modes of analysis of actors' portraits. In this chapter, I present the portraits as they individually and collectively relate to the conceptual framework and research questions. This study's three research questions were posed to deepen the understanding of cultural leadership experiences of Black women at a Hispanic-Serving Institution. This chapter covers a deeper discussion regarding the findings and implications for further research. However, before that discussion, I summarize the study, review the methodology and conceptual framework, and examine the findings as they relate to emergent themes. This summary review and discussion also connect literature on validation and Afrocentricity to understanding Blackness at Hispanic-Serving Institutions. Next, I address limitations of the study. Finally, I address implications of the student and recommendations for further research related to the study, implications of the study and recommendations for further research are put forth.

Overall, in this study using the methodological lens of portraiture and the conceptual framework of validation coupled with Afrocentricity, the artist unpacked goodness as it relates to leadership and cultural experiences of Black women (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997). With actors sharing their narratives through in-depth conversation and structured journaling, results from this study confirmed that Black women perceive student leadership as a communal process that reaches past organizational bounds. These results are consistent with the notion that interpersonal and academic validation are supportive processes set in place by organizational advisors,

faculty, and peers (Rendón, 1994). Indeed, results from this study suggested that feelings around belonging and commitment expressed directly relate to actors' definitions of community and connection.

Summary of Study

This critical case study addressed the cultural and leadership experiences of Black women in a locally-sponsored, culturally-based student organization at a Hispanic-Serving Institution. In-depth interviews, observations, and structured journaling were conducted to gain insight on how these types of organizations validate Black women. Portraiture methodology framed the overall study (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997). Within the case study design, in-depth interviews (Merriam, 1998), participant observations (Richardson, 2003; Spradley, 1980), and structured journaling (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997) were methods of data collection. Actors were selected using critical case sampling (Creswell, 2005). The analysis was based on coding as it relates to narrative analysis, searching for multiple voice and goodness (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997; Miles and Huberman, 1994). This coding allowed for three themes to emerge: commitment, community, and connection. All three of these themes addressed all three research questions in varying ways. A total of six individual and composite portraits were illuminated through the unique conceptual lens of validation coupled with Afrocentricity.

Overview of the Problem

Black students are at higher-risk for not being retained and persisting at institutions of higher education (Astin, 1993; Harper et al., 2009; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Tinto, 1987). While research shows that Black students are more likely to be successful if

they are involved, much of this research only focuses on their involvement in historically traditional organizations at Predominately White Institutions and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (Astin, 1993; Ross, 2004). These historically traditional organizations include Black Student Unions and Historically Black Greek Letter Organizations (Ross, 2002). However, the experiences surrounding involvement has not been explored in locally-sponsored, culturally-based student organizations at Hispanic-Serving Institutions. This study offers an opportunity to illuminate the stories surrounding involvement for Black women who choose not to be involved in historically traditional organizations at a Hispanic-Serving Institution.

Review of Methodology and Conceptual Framework

Coupled with validation theory, portraiture methodology positions this study to illuminate the voices of Black women at a locally-sponsored, culturally-based student organization. This methodology is an artistic perspective that elucidates marginalized voices. This artistic perspective uniquely situated me in the work. I utilized reflexivity as a process to explore my perspectives and positionality (Chapman, 2007). As the artist, I used introspection and intrapersonal analysis to position the artist in the overall portrait. In portraiture, involved participants are called actors. The artist develops knowledge by focusing on the actors' voices and searching for goodness (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997). As the portraitist, goodness was found by looking for the voice of the actors and listening to their stories and their gestures, documenting what I observed with genuine intensity and even capturing the moments of silence. The voice of the actors were the brush to piecing together the tapestrial whole. Critical case analysis, commits the artist to the study and the relationship with the actors (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis,

1997). In sum, critical case analysis allowed me to transfer the findings to other cases (Patton, 1990).

Validating Blackness

Validation coupled with Afrocentricity highlights student involvement and engagement through a non-Eurocentric approach. This unique conceptual framework indicates limitations in traditional student development theory (Astin, 1985; Rendón, 1994). Specifically, Astin's theory is limited because he does not acknowledge students' different racial backgrounds. As a result, he assumes all students are familiar with how to get involved in campus life. Rendón (1994) removes the pressure of student involvement off the students and places it on inside and outside agents. Validation coupled with Afrocentricity as it relates to Black female leadership is a unique conceptual exploration. In my lived experience, much of the non-traditional student rhetoric does not include Black female voices and stories. Yet, it is important to note that non-traditional students, like Black female students, encounter invalidating experiences from all spectrums of possible support (Rendón, 2002). Afrocentricity uncovers the important trans-cultural contributions of Black people as it relates to story-telling, culture, and history (Asante, 1984). A discussion including an evaluation of the research questions interweaves concepts of validation and Afrocentricity to illuminate to actors' voices.

Actors' Connections to the Conceptual Framework

Each of the actors shared stories that connect to validation and Afrocentricity. Actors have common shared experiences with validation, but in order to honor the individuality of the portraits, each actor's story is contextualized with the conceptual framework. Further, connections to the conceptual framework align with the organization

of the portraits in the previous chapter. Below I position the individual portraits within the larger conceptual framework of validation and Afrocentricity. These connections provide more depth for understanding the themes of connection, community, and commitment. The portrait emerges on deeper levels by understanding these themes in connection with the conceptual framework.

Vanidy's Connections to Conceptual Framework

The evidence of my student success is grounded in Rendón's (1995) validation theory coupled with Asante's (1980) Afrocentric thought. I was connected to my own cultural heritage through rituals that were created by the Black Student Union and my mentor. One of the rituals was a weekly visitation with my mentor. Rendón explains that the first element of validation is the process of institutional agents initiating contact with students. These visitations were initiated and setup by my mentor. He was persistent and intentional. In these meetings we discussed events in my personal life, goals and experiences on campus. He would often provide solutions to dilemmas, but he was also there to just listen. He validated my experiences by just being present.

Validation is best utilized in the first year of a student's academic career (Rendón, 1995). The Black Student Union hosted an overnight and ambassadors program that assisted with the access and retention of Black students at Denison University. I was set-up with a student mentor who connected me to the registrar and other campus entities. She literally walked with me to each area of campus as I secured classes and familiarized myself with campus departments and housing.

Community, connection, and commitment are seen in my interactions with on and off campus agents. I formed a sense of community and family by fostering relationships

that were initiated by my mentor. He introduced me to other members of the Black community and connected me to student organizations. I remained committed to these organizations because I felt a strong sense of cultural and institutional allegiance. The Black Student Union was my cultural connection to understanding the importance of the familiar. I was loyal and committed to the university because of the investments from my mentor and other university agents.

Noelle's Connections to the Conceptual Framework

Noelle connects to family's cultural history to her positionality as a student at California State University-Northridge. Afrocentrism considers cultural history as a part of the human experience (Asante, 1994). Cultural history is interconnected to the daily struggles of the Black experience in multiple contexts. Validation and afrocentrism acknowledges the unique contributions of people of color struggles in international and domestic contexts.

Rendón's (1994) validation theory states that student involvement is reliant on different types of student support inside and outside of the classroom. Noelle received interpersonal validation as a Black female student leader. Specifically, Noelle's family is a touching point for her determination and drive to complete her undergraduate experience with a Bachelors of Arts. Noelle's family keeps her grounded in the importance of always remembering your cultural heritage and not allowing struggles to determine her potential level of success.

In addition to family connections, Noelle has a deep connection to Alpha Nu Kappa's advisor, Fred. He pushes her to move past the struggle. Validation is not complicated. Validation occurs when an advisor or peer is able to acknowledge that

students of color need more than just opportunities for involvement. Rather, people of color, particularly Black women in this context, need a consistent presence to push them towards attaining their goals. Kimberly's story captures her journey towards self-definition as she tries to discover her passions in life.

Kimberly's Connections to the Conceptual Framework

Kimberly finds difficulty is discovering her passion as it relates to her major. While, she wants to be a sociology major she feels stuck in her Political Science major because she is about to graduate. She had a faculty member validate her presence at the university. The faculty member provided academic validation by igniting her passions in the classroom. Kimberly received support from the faculty member outside of the classroom. She felt remembered.

Rendón (1994) asserts that validation creates confirming and supportive environments. In Kimberly's case, she felt supported and that her presence at CSUN mattered. Afrocentrism is connected to Kimberly's cultivation of collectiveness through her commitment and connections to Alpha Nu Kappa. She desired to be a part of something familiar. She saw her cultural heritage in sister-to-sister and Alpha Nu Kappa. She remains committed through her own hopes for the organization and potential. Abby is also another committed member of Alpha Nu Kappa, but her commitment does not stem from a shared cultural heritage.

Aby's Connection to the Conceptual Framework

Aby's words are woven together with memories of her finding community and connection with the sorority. Regardless of her cultural background, she still found

community with Alpha Nu Kappa. She remains committed to the organization because of the individual investments of members. Her older peers, who are also the founding mothers, act as advisors. As advisors they validate her presence in the sorority. When examining her story from an Afrocentric lens, Aby's community, culture, and history are deeply connected to her relationships (Milam, 1992). She describes the development of those relationships in relation to her interpersonal development.

Rendón (2005) explains that interpersonal validation happens when students receive support from agents inside and outside of class. The founding mothers took intentional actions that supported her development and social adjustment to college life. Alpha Nu Kappa provided Aby with a means to stay connected to the university through involvement. She is also connected because of the constant and consistent investments of the founding mothers. They were persistent in letting her know that she mattered. The founding mothers demonstrated a value of humanity by caring about her safety. Validation is affirmed when students are in a confirming and supportive environment (Rendón, 1994). Aby remains involved in Alpha Nu Kappa because of her deep connections with the members.

The founding mothers took extra steps to get Aby involved. Validation is about taking those extra steps to let underrepresented students know that their presence at colleges and universities matters. I do not believe that it is coincidence that Aby is now a Resident Advisor. As a founding mother and Resident Advisor, Noelle made the initial steps in connecting Aby is committed to student involvement. Aby is deeply connected and committed the organization and has created a space at the university because of

interpersonal validation. Nancy's story is quite different from Aby's. Nancy's is a commuter student who remains committed to a local sorority with residential roots.

Nancy's Connections to the Conceptual Framework

Nancy embodies Afrocentrism in her connections to her family history. The retelling of cultural history is deeply rooted in African culture (Asante, 1984). We are connected to our community through information and story sharing. Nancy desires a connection to Alpha Nu Kappa and the Divine Nine community through their commitment to share information. She wants to see herself in multiple communities. She wants to be recognized and noticed. Interpersonal validation occurs between Fred and Nancy. Fred listens to her and provides a platform for her to be recognized. In addition, she is currently in her role as president because multiple peers pushed her to pursue that role. Validation occurs when inside and outside of the classroom agents take that extra step to notice a student. They present opportunities and then provide multiple methods in assisting students to meet their educational and interpersonal goals.

The Artist's Thoughts on Actor's Connections to the Conceptual Framework

The portrait revealed that loneliness is connected to feelings of isolation and burnout for members of Alpha Nu Kappa. By contrast, involvement is seen as a collective effort from all of the members. Validation of students of color allows for them to know their self-worth and self-worth is connected to community and commitment. Through an Afrocentric lens, I note women in the sorority are highly sensitive to their cultural and historical commonalities. Nancy, Kimberly, and Noelle shared experiences with the common phrase, "As a Black woman [...]." They are cognizant of this lived reality and associate their struggles in the sorority with their struggles as Black women on campus.

Surely, these struggles are connected to their need to alleviate a tense campus climate that creates a sense of competition between Black Greek communities. These three women find community in Alpha Nu Kappa, but that community is contingent on a collective sense of commitment. Afrocentricity emphasizes the importance of communal contributions in the context of history and culture (Schiele, 1994). The presence of history and culture are woven throughout actors' telling of struggle to remain visible in their involvement and commitment on campus. Visibility is an important factor for the actors because they each made a commitment to each other within the bond of sisterhood. The next section provides a discussion regarding the study, including an evaluation of the research questions.

Discussion

The unique coupling of validation and Afrocentricity provided a useful lens for deconstructing the experiences of Black women in a locally-sponsored, culturally-based student organization. To explore the results of the study in more depth, the next section will provide an in-depth discussion and evaluation of the research questions.

Evaluation of Research Questions

As the artist I presented three research questions in this study:

1. What is the meaning of student leadership from the perspective of Black female undergraduate students in locally-sponsored, culturally-based student organizations at Hispanic-Serving Institutions?
2. What is the experience of Black female undergraduate students who participate in locally-sponsored, culturally-based student organizations at Hispanic-Serving Institutions?

3. How do these organizations validate the experiences of Black female students within the context of Hispanic-Serving Institutions?

These research questions guided me to unpack the experiences of Black female students in a locally-sponsored, culturally-based student organization at Hispanic-Serving Institution, California State University-Northridge. Five actors shared their dynamic stories that informed key findings surrounding the themes: community, connection, and commitment. Black women in locally-sponsored, culturally-based student organizations find community in their commitment and connection to cultural leadership. These themes are examined below in tandem with the key findings of the study. While the results reveal individual portraits, the key findings report responses to the research questions as they relate to the entire portrait.

Key Findings: The Meaning of Student Leadership

Black female student leaders in Alpha Nu Kappa sorority are grounded in their perceptions of communal participation from peers. They define leadership as a collective process that creates opportunities for involvement and commitment. Validation research states that non-traditional students need constant interventions to negotiate institutional belonging (Rendón, 1994). Leadership and validation occur in tandem for the actors because of the *collective* “we.” The collective “we” is connected to their sense of belonging and involvement. For example, Aby states, “We do community service.” Aby was not alone in her feelings of connection and collectiveness. Aby, as the only Mexican-American sorority member, felt validated by her peers to take on a leadership role in a predominately Black sorority. Validation reaches beyond cultural bounds when employed with direct and sincere intentions. Yet, it is important to note that Aby is a non-traditional

student who found community and connection through her commitment to Alpha Nu Kappa. Each actor discussed leadership and involvement as a collective process by referring to the “we.” For the actors, validation reaches beyond involvement and creates institutional belonging. They are able to remain committed by creating a network of support as it relates to their sense of community and connection to other members of the sorority.

For many of the actors, their position in the sorority is their first exposure to leadership. Leadership was introduced through validation, and because of this validation leadership is connected to self-worth (Rendón, 1994). As seen in the data, validation encourages leadership. Actors define leadership in connection with inside-and-outside-of classroom agents, including faculty, advisors, and peers. If their leadership in Alpha Nu Kappa is their second or third leadership opportunity, they were connected because of a strong presence of validation from outside of classroom agents. In addition, the narratives revealed that leadership is defined as a deep commitment.

Commitment as it relates to definitions of leadership is both self-defined and based on organizational expectations. While inside and outside of classroom agents provide validation, commitment is connected to organizational collectiveness through shared expectations. Actors want members of Alpha Nu Kappa to be present in their involvement. The founders of the organization report that the sorority is at a crossroads in defining commitment as it relates to involvement. Actors do not want to be left alone in their self-defined commitment. Nancy, as a commuter student, drives from Los Angeles to attend Alpha Nu Kappa meetings. However, she questions her level of commitment based upon the presence of others. She correlates the organization’s expectations for

involvement with her definitions of commitment. But, she becomes discouraged if others are not present. She sees a lacking in collectivity and thus feels her efforts to attend meetings is in vain. As seen in chapter two, student engagement is a transformative process that includes interactions with peers, programs, faculty, and administrators (Tinto 1987). In order to engage actors in their leadership, commitment is seen a collective process that involves self-definitions of commitment and lived organizational expectations. Actors' connection to commitment and community relates collective belonging. Belonging is defined by how actors define commitment through involvement in a larger cultural community context.

Actors, because of their connections to a collective culture and history, see themselves as a part of not only the campus community, but a community that interweaves identity and belonging (Asante, 1984). Findings from this study seem to affirm that leadership is defined by actors' motivation and validation from inside-and-outside-of-classroom agents (Rendón, 1994).

Key Findings: The Experience of Actors at California State University-Northridge

Collectively, actors have various experiences at California State University-Northridge. As student leaders, they accessed the organization through their peer relationships. As a new student organization, Alpha Nu Kappa's survival is dependent on the deep commitment from involved members. Actors rely on peers, advisors, and mentors to remain dedicated to their involvement in Alpha Nu Kappa and in the classroom. Women in this organization have multiple roles on and off campus. They are students, leaders, daughters, siblings, and employees.

Actors are involved in community because of personal investments. They are able to define their community through experiences with inside-and-outside-of-classroom agents. Community is determined by multiple interactions. These interactions make up a network of constant engagement. Due to their multiple roles on campus, they are linked to multiple agents. These agents create avenues for belonging. They experience belonging through cultural collectiveness. Women in the organization create their own sense of community. Interaction and belonging is at the center of community for actors. They create interventions to retain their collective commitment to Alpha Nu Kappa. Actors have multiple deepened levels of interaction that create meaning and understanding amongst the women.

While the organization was created as a residential support group for women, Alpha Nu Kappa as a locally-sponsored organization fostered a space for commuter student involvement. Women who commute to organizational meetings set expectations of consistent and deep commitment from other members. They seek out this commitment because of this creation of collective expectations. Commuter experiences are telling of institutional expectations. Nancy, as a commuter student, was adamant about not wasting time in traveling to meetings where only a few members were present. Her experience as a commuter student is connected to her expectations of her chosen community. Community is generated through definitions of belonging and niche creation. These two sentiments are juxtaposed with experiences of isolation.

Community is created through experiences of isolation. Women were seeking for something that would connect them to the university outside of the classroom. These connections are culturally related. While, the organization is predominately Black, it

reaches to Mexican-American and Latina communities. There is an apparent alliance between these two populations because of Aby's deep involvement and Nancy's sentiments around Latina Greek support. There are multiple levels of complexity in creating community through commitment and involvement. Commitment and involvement are deepened through self-defined and personal connections.

Currently, Kimberly is unsure about her future in regards to her passions and academic major. She experiences uncertainty because of the lack of active involvement of classroom agents. Due to this lack of validation, she is about to graduate with a major that will not lead to a career pathway. Noelle, unlike Kimberly, is passionate about her major and career pathway. She has deep involvement in the Hip Hop Think Tank, which is an organization that fosters her passions for the music industry field. Her experience in this organization keeps her engaged in her classroom studies. Noelle's classroom studies and organizational experiences interact with each other on multiple levels of engagement.

Women in Alpha Nu Kappa have various experiences that interweave their multiple and intersecting identities to their involvement in Alpha Nu Kappa. They remain committed because of their shared experience around leadership. Their leadership is connected to a sorority culture that involves rituals and ceremonies. These rituals and ceremonies are only shared with members of the organization. While the organization is new in nature, they are involved because of this newness. They are creating their own space on campus because they experienced isolation and needed a place where they belong. On this point, Hurtado and Carter (1996) explain "understanding student sense of belonging may be key to understanding how particular forms of social and academic experiences affect these students" (p. 324). In this light, actors created their own

community because of the intersecting social and academic experience of isolation. The results of this study seem to support the notion that validation is key to fostering institutional values and investments for retaining Black women and other people of color.

Key Findings: Alpha Nu Kappa and Validation

Alpha Nu Kappa seems to validate women in the organization through their consistent investments from organizational peers and the advisor. Structured journaling revealed that relationships are key to validation. Validation is created through networks of relationships. These relationships are constantly in formation and necessary for deep commitment and involvement. Validation is about seeing students on multiple levels. Alpha Nu Kappa recognizes that members are navigating multiple roles and thus they create networks of support to navigate these roles. Fred, as an advisor, connects with members outside of their organizational expectations. Each actor mentioned Fred's contributions in their in-depth interviews and structured journaling. Fred sets goals with members. These goals are personal and academic in nature. He is invested in their holistic development because of this acknowledges their humanity. They are more than student leaders; they are women who need support and understanding because they navigate multiple roles.

Validation is employed through commitment, connection, and community. Women are committed to the community created by Alpha Nu Kappa. They are connected to each other because constant and consistent validation. Women shared experiences regarding how they became involved in Alpha Nu Kappa. Each of them shared that they are involved because members constantly reached out them to be involved. There was a personal connection that validated that their presence was

necessary. The organization would only benefit from their involvement and it needed their commitment. Alpha Nu Kappa validates members by prioritizing their presence as necessary to existence and growth of the organization. Alpha Nu Kappa is a unique sorority and actors shared stories around navigating the complexity of creating and maintaining a new locally-sponsored organization.

Limitations

The study of a single site case study is extreme and unique. Alpha Nu Kappa is the only sorority of its kind at California State University-Northridge (Club & Organization Directory—California State University-Northridge, 2011). Thus, other researchers or artists may find difficulty to applying this study to other sororities and fraternities on their campuses. However, the study speaks to the relationship between other cultural Greek organizations at Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs). The results of this study revealed that this organization's experiences can be used to illuminate diverse voices at HSIs. Locally-sponsored organizations exist on other campuses and due to the lack of research of culturally-based and locally-sponsored organizations, the results of this study inform the need for more in-depth exploration of unique experiences. While the in-depth interviews, observations, and structured journaling proved to be informative, certainly if they were employed on different participants at a different institution might have generated different results.

In addition to the unique nature of the organization, each portrait is unique and holds to a particular place and time. Illuminating voices from oppressed communities is complex in nature and thus the need for multiple studies employing portraiture in other contexts highlights needs that perhaps this study could not cover. The study only

observed active student members of the student organization. The portrait created from these voices did not include all of the members of the student organization. These aspects limit the study because some voices are excluded from the portrait. However, limitations were addressed in data collection, analysis, and illumination of multiple stories comprising one portrait. The portrait displays that listening and highlighting voices informs educational practice.

Recommendations for Research and Practice

Understanding the complex and intersecting nature of culture and leadership are essential to current educational policy and practice. How students create community and connection through the deep commitments inform the need for inside-and-outside-of-classroom agents. These agents are necessary to validate the necessity for Black women's presence and matriculation at institutions of higher education. Supporting locally-sponsored and culturally-based organizations reaches beyond providing them funding to exist. The next section explores implications of the study as it relates to research and practice.

Implications of the Study: Networks of Support

Findings from this study support the argument that commuter students who are also student leaders in culturally-based organizations need a tight network of support in order to keep them invested through organizational growth and conflict. Advisors are necessary for validating their unique positionality on campus, while also providing them tools to survive through organizational conflict and issues of involvement. Mentorship and peer-to-peer interaction occurs in formal and informal settings. Actors in this study became involved because of these interactions. These interactions are invisible and go

unrecognized. However, this invisibility can cause silencing. Outside of Fred, I was the first person to ask actors about their experiences in the organization. Why are networks of support in silos at institutions of higher education? The survival of unique organizations, like Alpha Nu Kappa, is dependent on how members are validated by multiple inside-and-outside-of-classroom agents.

Implications of the Study: Cultural Leadership Development

Cultural leadership and validation are interconnected. In order to employ cultural leadership on campuses, students of color need constant validation from inside-and-outside classroom agents. Findings from this study support the argument that cultural leadership, like Afrocentrism, is embedded in story sharing. In order to develop student leaders in a way that celebrates culture and invites cultural exploration, leaders must create forums that foster story-telling. A practical method for generating cultural leadership is a day-long leadership retreat that allows for team-building, story-telling, and skill-building around culture and experience. Campus-wide efforts to support cultural development should be prioritized through fiscal and staff support.

Coalition building between cultural experiences creates possibilities for solidarity and allyship. For example, if Alpha Nu Kappa partnered with a Latina sorority through programming or philanthropy, joint meetings for planning should encourage team and relationship building. Creating visible networks of support will allow for students of color to create niches of belonging and alliances with other students on campus. However, fostering cultural leadership development is a campus-wide effort involving staff, faculty, and students.

Implications of the Study: Professional Development for Faculty and Staff

Findings from this study support the notion that validation from faculty and advisors are necessary for the success of people of color on college campuses. Thus, professional development regarding how to validate people of color, and particularly Black women, is necessary for student development. Professional development includes not only training of how to support these vulnerable populations but generating practical interventions to personalize students' necessity and belonging on campus. However, due to the limited amount of research on these organizations, inside-of-classroom agents are unfamiliar with their existence and presence on campus. Community, commitment, and connection can be fostered by inside-of-classroom agents. There are a number of strategies that agents can use to employ validation to members in locally-sponsored, culturally-based student organizations. For example, set consistent one-on-one meetings with members to establish trust. These meetings can be used to establish rapport and send a clear message to members that agents care for their holistic development.

Implications of the Study: Fostering Campus-Wide Dialogue

Findings from this study point to the need for staff and faculty to create the time to establish and maintain a dialogue about the unique position of locally-sponsored, culturally-based organizations. While funding these organizations contributes to students feelings of belonging, they need mentorship and support outside of fiscal maintenance. Students must be a part of the dialogue, as well. As seen in this study, unique stories inform practice. Thus, removing structures that silence students by listening to their stories adds an aspect of empowerment that engages them on multiple levels. Creating a sense of community with members from locally-sponsored, culturally-based

organizations occurs through consistent involvement and investments. Faculty and staff must take the time to check-in with students about their personal lives, and their academic passions. Faculty should remember students' names and invite them to register in courses that they teach, especially if the student has expressed interest. Kimberly's portrait revealed that faculty has the power to ignite or hinder students' motivation. Connection and commitment are exhibited through consistency. While these organizations are unique, archiving their creation and legacy also exhibits a commitment to their continued existence.

Recommendations for Future Research

Institutions of higher education are increasingly becoming more diverse with time (Allen and Turner, 1997). California public institutions are faced with supporting people of color, including support staff regardless of fiscal constraints. Given the complex nature of locally-sponsored, culturally-based organizations at Hispanic-Serving Institutions, more research is needed regarding how these organizations are created and sustained. Professionals who advise these organizations must share their experiences at local, regional, and national conferences and in other professional networks. Senge (2006) asserts that knowledge is produced through information sharing and networks. Research on how Black women create networks of support in non-historical Black Greek organizations will inform practitioners on how to sustain institutional belonging and niche creation on college campuses.

Contrasting student experiences, the narratives of advisors who support locally-sponsored, culturally-based organizations forms an important line of scholarly inquiry. Investigating their experiences can create solutions that integrate validation in practice.

Unveiling these stories can create bridges of understanding that may expose different relationships on campuses necessary to foster student success. In addition, seeking out similar organizations on other college campuses may highlight trends necessary to sustain their institutional presence. Qualitative and quantitative research of these types of organizations nationally may illuminate patterns necessary to understand in order to support underrepresented students on college campuses.

Research on allyship and coalition building between other culturally-based organizations, like Black and Latina Greek organizations, may inform student engagement, involvement, and leadership research. Two important questions to ask in this line of scholarly inquiry are: How do predominately Black Greek organizations create space for other marginalized communities to become involved? How is community created between Black and Latina students at Hispanic-Serving Institutions?

Belonging, loneliness, and feelings of necessity should be explored through empirical and conceptual research. For example, how do Black women create spaces of belonging at Hispanic-Serving Institutions? Further, are these experiences institutional dependent? Student affairs professionals can utilize the findings of this study to inform their practice on campuses. Research should include the stories of Student Affairs professionals who illuminate voices of marginalized populations through practice.

Unique coupling of multiple frameworks to illuminate marginalized voices should be included in higher educational research. The coupling of validation and Afrocentricity illuminated the voices of underrepresented students in Alpha Nu Kappa. However, are there other conceptual frameworks that should be coupled in order to examine unique and

vulnerable student populations? For example, is there a way to connect Black feminist theories to validation and other student involvement and engagement theories?

How does positionality of identity play into validation? As a Black, queer, Masculine of Center, Caribbean-American Student Affairs professional, my identities certainly influenced my commitment to this study. Investigation of student identity development theories can explore the unique experiences of participants and researchers at institutions of higher education.

Concluding Statement

Inside-and-outside-of-classroom agents on college campuses have the power to transform the experiences of underrepresented students. The study highlighted how women in Alpha Nu Kappa who created community and connection through their personal investments through involvement and investment. Illuminating their voices removed the silence of their unique experience at California State University-Northridge, a Hispanic-Serving Institution. We cannot be afraid to seek out the things that are unknown and hidden. As a student leader, I remember that I had to create opportunities of involvement in order to survive the intense campus climate. Women in Alpha Nu Kappa have created a community in which they can struggle together. They remain involved because of their deep commitment. I am committed to the existence of self-defined spaces that support the holistic development and success of underrepresented students. Relationships are essential to creating a network of support for Black women. By creating these networks, Black women create spaces of belonging for other underrepresented students. The exploration of the stories of four women informs the practice for supporting women of color at institutions of higher education. Culture, history, and validation

generate a network of support that sustains women of color. There is much power in fostering relationships with underrepresented students to create a sense of belonging and mattering across systemic structures.

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APPENDIX A: RESEARCH INVITATION

Dear (student name)

My name is Vanidy Bailey. I am a graduate student in the Education, Policy, and Leadership program at California State University-Northridge. I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements of my dissertation and I would like to invite you to participate in my study. I am studying the experiences of Black student leaders at California State University-Northridge. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to meet with me for an interview about your experiences as a student leader for 60-90 minutes.

As a part of this study, we will discuss your experiences as a student leader, your perceptions of student leadership at California State University-Northridge, and your own choices about becoming a student leader, your perceptions of student engagement, and your relationship with faculty and advisors. The meeting will take place at a mutually agreed upon time and place. The interview session will be audio taped so that I can accurately reflect on what we discussed. The tapes will only be reviewed by myself and third-party professional transcriptionist and I will analyze that data. Please be assured that this data will be destroyed. As a participant in this study, you may feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions and have to the freedom to not answer any questions. Although you probably will not benefit directly from participating in this study, we hope that others in the community will benefit from the powerful stories regarding your experiences as a student leader.

Participation is confidential. Study information will be kept in a secure location at the California State University-Northridge. The results of the study may be published or presented at professional conferences, but your identity will not be revealed. If you decide to participate in a focus group related to this study, others in the group will hear what you say, and it is possible that they could tell someone else. Because we will be talking in a group setting, I cannot promise that what you say will remain completely private, but I will ask that you and all other group members to respect the privacy of everyone in the group. You have every right not participate in the study. You may also stop being in the study at any time or decide not to answer any question you are not comfortable answering.

Please contact me should you have any questions about this study. You may contact me at vbailey@ucsd.edu or my dissertation chair, Nathan Durdella at nathan.durdella@csun.edu if you have study related questions or problems. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Office of Graduate Studies, Research and International Programs. Thank you for your consideration.

APPENDIX B: CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

BLACK STUDENT LEADERSHIP

STUDENT INFORMED CONSENT FORM

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Vanidy Bailey (Principal Investigator), M.A., and Nathan Durdella (Faculty Sponsor), Ph.D., from the College of Education at California State University-Northridge. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are (1) a student, (2) a Black student leader, and (3) are willing to share your experiences. **Your participation in this research study is voluntary.**

This consent form includes sections that explain (1) the purpose of the study, (2) procedures, (3) potential risks and discomforts for subjects, (4) potential benefits to subjects, (5) payment to subjects for participation, (6) confidentiality, (7) participation and withdrawal, (8) identification of investigator, (9) rights of research subjects, and (10) signature of research subjects.

Purpose of the Study

This study is an investigation of the experiences of Black student leaders at California State University-Northridge. This research study is part of my dissertation. I am interested in examining the experiences of Black student leaders and perceptions of student engagement at California State University-Northridge. The goal of this study is to enlighten the limited research on culturally based student organizations at colleges and universities.

Procedures

If you elect to participate in this study, you may be asked to do the following: a) participate in a 60-90 minute interview session; b) Maintain an electronic journal.

Potential Risks and Discomforts to Subjects

Given the purpose of the study on issues that may be personal, some interview question could be more sensitive, including questions related to experiences with and/or perceptions of faculty or students, experiences related to academic study within the home and family environment, and feeling about who you are as a student. You may feel uneasy about answering some of these interview questions. You may elect not to answer any of the questions with which you feel uneasy and still remain as a participant in the study. If, after your participation in the study, you feel that you need to seek support services, please contact CSUN's University Counseling Services in Bayramian Hall, Suite 520, 818-677-2366, 818-677-7834 (TTY), or e-mail: coun@csun.edu.

Potential Benefits to Subjects

You may not benefit personally from your participation in this study. However, this evaluation addresses the needs of underrepresented Black students in student leadership. Thus, findings of this study may contribute to our limited knowledge on the subject. The information gleaned from the study may lead to greater awareness of and support for the historically underrepresented students who are current and upcoming

student leaders. The findings may also inform members of the larger community and professional who work in higher education fields in the community.

Payment to Subjects for Participation

Interviewees and/or research subjects will receive a \$10 gift certificate from the CSUN Bookstore.

Audio Recording of Subjects

During the course of the project, subjects may be audio recorded. Your initials here _____ signify your consent to be audio recorded. You will be audio recorded for reasons related to data analysis and interpretation. During the audio recording, you may decline to be recorded and have the recorder turned off at any time during the interview. Digital audio recordings (i.e., files) will be stored on the laptop (password protected) of the principal investigator. De-identified records in the form of transcriptions (i.e., files) will be maintained on the laptop (password protected) of the principal investigator for the period through which findings from the study will be disseminated. After this period digital audio files and transcription files will be destroyed.

Confidentiality of Data

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Names will not be used in the reporting of findings. Every effort will be taken to ensure your confidentiality as a participant in this study. If you consent to participate, you will be assigned a random, three-digit number to protect you. No identifying information will be used, and your institution and/or program will not be identified by name in any published report.

Uses of Data

The information that you provide in this study may be used in institutional reports, instructional material, and/or scholarly presentations and publications. Any information that you provide in connection with this study will not be associated with your name or your personally identifying characteristics. That is, any direct quotations of what you say in connection with this study will be used in published or publically available documents in a way that cannot be associated with you.

Participation, Withdrawal, and Review

Your participation in this study is voluntary. Your participation or non-participation will not affect your standing at California State University, Northridge. You are not obligated whatsoever to answer or respond to any question or to discuss anything that you are not inclined to answer or discuss. You can skip any question, or any part of any question, and will not face any penalty for answering, or not answering, any question in any way. You may ask that the audiotape be stopped at any time and/or may leave the interview at any time for any reason without consequences of any kind. Once your participation in interviews has concluded, you will have a period of 30 days (from the date of the final interview) to review digital audio files and/or transcriptions (whichever are available) from your interviews and/or withdrawal consent and participation in this

study. If you withdrawal consent after participation in the interviews has concluded, digital audio files and/or transcription files (whichever are available) from your interviews will be immediately destroyed.

Identification of Investigators

If you have any questions, concerns, or comments about this research and your participation in this study, you may contact the following: Vanidy Bailey via email at vbailey@ucsd.edu or office telephone at 858-822-0683. In addition, you may contact the following: Dr. Nathan Durdella via email at nathan.durdella@csun.edu or office telephone at 818-677-3316.

Rights of Research Subjects

You may withdraw consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You can halt your participation in the study at any time. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, the details of this study, or any other concerns please contact the Office of Research and Sponsored Projects, California State University, Northridge, 265 University Hall, 18111 Nordhoff Street, Northridge, CA 91330, 818-677-2901.

Affirmation by Signature of Research Subject

I have read and understand the procedures described in this “Consent to Participate in Research.” My questions have all been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Subject

Signature of Subject

Date

Affirmation by Signature of Investigator or Designee

In my judgment the research subject is voluntarily and knowingly giving informed consent and possesses the legal capacity to give informed consent to participate in this research study.

Name of Investigator or Designee

Signature of Investigator or Designee

Date

APPENDIX C: RESEARCH PROTOCOL

BLACK STUDENT LEADERSHIP

STRUCTURED IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW

Interview Session:

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. **Before we begin, I would like to give you the opportunity to read and sign the consent form.** As we discussed, this interview is part of my dissertation study at California State University-Northridge. My faculty advisor, Nathan Durdella, can be reached by email at nathan.durdella@csun.edu. The interview will be used for the purpose of informing my work as a doctoral student in College of Education at California State University-Northridge. During the interview, we will talk about your participation in and experiences as Black student leader in a culturally-based student organization.

This conversation is strictly confidential and care will be taken to exclude all names and identifying characteristics from the data. Further, any responses that you provide will not impact your academic status. I would like your permission to record our conversation on tape so that I can more accurately reflect your thoughts and experiences. We are going to begin the interview. The interview should last about 60-90 minutes. Do you have questions before we begin?

Demographic Questions

Are you currently a leader in Alpha Nu Kappa?

How long have you been a leader in Alpha Nu Kappa?

Have you been a member of other culturally-based student organizations at CSUN?

Leadership

What's your experience as Black woman in your current leadership role at CSUN?

Engagement

Tell me a story about the time you learned about student leadership at CSUN.

Validation

Talk to me about your relationship with Alpha Nu Kappa's advisor.

Please describe your academic experience at CSUN. Please include your relationship with university faculty.

Definitions of Leadership

Please describe your definition of leadership?

What experiences shaped your personal definition of leadership?

What characteristics are essential for a leader to possess?

Why are these characteristics essential?

Thoughts on successes and failures

Tell me a story about a time in which you were successful.

Tell me a story about a time in which you learned to improve.

Conclusion

Do you have anything else to add?

APPENIDX D: STRUCTURED JOURNAL PROTOCOL

BLACK STUDENT LEADERSHIP

ELECTRONIC JOURNAL

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. **Before we begin, I would like to give you the opportunity to read and sign the consent form.** As we discussed, this interview is part of my dissertation study at California State University-Northridge. My faculty advisor, Nathan Durdella, can be reached by email at nathan.durdella@csun.edu. The journal will be used for the purpose of informing my work as a doctoral student in College of Education at California State University-Northridge. As a part of your own reflections, please consider your participation in and experiences as Black student leader in a culturally-based student organization.

This journal is strictly confidential and care will be taken to exclude all names and identifying characteristics from the data. Further, any responses that you provide will not impact your academic status. I would like your permission to use this journal as a part of my data collection and analysis so that I can more accurately reflect your thoughts and experiences. The journal should be maintained bi-weekly and should be submitted on Mondays. Please submit the journal to vbailey@ucsd.edu with the subject line **(Your Name) and Electronic Journal**. Should you have any questions please feel free to contact me at vbailey@ucsd.edu.

Signature of Research Subjects

I have read and understand the procedures described in this “Research Protocol.” I agree to maintain an electronic journal. I have been given a copy of this protocol.

Name of Subject

Signature of Subject

Date

ELECTRONIC JOURNAL

Location of Journal Writing: _____
Date of Journal Writing: _____
Today's Date: _____

First, take a moment to think about the events you wish you capture. Consider your leadership practices, interactions, impressions, etc.

1. What were the main issues or events that relate to your experiences as a Black student leader?

2. Below is the electronic journal. Please record your thoughts and reflections. Consider your places for developing and maintaining relationships with people (formal meetings, events, informal conversations, etc.)

<i>Topics</i>	<i>Journal Writing</i>
<u>Relationships with peers</u>	
<u>Relationships with faculty</u>	
<u>Relationships with advisor(s)</u>	

APPENDIX E: OBSERVATION GUIDE

Observation on the Conversations – Black Female Student Leadership

Location of Conversation: _____

Date of Conversation: _____

Today's Date: _____

1. What were the main issues or themes that stood out to you in this observation?
2. Summarize the information you got (or failed to get) via this observation on the research questions
3. Anything else that struck you as salient, interesting, illuminating or important from this observation?
4. What new, or remaining, questions do you have in considering the next conversation?

Methodological Notes – Black Female Student Leadership

Today's Date: _____

Note in reference to ? _____

Actions needed? _____

Type of methodological concern (circle one):

Coding

Portraiture

Searching for Goodness

1. What are the methodological issues that are concerning you at this moment?
2. What can be done to address this issue, if anything?
3. What new, or remaining, questions do you have in considering this concern?

Conceptual Notes – Black Female Student Leadership

Today's Date: _____

Note in reference to ? _____

Actions needed? _____

Which theoretical framework does this pertain to (circle one)?

Validation

Afrocentricity

1. What theoretical concerns/connections/disconnections are you are seeing?
2. What does this imply for validating the experiences of black student leaders, their relationships and/or community?
3. How might this be incorporated into the portrait of the Alpha Nu Kappa?

Personal Notes – Black Female Student Leadership

Today's Date: _____

Context of reflection (circle one):

Participant

Participant-Observer

Researcher/Portraitist

1. How are you feeling right now?
2. How does that impact the study of Alpha Nu Kappa?
3. How might it inform the portrait of Alpha Nu Kappa?

Note: Post session, immediate observations and reflections

(Context, culture, community)

Personal Notes – Black Female Student Leadership

What just happened during the research?

What did I experience?

Talk about the spaces in which you occupy.

What reflexive notes must be written immediately to capture the experience?

Methodological Notes –Black Female Student Leadership

How is the portrait emerging? (Searching for goodness)

Conceptual Notes – Black Female Student Leadership

How is this conversation mapping of the conceptual framework?

Validation, Afrocentricity?

How can I create a tapestry based on the relationships of Alpha Nu Kappa? Is it about time and space? Or common narratives?

How can the artist build relationships that are related to actors' strengths?

Are stories captured in moments? (pay attention to views, values, acts, actors, buildings, the history of the institution and facts).

What are the connections between individual personalities and organizational culture? (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005). How can the artist connect place and culture?