Abstract

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2009), 12 percent of undergraduate students are single parents; 78 percent of those students are considered low income. Students who are also parents face dealing with the responsibilities of parenting while also having to work and attend class. Time management, healthcare, childcare, and financial obligations are barriers that make persistence especially difficult for single parent college students. Those barriers are especially apparent for women of color (Knight, 2007). Knight (2007), suggests that, “These concerns are significant when conceptualizing issues related to Black females as racist, classist, and sexist systems of oppression and inequality shape school experiences and outcomes, and are triple threats to academic achievement” (p.2).

The purpose of this autoethnography was to explore the author’s experience as an African American single parent college student and as a member of a sorority designed for students with similar backgrounds. More specifically, this study aimed to give light to the affects that intersectionality had on the author’s ability to persist in a higher education setting. This study explored the author’s personal experience in relationship to other African American single mother college students’ experiences during their academic tenure. This study aimed to answer the following research questions: How did the intersections of racism, classism, and genderism affect the persistence of the author? This dissertation also sought to answer what was the impact that a sorority, dedicated to mothers in higher education, had on the author personally, socially, and academically?

This research utilized critical race feminist theory and counter-narratives to describe the microaggressions experienced by the author and other members of the sorority. The counter-narratives dove deeper into the core of the single parent college student experience. They uncovered the social isolation, the lack of understanding from faculty and staff members, and the extensive pressure to succeed despite all odds. Findings revealed that the author suffered from the consequences of multiple intersections of racism, sexism, and classism. She not only had to deal with external indicators of oppression but internal as well. Providing support for this growing population is essential for student connectivity, student development, and persistence.

Defense of Dissertation Committee

Matthew Davis, Ph.D.
Kimberly Allen, Ph.D.
Thomassina Hassler, Ph.D.
Carl Hoagland, Ph.D.