Progression to Womanhood: A Framework on the Identity Development of Black American College Women

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There are a number of theoretical constructs that highlight the myriad ways that Black women contend with isolation, but few examine the interactions that take place between colleges and Black undergraduate women while they are processing their understandings of Black womanhood. Additionally, current renditions of student identity development theory center upon the "Black experience" or the "woman's experience", but these theoretical constructs lack the intersectional perspective that is required in fully exploring the racial and gender identification of Black undergraduate women. Consequently, Progression to Womanhood considers historical and sociopolitical accounts when describing Black women's progression into adulthood. This conceptual framework discusses the stages of racial and gendered development of Black women in the context of the college setting. Progression connects psychosocial and college impact models in order to more fully explain the intersectional identity developmental experiences of Black college women.

Keywords: Black women, identity development, intersectionality

Black women are doing something right. Though their existence was widely barred from many American institutions – including the educational system – well into the latter half of the 1900s, their presence in said institutions has steadily increased (Anderson, 1988; Lucas, 1994). And while their voices have yet to be recognized and validated within the broader U.S. society, Black women continue to speak. Still, issues stemming from race relations in the United States have influenced the ways that Black undergraduate women situate themselves within institutions of higher education (Anderson, 1988; Collins, 2001; Lucas, 1994). In fact, complex relationships between Black women and higher education have always existed because they experience different standards for academic performance and social integration, expectations that their male and White counterparts do not encounter while attending college (P. Collins, 1986; A. Collins, 2001; Jarmon, 2001).

Although the experiences of Black college women are not monolithic, the literature indicates that they face similar challenges, including covert racism (P. Collins, 2000; hooks, 1981; Solórzano, 2000; Thompson & Dey, 1998), identifying safe spaces to explore new values and belief systems that align with their culture (P. Collins, 2000; Cross, 1971; Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010), coping with a lack of mentorship (Jarmon, 2001; Patton & Harper, 2003), and contending with institutionalized missteps in assisting Black women with their transition onto predominantly White campuses (Brofenbrenner, 1993; P. Collins, 2000; A. Collins, 2001; Gregory, 1999; Jarmon, 2001). These relationships with the college environment play a major role in students' identity development and are reflective of some of the issues that Black women – both inside and outside the academy – contend with when formulating their understandings of Black womanhood (Brofenbrenner, 1993; Phinney, 1990; Sellers, et al., 1997; Stevens, 2002).

There are a number of theoretical constructs that highlight the myriad ways that Black women contend with isolation, but few examine the interactions that take place between colleges and Black undergraduate women while they are processing their understandings of Black womanhood. The literature therefore requires a model that connects Black college women to the

collegiate environment as they undergo the process of identity development. Presented as *The Progression to Womanhood*, this conceptual framework discusses the stages of racial and gendered development of Black women in the context of the college setting.

Race, Gender, Black Women, and Higher Education

Crenshaw (2011) noted that explorations of race and gender tend to be addressed as two distinct experiences and identities. Yet, when discussing issues affecting Black women, including identity development, an intersectional approach is most appropriate for examining the unfolding complexities of Black womanhood (P. Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 2011; hooks, 1981; Tatum, 1997). Crenshaw (2011) explained that there is a "multi-dimensionality of black women's experience[s]…single-axis analysis [erases black women theoretically and] undermine efforts to broaden feminist and anti-racist analyses" (p. 25). In the U.S., acts of discrimination are often only acknowledged as covert, one-dimensional behaviors (Crenshaw, 2011). However, this approach limits the ways we comprehend – and inquire about – the dynamics of power and privilege, which impact how Black women are positioned and conceptualized in racialized and gendered structures (Crenshaw, 2011; Springer, 2007), including higher education. Because racial and gender constructs exist within a society that perceives itself to be post-racial, viewing race and gender as mutually exclusive omits Black women from consideration for social services and policy remediations that exist within most U.S. institutions, including the postsecondary sector (P. Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 2011; hooks, 1981; Tatum, 1997). Such omissions occur when intersectionality is not recognized while issues of equity are addressed, in part because conditions supporting covert racialized sexism are difficult to identify when the focus is centered solely on race or gender (P. Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 2011; hooks, 1981; Solórzano, 2000; Springer, 2007).

Scholar-philosopher Audre Lorde (1983) indicated that as long as people are oppressed in society, inequity will persist. Lorde (1983) asserted that a ranking system does not exist among oppressed groups and that they are interrelated in their oppression. There are, however, variations in how different groups contend with oppression. Black women are uniquely positioned within the system of oppression because their gender and race further stratifies them from the experiences of White women and Black men (Crenshaw, 2011; Springer, 2007).

In her seminal work, *Black Feminist Thought*, P. Collins (2000) explained the "outsider within" paradigm. Collins (2000) suggested that Black women have become perpetually situated in a space where they observe behavioral, cultural, and sociopolitical patterns that often go undetected by others. Known as "marginal intellectuals," Black women possess an incomparable and valuable perspective on postsecondary infrastructures (P. Collins, 2000; hooks, 1981; Patton & Harper, 2003). For example, a Black undergraduate woman attending a predominantly White university may find fault with a cultural program depicting the artistry of an African dance troupe, though the intent of the program was meant to validate the experiences of students of color. From her perspective, the majority of the women dancing lacked sufficient clothing, the dances required educational explanations, and the campus only seemed to feature dance acts when exploring intercultural traditions. In this sense, the young woman connected the impact of the cultural program to her experiences as a Black woman in the United States, perhaps drawing upon collective encounters with racism and sexism when interpreting the displays of African culture. Overall, P. Collins (2000) posited that the experiences of Black women remain on the cusp of critical discourse because the intersectionality of their race and gender impacts the ways they are recognized and supported in U.S. institutions (Anderson, 1988; A. Collins, 2001; P. Collins, 2000; Gregory, 1999).

Currently, gender is defined through the lens of White women and Blackness from a male perspective within the United States (P. Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 2011; Cross, 1971; hooks,

1981; Miller, 1997; Tasker & Negra, 2007). The developmental experiences of Black women are therefore considered primarily inasmuch as their circumstances overlap with White women or Black men (Crenshaw, 2011; hooks, 1981; Springer, 2007; Tatum, 1997). Postsecondary settings that fail to recognize the distinctiveness of Black women's identity development will continue to combat challenges in supporting these students through their developmental processes (Crenshaw, 2011). Crenshaw (2011) urges us to reconsider the ways we have framed our policies and ideas on racial and gender identity development, as we currently assume that allegations of institutional and social exclusion are one dimensional. The preponderance of theoretical literature compartmentalizes identity development, however, in order to obtain clarity on the lived experiences of Black women, these perspectives should be consolidated, creating a single lens that reflects multiple identities. In short, we should disregard dichotomous lenses and aim to interpret identity development from a multifarious perspective.

In the case of Black women in the U.S., race and gender should be examined simultaneously because Black women undergo experiences that are unique to the intersection of two historically oppressed statuses. As descendants of Pan African peoples, Black women continue to contend with the systematic dehumanization that was instituted at the height of slavery and centered upon the deconstruction of their womanhood as it related to their Blackness. Black women have been stereotyped as hypersexual, have been depicted as non-feminine or hypermasculine, and have dealt with constant critiques of their physical features (Springer, 2007; Stevens, 2002). They have been psychologically and physically dismantled in an environment where a strong self-construct leads to positive psychosocial outcomes (Umaña-Taylor, 2011). It is for these reasons that the racial and gender identity development of Black college women calls for an intersectional approach.

Student Identity Development Theory

According to Evans and colleagues (2010), a theory is a concept used to explain and predict a particular phenomenon. Within the field of higher education, we use student development theory to explain and predict behaviors among students in order to intervene and assist them in successfully completing college (Evans et al., 2010). Educators often explore psychosocial and cognitive structural theories, which assist them in predicting students' development in several domains (e.g. intellectual, identity, etc.). Fundamental to student identity development research is the modernist technique, as these theories value individuals' advancement through stages (Renn, 2004).

In college, students encounter several cognitive and psychological changes while affirming their personal value systems and exploring potential professions (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). As educators work to understand how students successfully navigate these changes, several adaptations of psychosocial theory have been utilized to trace students' general cognitive and psychosocial development as they advance through their college careers (Evans et al., 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) are careful to distinguish between development and change when categorizing the theories and frameworks that explain the multi-faceted processes of college student development. They assert: "change refers to alterations that occur over time in students' internal cognitive or affective characteristics...development involves changes in an organism that are 'systematic, [organized, and] successive…and are thought to serve an adaptive function'" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, p. 16).

While there are several categorical differences among models of student development, those that examine race generally fall within the psychosocial group (Evans et al., 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Conversely, models focused on gender may be recognized as

cognitive-structural theory (i.e. –*Women's Ways of Knowing*) or as psychosocial theories (i.e. –*Finding Herself*) (Evans et al., 2010).

Racial Identity Development

According to Umaña-Taylor (2011), "identity that develops as a function of one's ethnic group membership can be generally referred to as one's ethnic identity" (p. 792). Race is multifaceted and is shaped by several layers and influences, including ethnicity, regional differentiation, and socioeconomic status. The concept of race has always been complex. However, it was not until recently that the exploration of race has taken an intersectional approach in order to move beyond the oversimplification of labeling (Umaña-Taylor, 2011). There is value in examining the identity development of racial minorities alongside the sociocultural challenges they face, as evidence suggests that the development of a positively affirmed social identity is more likely to protect people of color from negative psychosocial outcomes, such as chronic stress, poor self-esteem, depression, and anxiety (Umaña-Taylor, 2011).

While it is not exhaustive, Figure 1 demonstrates that there is no shortage of theoretical constructs describing the racial development of Blacks. Despite the fact that there are several theories that attempt to highlight Black identity development, none of these theories go into depth about the gendered experiences of Black women. Understanding the ways that these developmental processes occur, as well as identifying supplemental factors that work towards strengthening the racial and gendered identity of Black college women will aid educators in supporting an underrepresented population that participates in a predominantly White society.

Baldwin (1981)	African Orientation	Self-Extension	African Self-Consciousness		
Phinney (1993)	Unexamined ethnic identity, diffused	Unexamined ethnic identity, foreclosed	Ethnic identity search	Achieved ethnic identity	
Cross (1991)	Pre-Encounter	Encounter	Immersion-Emersion	Internalization	Internalization-Commitment
Atkinson, Morten, & Sue (1993)	Conformity	Dissonance	Resistance-Immersion	Introspection	Awareness
Berry (1993)	Assimilate	Marginalize	Separate	Integrate	
Helms (1995)	Conformity	Dissonance	Immersion-Emersion	Internalization	Integrative Awareness
Cross & Fhagen-Smith (1996)	Infancy and Childhood	Preadolescence	Adolescence	Early Adulthood	Adult Nigrescence
Sellars, Shelton, Cooke, Chavous, Rowley, & Smith (1997)	Salience	Centrality	Regard	Ideology	

Figure 1. Racial and Ethnic Identity Development Models

Traditionally, scholars have relied heavily upon the foundational work of Erikson's (1968) theory of identity development to describe students' developmental experiences (Evans et al., 2010; Umaña-Taylor, 2011). Marcia (1980) adapted Erikson's model, where he outlined four identity statuses: (1) diffuse, (2) foreclosed, (3) moratorium, and (4) achieved. Yet, the perspectives of people of color were relatively absent from both of these theories. Phinney (1993) operationalized Marcia's adaptation into a three-stage model focusing on racial identity. Phinney (1993) was one of the few authors to capture the significance of the association between psychosocial meaning-making from race-based perspectives. Individuals undergoing the "Exploration" stage are explicitly and actively researching their racial roots by way of discussion with family and friends, observing media, and reading literature. Those entering into the "Resolution" stage are becoming more committed to their respective ethnic group and are making sense of what their membership within the group means to them. It is also in this stage that people of color are navigating the degree of importance and relevance that race has played in their lives.

Still, the theory that is most often used to explain the identity development of Black students is William Cross' (1971, 1991) *Nigrescence* model (Evans et al., 2010; Helms, 1995; Renn, 2004). French for "the process of becoming Black," the examination of nigrescence and Black identity development by American psychologists gained momentum in the late 1960s (Cross, 1991). Cross (1991) stated that *Nigrescence* was first conceptualized in U.S. contexts, where Blacks were becoming more vocal and outward about identifying with Black themes and symbolisms during the Black Power Movement. It was around the 1970s that bridges between Black identity development and social movements began to emerge (Cross, 1991). These microtemporal models—which aimed to explore socialization processes that traditionally occurred over expanded periods of time—indicated that individual components of identity transformation transpired as a result of their relationship with social movements (Cross, 1991).

Cross (1991) framed his model around five stages: (1) Pre-Encounter, (2) Encounter, (3) Immersion-Emersion, (4) Internalization, and (5) Internalization-Commitment. Cross (1991) determined that Black Americans in the Pre-Encounter stage generally possess low salient profiles and identify with one of two typologies: "Negro self-hatred" or "high Black affiliation". Both groups place low importance on race, however, the former maintains negative images of race while the latter maintains positive racial perceptions (Cross, 1991). Black Americans progressing into the Encounter stage are becoming more familiar with the sociohistorical implications of race, subordination, and oppression in the U.S. (Cross, 1991). In immersing themselves into the "world of Blackness", Black Americans in the Immersion phase align themselves with strong ideologies and imagery espousing Afrocentricity (Cross, 1991). Emersion is one where Black Americans reclaim authority over their feelings with the understanding that the potential for continued growth is eminent (Cross, 1991). At this point, individuals may find themselves disappointed with their understanding of Blackness and regress, fixated upon Blackness while upholding anti-White principles. Black Americans may also grow comfortable with their identity and choose to recede from issues centered on race (Cross, 1991).

Blacks who advance to the fourth stage of *Nigrescence* recognize that racism is a part of everyday life and have the capacity to identify instances of institutionalized oppression within American systems (Cross, 1991). Finally, individuals who transcend to the final stage of Internalization-Commitment encompass the emotional maturity prevalent in the Internalization stage, while maintaining a high degree of engagement and commitment to Blackness, Black issues, and the Black community (Cross, 1991).

Cross (1991) cautions that, while these stages serve as a precursory measure on how individuals' perspectives may change as the relevance of race intensifies, *Nigrescence* is not a

tool by which to delineate and measure "healthy" behaviors. Unfortunately, Cross' (1991) model fails to consider the fact that the Black Power Movement was built upon—and supported—themes of patriarchy and Black male domination within the Black community (P. Collins, 2000; hooks, 1981). These behaviors are therefore interwoven into the theory of *Nigrescence*, as it explores racial identity development through the lens of the Black Power Movement. Though it takes a multidirectional approach in examining Blackness, *Nigrescence* misses several themes that are unique to the Black woman's experience, including the hypersexualization of Black women's bodies (P. Collins, 2000; Stevens, 2002) and their dependence on other Black women to understand gender within the context of the Black community (Stevens, 2002).

Drawn largely from social identity theory, identity *affirmation* occurs among individuals seeking to attain a positive self-concept (Umaña-Taylor, 2011). For Blacks, achieving *affirmation* involves developing feelings of affinity towards their racial group. Affirmation can be a challenging process for racial minorities, as they face damaging imagery, negative stereotypes, and prejudicial – sometimes violent – behavior on a daily basis (Crenshaw, 2011; Kitwana, 2002). It is for these reasons that racial identity is more presently considered when exploring the psychosocial functioning and development of Black college women (Umaña-Taylor, 2011). Research indicates that Black women exhibiting positive affiliations with their race are more psychologically protected from racism and are more apt to demonstrate positive psychosocial functioning (Umaña-Taylor, 2011). Additionally, demonstrating affirmation of their racial heritage have a less balanced conceptualization of self and are less inclined to experience feelings of depression and suicidal ideation (Walker, Wingate, Obasi, & Joiner, 2008). To this end, a positively affirmed racial identity among traditional-aged Black college women serve as a "significant protective function in the face of negative external influences" (Umaña-Taylor, 2011, p. 796).

Gender in Student Identity Development Theory

Gender is shaped by our families, friends, society, and the media. Gender dictates how we are named and dressed as youth, but it also has broader implications for economic access, resource allocation, educational socialization, and career options later in life (Bussey, 2011). While it is often confused as a construct that is interchangeable with biological sex, gender and sex are not synonymous. Sex denotes an individual's biological characteristics and sexual organs, while gender is the social construct most commonly associated with sex and sex-related roles of individuals (Bussey, 2011). According to Bussey (2011), "gender identity is viewed as part of a person's broader concept of his or her personal identity…[identity formation] is an ongoing process that transforms over the life course" (p. 604). Still, there are various schools of thought that explore gender differentiation, including social science and sociological, humanistic, psychological, and social cognitive. Psychological perspectives center upon the ways in which individuals make sense of their gender, while the social sciences examine the oppressive qualities of gender differentiation (Bussey, 2011). For instance, West & Zimmerman (1987) indicated that the gender identities of men and women are firmly planted in social and economic structures that were developed to control the dissemination of tangible resources.

Though there are several theoretical constructs that examine how women make sense of the world, this manuscript focuses on Josselson's (1987, 1996) interpretation of Marcia's (1966) *Ego Identity Statuses* because of her psychosocial perspective. While there is a great deal of merit in the work of other theorists, Josselson (1987) explicitly emphasized that the preponderance of identity development theories lacked gender-inclusive lenses (Evans et al., 2010). She attempted to organize an approach that validated the unique experiences of women as they undergo the process of identity development.

In her investigation on gender development among women graduating from college, Josselson (1987) expounds upon Marcia's (1966) four statuses of identity development by utilizing Erikson's (1980) "Stages of Psychosocial Development" to support her framework. In classifying women into the statuses of (1) Identity Foreclosure, (2) Achievement, (3) Moratorium, and (4) Identity Diffusion, Josselson (1987) attempts to devise a theory that is non-linear nor one that is positioned around age-related patterns.

Gilligan (1982)	Individual Survival	Selfishness to Responsibility	Self-Sacrifice	Goodness to Truth	Nonviolence
Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule (1986)	Silence	Received Knowledge	Subjective Knowledge	Procedural Knowledge	Constructed Knowledge
Josselson (1987)	Identity Foreclosure	Achievement	Moratorium	Identity Diffusion	
Baxter Magolda (1992)	Absolute Knowing	Transitional Knowing	Independent Knowing	Contextual Knowing	
Interpersonal Knowing (Women) Impersonal Knowing			Interindividual (Women) Individual		

Figure 2. Gender in Student Identity Models

Josselson (1987) noted that previous psychosocial development models were framed around the life circumstances of men as they become more independent and seek autonomy. Most women, however, ascribed to relationship-centered transformative processes, where they utilize their connections with others to situate themselves in society and pinpoint their social roles (Josselson, 1987). Josselson (1987) therefore based her theory in the ways that women formulate their identities through relationships.

The first status, Identity Foreclosure, is one where women have avoided crises and have made early career and relationship commitments that they sustain for prolonged periods of time (Josselson, 1987, 1996). Identity Foreclosures actively seek to recreate their childhood experiences with the families they have built and attempt to maintain cultural traditions (Josselson, 1987, 1996). Known as "Guardians," these women seldom experience substantial personal growth (Josselson, 1987, 1996).

Near graduation, women who transition into the Identity Achievement status are a diverse group and have developed a self-ascribed identity. These women tended to establish psychological independence in adolescence, which increased their capacity to explore identity processes in an autonomous manner (Josselson, 1987). Identity Achievements are more open-minded, less reliant on external social forces to shape their conceptualization of self, and have a supplanted sense of identity rooted in the self (Josselson, 1987). However, when recognizing their achievements, Identity Achievements depend upon their partners or significant others for validation (Josselson, 1987). Known as "Pathmakers," these women forge their own trail (Josselson, 1987, 1996).

The third type, Moratoriums, are those who reside in a perpetual state of exploration (Josselson, 1987). Because our society places a high degree of emphasis on stability and commitment among women, social pressure may cause Moratoriums to feel a great sense of anxiety (Josselson, 1987). These women tend to exhibit low self-esteem, and while this phase may be unsettling, placement in this status is not indicative of long-term challenges (Josselson, 1987). Josselson (1996) describes these women as "Searchers," because they are still affirming their personal value systems and solidifying pertinent life choices.

Of all the identity statuses, Josselson (1987) determined that women of the Identity Diffusion group were the least psychologically developed, exhibited high levels of anxiety, were less independent, and found sustaining intimate relationships challenging. Josselson (1987) suggested that Identity Diffusion is best conceptualized as a normative developmental stage, where women are further categorized in one of four subgroups: severe psychopathology, previous developmental deficits, Moratorium Diffusion, and Foreclosed Diffusion. Women in the first two categories have spent the majority of their lives attempting to overcome early trauma. Women in the third group were actively moving between self-actualization and a state of developmental limbo. Finally, Foreclosed Diffusers were passive and did not feel in control of their lives (Josselson, 1987). Labeled, "Drifters," Identity Diffusers continued to move forward past their undergraduate careers, though they lacked the control necessary to sustain a concrete sense of identity (Josselson, 1996).

In examining the ways women begin to construct their sense of self, Josselson (1987) found relationships between the themes of love, caring, and connectedness throughout her study. However, neither Josselson's foundational work (1987), nor her follow-up piece (1996) addresses the fact that her model—which attempts to assert representations of the woman's experience—lacks the voice of women who have been othered. In addition to the heterosexist undertones that were pervasive throughout her writings, *Finding Herself* is vastly representative of White, middle-class values. The subordinate-dominant power dynamics at play in this text go unrecognized by the author, as the focus of her model centers on (White) women who have been afforded the opportunity to earn a college degree.

Progression to Womanhood

Though they serve as useful templates, existing student development theories inadequately represent the various dimensions of a contemporary and diverse student population (Renn, 2004). When analyzing the racial identity development of multiracial students, Renn (2004) posited that there is an increasing need for theoretical paradigms that account for the relationship between students and their environment (Brofenbrenner, 1993). Additionally, several scholars, including Crenshaw (2011), Miller (1991), and Renn (2004) suggest that many theories specifically omit minority voices. As previously indicated, current renditions of student identity development theory center upon the "Black experience" or the "woman's experience", but these theoretical constructs lack the intersectional perspective that is required in fully exploring the racial and gender identification of Black undergraduate women (Crenshaw, 2011; Josselson, 1987; Miller, 1991; Renn, 2004). Consequently, *Progression to Womanhood* considers historical and sociopolitical accounts when describing Black women's progression into adulthood.

The *Progression to Womanhood* model is situated within the literature, as it connects psychosocial and college impact models in order to more fully explain the intersectional identity developmental experiences of Black college women (Cross, 1971; Evans et al., 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Brofenbrenner (1993) suggests that "development is an evolving function of person-environment interaction [and that] this interaction must take place in the immediate, face-to-face setting in which the person exists" (p. 10). Subsequently, *Progression to Womanhood* is responsive to the ways that students interact with their environments and networks as they advance through different stages of development (Brofenbrenner, 1993; Renn, 2004).

The following ecology model provides a visual representation of the environments within which Black undergraduate women are situated when proceeding through the *Progression to Womanhood* framework. Black Feminist Thought is extensively present in this model, as it demonstrates that Black women encounter similar challenges caused by forces in the exosystem

and macrosystem, though the circumstances presented in the microsystem are unique to individual situations (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 2011; Springer, 2007; Tatum, 1997).

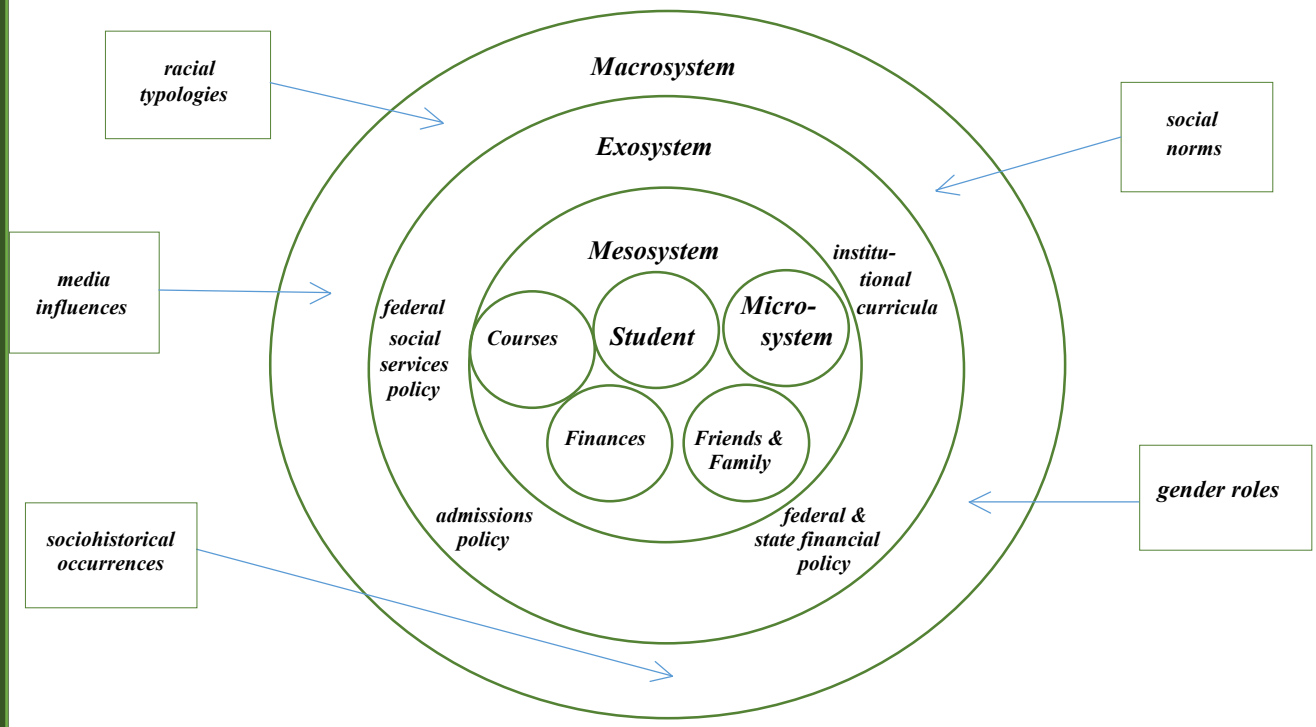

Figure 3. The Identity Development Ecology Model for Black College Women (Adapted from Kris Renn's *Ecology of Multiracial Identity on Campus*)

The Identity Development of Black College Women

Several postmodern approaches to racial and gender identity development aim to explicate the specific dynamics involved in the developmental processes of underrepresented groups (Evans et al., 2010; Parpart & Marchand, 1995). These efforts have been particularly important when considering gender, as patriarchal attitudes have led to ambiguous, ambivalent understandings of gender in the U.S. (Banet-Weiser, 2007; Evans et al., 2010; Parpart & Marchand, 1995). Postracial and postfeminist ideologies distort advances made towards racial and gender equity within U.S. institutions, including the educational system (Collins, 2000; hooks, 1981; Springer, 2007). These issues are important to note when addressing the racial and gender identity development of Black undergraduate women, as this context sets the stage for how they come to situate themselves in society and within the campus environment. Therefore, the *Progression to Womanhood* model incorporates elements from three traditional families of student development theory (e.g., race, gender, and ecology) as understood through an intersectional lens shaped by critical Black feminist perspectives.

Currently, when discussing the identity development of Black women, most educators turn to Cross' (1971) *Nigrescence* model (Tatum, 1997), as it is assumed that race is widely considered the focal point of identity among Blacks, regardless of gender (Crenshaw, 2011). *Progression* therefore integrates gender into the identity processes of Black undergraduate women, as race and gender are both significant aspects of their identity. This linear model includes five stages: Adherent, Novitiate, Explorer, Participant, and Contributor. Progression

through this model is not absolute and students may fluctuate between stages at various points of their college career.

	Adherent	***Novitiate***	***Explorer***	***Participant***	***Contributor***
Identity Development Process During Collegiate Career	Weak concept of Black womanhood.	Increased level of independence.	Navigating challenges against belief systems.	Intermediate experimentation with identity.	Self-classifications established.
	Guardian-based assumptions.	Initial separation from familial-based values and definitions.	Defining and articulating interests.	Exploration of self-selected classifications.	Resolved dissonance between the self and sociocultural understandings of race and gender.
	Interactions with authority figures shapes role in society.	Exploration of how the self is situated in new environment.	Dependence on social network to solidify role on-campus and in society.	Broadened network includes diverse connections.	Internalization of themes on self-reliance, intelligence, and acceptance of diverse standards of beauty.
	Media influences perceptions of Black womanhood.	Engaged in remedial dialogue on race and/or gender.	Engaged in initial exploration of historic and contemporary Black issues.	In-depth research on themes regarding the intersectionality of identity.	Identify with one of two typologies: (1) Low race/gender salience (2) High race/gender salience
	Race takes precedence over gender.		Initial transformation of self-portrayal, image, and linguistic patterns.	Emulation of Black Womanhood. - Peers - Role Models	Role modeling behaviors of Black Womanhood for others.

Figure 4. Progression to Womanhood
A New Framework on the Identity Development of Black American College Women

Adherent

Upon entry into their new college environment, Adherents exhibit a low understanding of Black womanhood. Though they may possess strong ties to the Black community, they have yet to pinpoint Blackness as a salient part of their own identity, particularly through the lens of a woman (Cross, 1971; Stevens, 2002). These young women are still dependent upon the ideologies that were introduced to them in their youth, which shaped their belief systems (Cross, 1971; Cross & Fhagen-Smith, 2001; Stevens, 2002). Because of these attachments to their childhood, women in this grouping continue to rely upon authority figures for guidance in understanding themselves and how they fit into the world (Josselson, 1987; Stevens, 2002). Additionally, Adherents are susceptible to the images and messages that are broadcasted through various media outlets, many of which project one-dimensional depictions of Black women (Stevens, 2002). Yet, these women are unaware that these messages stem from sociohistorical accounts which have shaped U.S. economies and race-based social stratification (Collins, 2000; hooks, 1981). Finally, premature understandings of race cause Adherents to rank the racial aspects of their personhood above their gender (Crenshaw, 2011).

Novitiate

The second stage involves women who have begun to engage with the campus community and are exhibiting higher levels of independence from their home lives (Stevens, 2002). These demonstrations of independence begin to emerge as they encounter challenges made against their personal histories, traditions, and beliefs (Cross, 1971). Eventually, Novitiates either choose to ascribe to their previously-held ideologies or begin to examine the adaptation of alternatives (Josselson, 1987). Novitiates are becoming comfortable with the idea of exploring who they are and how they fit into subgroups, as well as the broader campus community (Helms, 1995). Often, preliminary involvement in student organizations, budding friendships with Black students of diverse backgrounds, and enrollment in general education courses, Black women advancing through this stage are beginning to engage in fundamental dialogues on race and gender (Patton & Harper, 2003; Stevens, 2002).

Explorer

Black women who have advanced to the third stage are individuals who are beginning to successfully navigate challenges against their belief systems and are now open to ideologies that are supportive of Blackness and Black womanhood (Cross, 1971; Stevens, 2002). Explorers are actively involved in learning more about the social forces which have negatively affected the Black community, and they now recognize and understand the themes of power, subordinate-dominate roles, and systems of oppression (Collins, 2000; Cross, 1971; hooks, 1981). Explorers are also becoming more adept in identifying patriarchal paradigms in the broader society, as well as within the Black community (Collins, 2000; hooks, 1981). Though they subscribe to teachings of racial solidarity, Explorers are beginning to question systems of oppression that work against them due to their race in conjunction with their sex (Crenshaw, 2011; Cross, 1971).

Explorers are also starting to demonstrate their ability to think independently and critically, which has a positive effect on their ability to define and articulate their interests, though they remain dependent upon their peer groups in shaping their social identity (Stevens, 2002). Explorers are experimenting with their image, which may cause inner conflict as they are becoming increasingly aware of the negative typographies that have been perpetuated about Black women and stereotypes (with lengthy histories) that their friends willingly replicate (P. Collins, 2000; hooks, 1981; Stevens, 2002). Black college women who also identify with the Hip-Hop Generation may be particularly perplexed, as misogynistic and heterosexist themes that are prominent in many streams within commercialized hip-hop culture run in complete opposition of healthy, balanced self-conceptualization of Black womanhood (Kitwana, 2002;

Rose, 1994; Stevens, 2002). Explorers engaged in the hip-hop community who are not purists – individuals dedicated to grassroot movements within hip-hop – may be learning to compartmentalize their consumption of mainstream hip-hop, or they may be internalizing the messages that are prominent in commercial hip-hop media.

Participant

No longer an observer, Participants are actively and skillfully engaged in the development of their racialized and gendered identities. These women have shifted past basic understandings of Black female archetypes (P. Collins, 2000; Cross, 1971; Stevens, 2002). Black women in this stage are demonstrating high degrees of confidence in shaping their own motifs centered on their personal values, their experiences, and their perceptions of Blackness and womanhood in the U.S. (Josselson, 1983; Stevens, 2002). Participants who previously exhibited dichotomous viewpoints on race, gender, class, and sexual orientation are now more willing to forge relationships with a broader social and professional network (Cross, 1971; Stevens, 2002). Participants are becoming more adept in recognizing the intersections of "otherness" – or marginalization – among minority populations and are self-conceptualizing themselves at varying degrees across a spectrum of identity (Crenshaw, 2011; hooks, 1981; Stevens, 2002). Understanding the dynamics of intersectionality leads women to move past the stratification of social constructs such as race and gender, which contributes to their ability to avoid placing emphasis on one sole aspect of their identity.

In addition to becoming more familiar with literature that examines the othering of underrepresented populations, Participants act as unofficial ethnographers, entering the field and experiencing different cultures first-hand (Cross, 1971; Stevens, 2002). Finally, Participants have successfully identified role models with which they can practice the emulation of Black womanhood (Jarmon, 2001; Stevens, 2002). They have selected mentors, women within their peer group and within the community, who they have determined are skilled in espousing the essence of their own definitions for Black womanhood (Collins, 2001; Jarmon, 2001; Stevens, 2002).

Contributor

Contributors have established a high degree of self-confidence in who they are, how they are situated within their surrounding environment, and what their role is within their immediate and broader communities (Cross, 1971; Stevens, 2002). Contributors demonstrate a sense of self-awareness and community responsibility, though the communities with which they ascribe to may not be *other*-based (Collins, 2000; Cross, 1971). Black women who have advanced to the fifth stage have resolved feelings of dissonance between themselves and societal norms on race and gender. Additionally, they have learned to value the beauty of diversity and no longer subscribe to narrow, demeaning definitions and depictions of underrepresented groups (P. Collins, 2000; hooks, 1981; Stevens, 2002). Though Contributors have internalized self-authored themes of resilience and determination, they may continue to emphasize race and gender, or may choose to focus on other aspects of their identity (Cross, 1971). Those who exhibit high race/gender salience, however, work diligently to model their ideologies surrounding Black womanhood for Black youth, for other Black college students, and for their peers within the broader Black community (A. Collins, 2001; P. Collins, 2000; hooks, 1981; Stevens, 2002).

Implications

In a society where Black women often contend with negative, stereotypical imagery, are suppressed within the broader dialogue on Blackness, and are all but removed from discussions of womanhood, *Progression* is explicit in focusing solely upon Black womanhood and how it

evolves as Black women advance through college. This framework centers on the diverse experiences of Black collegiate women, while recognizing that they may also rely on their environment, peers, and family to develop initial understandings of Black womanhood. *Progression* is distinctive because it acknowledges the sociocultural challenges that Black women face, while simultaneously centering upon the agency that Black women possess in constructing their identities.

Progression also recognizes contemporary themes that are currently present in the lives of many Black college women, including the consumption of media and affiliations with hip-hop culture. Additionally, this framework allows space for Black women who identify with the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, Questioning, and Ally (LGBTIQQA) community to fully express themselves without the confines of heteronormativity. For instance, Josselson (1987) was cognizant that women's gender identity development is fluid and may change over the course of the life span. Still, much of Josselson's (1987) theory explored how women made sense of themselves and their experiences within the institution of marriage and in intimate relationships with men. This framework incorporates a broader spectrum of gender expression and sexual orientation among Black college women.

Additionally, *Progression* highlights a few of the ways that higher education scholars could improve upon studies involving Black college women. Though literature on the experiences of Black college women began to emerge in the 1980s, very few studies have elected to take an adequacy perspective. Rather, the majority of studies on Black women in college take a deficit approach to outlining their issues and formulating recommendations (Collins, 2001; Crenshaw, 2011). *Progression* is unique in that, because it first acknowledges that macrosystems, exosystems, and mesosystems can serve as a challenge to the development of a positive self-conceptualization among Black college women. Second, this framework couches the persistence and advancement of these women in their ability to utilize adversity as a catalyst for personal growth. Researchers are therefore challenged to continue to explore the experiences of Black college women from an intersectional lens and from an adequacy perspective in order to determine how their identity developmental processes may be evolving with shifts in the college environment.

As previously indicated, the racial and gender identity development of Black college women is important because they continue to face difficulties as minorities in a predominately White society. While institutions of higher learning can be welcoming spaces for students while they explore their values and become acquainted with difference, colleges and universities are not immune to stereotypes, bias, and covert/overt racism. In order for Black college women to successfully advance through their academic programs and graduate, it is important that they feel safe within their university community. One way educators will achieve this task is by ensuring that Black college women have developed a positive self-construct, which serves as a preliminary mechanism for psychological and emotional protection against race-based and gender-related bias. In becoming familiar with the ecology model and identity development framework detailed in *Progression*, faculty and staff may also work to build upon their ability to properly identify institutional and individual othering which may impede the academic and social success of Black College women.

As with any model, *Progression* has its limitations. Because this framework centers upon the racial and gender identity of Black women in college, there are socioeconomic implications with this work. While there are a number of Black women enrolled in – and graduating from – colleges and universities throughout the country, there is still a large population of Black women who have been unable to gain access to an advanced education. While the voices of underprivileged Black women may be reflected in this framework, there is a

respective allocation of privilege and social capital attached to the identity development processes of Black college women that must be acknowledged. Further, while this piece works as a conceptual paradigm, the next step in expanding upon this framework includes applying empirical evidence to this structure to test the themes presented in this manuscript.

Conclusion

The racial othering of Black women alongside Black men differentiates Black women's identity development from that of White women, but their womanhood also separates their experiences from those of Black men (Crenshaw, 2011). Though White women were able to distinguish their developmental patterns from White men (Belenky et al., 1986; Gilligan, 1977; Josselson, 1987), theoretical constructs exploring the identity development of Black women remain in limbo because of the juxtaposition of their race, gender, and the sociocultural implications of both within the United States (Crenshaw, 2011). Because it is widely assumed that race is the primary identifying factor in Black women's development, their experiences have been condensed with Black men, as both groups feel racialized subordination (Crenshaw, 2011). Yet, patriarchal attitudes also exist within the Black community which are oppositional to Black women's consciousness (Crenshaw, 2011).

Identity is an internalized system that works to protect us from psychological harm, conjoins us with our interests, values, and loved ones, and reflects our "idiosyncratic libidinal needs" (Josselson, 1987, p. 12). Though our behaviors are socialized in very obvious ways, we form our identities under less apparent terms (Josselson, 1987). The *Progression to Womanhood* framework aims to nest these processes within the context of the college setting for Black undergraduate women. This conceptual map is relevant, as it makes a significant contribution to the existing body of literature that explores student identity development.

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