

INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

UMI

**A Bell & Howell Information Company
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
313/761-4700 800/521-0600**

"TAKE THE BLINDERS FROM YOUR VISION,
TAKE THE PADDING FROM YOUR EARS"

by

Georgianna Glose

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Social Welfare in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Social Welfare, The City University of New York

1996

UMI Number: 9618069

**Copyright 1996 by
Glose, Georgianna Inez**

All rights reserved.

**UMI Microform 9618069
Copyright 1996, by UMI Company. All rights reserved.**

**This microform edition is protected against unauthorized
copying under Title 17, United States Code.**

UMI
300 North Zeeb Road
Ann Arbor, MI 48103

©1996

Georgianna Inez Glose

All Rights Reserved

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Social Welfare in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Social Welfare.

October 2, 1995
Date

Michael J. Smith
Chair of Examining Committee

Oct 2, 1995
Date

Marie S. ...
Executive Officer

Michael Fabricant

Joel Walker

Harold Weissman

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Abstract

"TAKE THE BLINDERS FROM YOUR VISION,
TAKE THE PADDING FROM YOUR EARS"

by

Georgianna Glose

Adviser: Dr. Michael J. Smith

This is an ethnographic study which documents the daily incidences of institutional racism in the lives of forty African-American Roman Catholic sisters and former sisters. During an eighteen month period, the participants were interviewed about their experience regarding the outreach, recruitment and membership process in predominantly white congregations of women religious. An open-ended questionnaire was developed for use on an information-rich sample, using the snowball technique. The focus of the study is the description of the organizational and attitudinal supports and obstacles experienced by the participants. Components and factors of the experience suggest a cultural ignorance on the part of the predominantly white congregations of women religious. Applications to Human Service organizations are discussed.

EQUALITY

by Maya Angelou

You declare you see me dimly
through a glass which will not shine,
though I stand before you boldly,
trim in rank and marking time.

You do own to hear me faintly
as a whisper out of range,
while my drums beat out the message
and the rhythms never change.

Equality, and I will be free.
Equality, and I will be free.

You announce my ways are wanton,
that I fly from man to man,
but if I'm just a shadow to you,
could you ever understand?

We have lived a painful history,
we know the shameful past,
but I keep on marching forward,
and you keep on coming last.

Equality, and I will be free.
Equality, and I will be free.

Take the blinders from your vision,
take the padding from your ears,
and confess you've heard me crying,
and admit you've seen my tears.

Hear the tempo so compelling,
hear the blood throb in my veins.
Yes, my drums are beating nightly,
and the rhythms never change.

Equality, and I will be free.
Equality, and I will be free.

Maya Angelou, I
Shall not be
Moved, Random
House:New York,
1990, p.12.

Acknowledgements

I want to acknowledge my appreciation to the members of the committee who supervised this dissertation. Dr. Michael J. Smith offered guidance and assistance throughout the project and patiently understood the need for changes in deadlines. Dr. Michael Fabricant helped me find the qualitative research strategies I needed. Dr. Joel Walker offered his expertise, his enthusiasm and his insights to the project. I am most grateful to these fine mentors. I want to acknowledge the support of New York City Technical College which provided a fellowship leave for me so that I could finish the project. The Sisters of St. Dominic of the Holy Cross supported my study and provided essential support for traveling and the use of the computer lab. I am deeply grateful to my sisters for their help.

This project was encouraged by the Nia House Board of Trustees through its chairperson, Cheryl Smith. I want to thank Cheryl for her friendship and encouragement. Mrs. Joanne Evans and Brother Cyprian Rowe, members of the Board, were invaluable sources of support and encouragement. Mrs. Evans provided many of the contacts that led to very productive interviews. Without their support and assistance the project could never have been completed. I am deeply grateful to them for their help, their friendship and their courage.

Throughout the coursework and preparation of the project, I was supported and encouraged by generous colleagues. Ms. Lenore Hildebrand offered interest and encouragement in the bleakest of moments. Our monthly meetings became an opportunity to report progress and gain nurturance for the next set of tasks to be accomplished. Mr. Jim Normandy provided continued interest and support and made it seem as if this huge task could be accomplished. I am deeply grateful for all that they have done.

I want to express my gratitude to the courageous women who consented to become part of the study. During the lengthy interviews, painful moments from the past were often discussed. I am grateful for their generosity and candor. Their sorrows and hardships, I hope, will help predominantly white congregations of women religious create a more welcoming environment for African-American women.

No project of this magnitude can be accomplished without the continual assistance of a generous reader, editor and encourager. S. Sally Butler did all of this and more; she patiently waited as each step toward the completion of the project was attempted. I am deeply grateful to her for the many hours of assistance she offered and the continual

encouragement she provided. I want to thank my family for their patience during the entire period of this task and my mother for her nurturing support. The many "get away" hours of writing were made more pleasant by her presence and assistance. Finally, I want to thank my friends and colleagues who have offered their warmth and understanding during the preparation of this project.

Dedication

For the Nia House project and the courageous women pioneers who seek welcome and acceptance in predominantly white congregations of women religious.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

"We Have Lived A Painful History" The Nature of the Problem

Introduction	1
Historical Perspective	2
Church Authorities Acknowledge Racism	6
U.S. African-American Catholic Church	9
Women Religious Address the Issue	10
What Needs To Be Done	13
Summary	17

Theoretical Background

Introduction	18
Definition of Networks and Social Support	19
Description of Social Support	25
Functions of Social Support	27
Context of Social Support	29
Differing Theories and Approaches	29
Instruments	35
Studies and Outcomes	42
Institutional Perspective	58
Summary	62

"Equality And I Will Be Free" The Development of the Project

Introduction	63
The Search	63
Nia House	66
Interest	70
Contribution	71
Summary	72

Study Design

Introduction	73
Qualitative Inquiry	75
Questionnaire Development	78
Sampling	79
Sample Size	80
Interview Process	82
Units of Analysis	84
Reliability and Validity	85
Summary	86

"You Do Own To Hear Me Faintly" The Interviews	
Introduction	88
The Vocation Directors Speak	91
The African-American Women Speak	122
Summary	159
"I Keep On Marching Forward" The Issues	
"Confess You've Heard Me Crying"	161
"Admit You've Seen My Tears"	214
Summary	243
"Hear The Tempo So Compelling" The Analysis and Applications	
Introduction	244
Study Trends	246
Applications	279
Summary	293
Bibliography	295

"WE HAVE LIVED A PAINFUL HISTORY"

Nature of the Problem

Introduction

Racism permeates the history of African-Americans in the American Catholic Church. While other Christian churches have recognized the fervor of African-American members, the Roman Catholic church has generally failed to attract and integrate these Americans. In the 1980's, American Roman Catholic Bishops and Pope John Paul did address the problems of racism in the Church. Now, African-American Catholic membership increases and African-American Catholics articulate their needs, the United States Catholic Church needs to respond.

Congregations of women religious in the United States have also been part of "de facto" segregation. African-American women who have sought to enter religious life have encountered many obstacles and have been routinely guided to the three predominantly African-American congregations in the United States. While a few predominantly white religious congregations permitted some African-American women to enter their membership, these congregations were ill-equipped to deal with the barriers and obstacles caused by racism among their white members. (Lately, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious has begun to address some of the issues raised by African-American sisters.) The decision to enter religious life is a complex one but it is made more difficult by the insidious effects of racism in American religious

congregations.

This section explores the history and develops the key areas of interest for this study.

Historical Perspective

Racism has permeated the history of the Roman Catholic Church in America. "While the United States Catholic Church and people have recognized the necessity of reinterpreting some teachings of the world-wide Church and reshaping American society in order that the national Church might be faithful to what it understood to be its Christian and civic duty, it has greater difficulty understanding and supporting or acting to aid African-Americans it once enslaved and now discriminates against to secure fairness and justice in America."¹ The most devastating effect of this institutional racism in the Church was the denial of the priesthood and religious congregational life (leadership roles) to African-American men and women. The Catholic Church in pre-Civil War days was bound not only in the slave members of the Church, but bound also by the intellectual and social structures of her clergy and people, who felt constrained to justify what many Catholics elsewhere had come to find unjustifiable.² "At the third Plenary Council of Baltimore, Bishop Elder (1865-1884) shared the sentiments of many U.S. Bishops when he thought that a colored

¹William Preston, "A More Perfect Union: The Silence of the Church," America, March 1990, p.315.

²Charles D. Burns, "Vocations in a Church that Transcends Race," Origins, Feb. 4, 1988, pp. 588-591.

clergy would be, at that time, an injury to religion, because they would not command the respect of the priesthood."³ Between 1829 and 1842, two attempts were made to found a religious community of African-American and White women but civil laws prevented it.⁴

The work of Catholic activists like Daniel Rudd, who published the American Catholic Tribune and spearheaded a series of Afro-American Congresses from 1889 - 1894, raised the issues of membership and support. "The five Black lay Congresses from 1889-1894 were a conscious effort by Black Catholic lay leaders to assert their Catholic faith, their pride in this faith, the need for an end to racism in the church and their hopes for a massive conversion of African-Americans to Catholicism."⁵ These meetings led to the development of the Committee for the Advancement of Colored Catholics in 1916 by Dr. Thomas Wyatt, whose primary concern was the aid of World War I veterans. This organization would later become known as the Federation of Colored Catholics and finally, as a result of an internal split in 1940, as the Catholic Interracial Council.

While these organizations developed goals which focused on improvement of services to African-American Catholics, they

³Martin Carter. S.A., "Where is the Black Church on Racism?" Ecumenical Trends, V. 16, 1987, p.177-180.

⁴Charles Burns, p.589.

⁵Cyprian Davis, "Brothers and Sisters to Us: The Never Ending Story," America, March 1990 p.319.

were unable to overcome the institutional racism evident in the Church.⁶ "In my childhood, Catholic Churches were segregated. All of them. For the immigrants, the Church was the wellspring of support for religious identity, social and material needs. For Blacks, the Church was mired in institutional racism."⁷ Thea Bowman recalls, "when I was a child in Canton, Mississippi, I wasn't welcome in many Catholic Churches in my homestate. I'd go in and they'd tell me to sit in the back pew."⁸ At the beginning of this century, outside of southern Maryland, southern Missouri, southern Louisiana, and western Kentucky, most African-Americans were either Baptist or Methodist. With a well organized leadership structure of articulate and dedicated religious leaders in their own churches, most African-Americans looked upon the Catholic Church as white and consequently anti-African-American.⁹

In a recent study of church affiliation among African-American adults, over two-thirds (n=2107) were reported to be official church members. The study findings demonstrate the

⁶Cyprian Rowe, "Brother Cyprian Rowe, Black and Catholic," America, March 29, 1980, pp.262-264.

⁷Robert L. Robinson, "Robert L. Robinson, Black and Catholic," America, March 29, 1980, pp.257-259.

⁸Thea Bowman, FSPA, "Forged By History," Horizons, Fall 1989, p.8.

⁹Charles D. Burns, p.590.

importance and centrality of religion to African-Americans.¹⁰ Women are more likely to attend church than men, according to the study. For African-Americans, the Catholic tradition has been one that represents a higher status orientation and may represent an important religious factor in the secular experience.¹¹ Thirteen church memberships in south east Michigan and north west Ohio were part of a study on the climate of different religious groups. On the whole, the small African-American Protestant congregations were characterized by higher levels of stability, expressiveness, social concern and sense of community. This picture is consistent with the descriptions of the African-American church as a central source of personal and social support and identity. The African-American church is also the base for social change. The large white Catholic parishes in the study were characterized by low levels of expressiveness and high levels of stability and social concern. This finding is reflective of the formalistic institutionalized social action oriented description of many Roman Catholic parishes.¹² These

¹⁰Robert J. Taylor, "Structural Determinants of Religious Participation Among Black Americans," Review of Religious Research, 1988, pp. 114-125.

¹¹Larry Hunt and Janet Hunt, "Black Catholicism and Occupational Status in Northern Cities," Social Science Quarterly, V. 58, 1978, pp.657-670.

¹²Kenneth Pergament, William Silverman, Steven Johnson, Ruben Echemendia and Susan Snyder, "The Psychosocial Climate of Religious Congregations," American Journal of Community Psychology, V.11, 1983, pp. 351-381.

studies highlight essential differences which must be addressed by congregations of women religious which hope to enter into a multicultural environment.

Today African-Americans account for 1.2 million of the 54 million Roman Catholics in the United States. In a poll by the National Office of Black Catholics, 89% of the respondents identified racism as a problem in the parish, school, diocesan and arch-diocesan structures and 73% were concerned about the alienation of young African-Americans.¹³ While there are approximately 53,000 priests in the American Catholic Church, only 300 are African-American and of those only 12 are Bishops.¹⁴ "Given the many movements on behalf of self-determination and black power among African Americans, it seems odd that the Church's 1,100 Black parishes are headed by 1,040 white priests and only 60 African-American priests.¹⁵ There are 128,378 members of religious congregations of women; 700 are African-American. Of the 700 African-American religious women, 430 belong to three African-American congregations¹⁶. It is these startling statistics and the experience of African-American women religious which led to the development

¹³"Black Catholics Express their Concern over Racism," Jet, Dec. 1, 1986, p.39.

¹⁴Richard N. Ostling, "Black Catholics vs. the Church," Time, V. 134, July 10, 1989, p. 57.

¹⁵William Preston, p.316.

¹⁶M. Elaine Dillhunt, OSF, "Needed: More Black Women in Religious Life," Sisters Today, 1988, V. 60, pp. 91-94.

of this study.

Church Authorities Acknowledge Racism

In 1979, the American Catholic Bishops issued a pastoral letter, entitled "Brothers and Sisters to Us," acknowledging the existence of racism as an enduring evil in the American Catholic Church. The history of African-Americans in the Catholic Church in many ways parallels the history of African-Americans in the United States¹⁷. This pastoral letter sparked new interest in the development of a program to sensitize clergy to the problems of racism,¹⁸ and one year later Bishop Walker of Washington, D. C. called for the church to fight racism in the hiring policies, in the appointment of local committees, and in the worshipping community.¹⁹ "A way must be found to enlarge the number of Black priests and Church spokesmen who are visible to White and Black Americans."²⁰ A predominantly White clergy suggests that African-Americans are incapable of responsible positions in the structure and undercuts every effort of African-Americans to create a positive identity for themselves as Catholics.²¹

¹⁷Bill Kenkelen, "Black Catholics Extend Equality Fight," National Catholic Reporter, V.16, Feb. 15, 1980, pp.4-6.

¹⁸Bill Kenkelen, "Beautiful Message, Little Action," National Catholic Reporter, V. 16, Feb. 15, 1980, p.48.

¹⁹ "D.C. Bishop notes: Church Should Continue Dual Fight Against Racism," Jet, Feb. 19, 1981, p.41.

²⁰William Preston, p.316.

²¹Ibid.

In 1989, Pope John Paul issued a statement entitled, "The Church and Racism, Toward a More Fraternal Society," which recommends positive initiatives "beginning with the conversion of minds and hearts without which structural change would be in vain." This document plainly states that the church's vocation to promote equality has been betrayed by the sins of her own members.²² The Pope's message suggests that racism and ethnocentrism are world wide issues which should be addressed. In Africa, for example, the native indigenous clergy have assumed the direction of the particular churches, on both the diocesan and parish levels. Unfortunately, congregations of religious women in Africa are still under the direction of a predominantly White hierarchy.²³ The African clergy has had to limit the recruitment of young women to religious life by foreign religious institutes because "it has left a trail of disillusioned women who believed that they were sent abroad for further studies only to find out that they were meant to supply domestic services."²⁴

The Vatican's interest helped to highlight the issue of racism and the concerns shared by some members regarding the exclusion of those of African descent from among the clerical and religious congregations around the world.

²²George W. Hunt, ed. "Toward a More Fraternal Society," editorial America, March 11, 1989, pp. 211-212.

²³M. Gerard Nwangwu, "Women Religious and the African Synod," Review for Religious, July-Aug. 1992, p.510.

²⁴Ibid.

In the United States, the problem is deeper and more difficult than access to a particular lifestyle. The external signs of blatant racism have disappeared in the American Church as they generally disappeared in American society but institutional racism still persists in the Church as it does in American society.²⁵ The historic polarity between African-American and White in this society is a model for a range of phenomena related to power and powerlessness.^{26,27}

U.S. African-American Catholic Church

Among desegregated churches, the Roman Catholic Church has the largest membership. It is the largest denomination among African-Americans today and continues to grow due to immigration, return and conversion of African-Americans to the Church. This segment of the church is fast becoming multicultural and multilingual.²⁸ If the Church is to continue to minister to these members effectively, it must begin to develop leadership opportunities for men and women of color. African-American Catholics continually face their own particularity as a people set apart, not only negatively by

²⁵Cyprian Davis, "Brothers and Sisters to Us: The Never Ending Story," America, March 1990, p.320.

²⁶Gayraud Wilmore, "The New Need for an Intergroup Coalition," The Christian Century, 1982, pp.170-174.

²⁷William Preston, p.316.

²⁸Martin Carter, "An African-American Catholic Perspective on the Unity of the Church," Midstream, V.28, Oct. 1989, p.356-368.

prejudice, but also positively by their culture and history.²⁹

At the most recent meeting of the Black Catholic Caucus, the National Black Pastoral Plan was approved. The plan addresses the African-American Catholic's "search for internal unity or personal wholeness." The need for the study of cultural and historical contributions of African-Americans is highlighted. The plan requires the development of cultural resources in order to support African-American Catholics in moving toward wholeness.³⁰

Women Religious Address the Issue

In 1988, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, composed of all the administrative leaders of congregations of women religious of the Roman Catholic tradition, addressed this issue at its September meeting, and issued a statement acknowledging their commitment to "wear away the rock of racism in the church and in society."³¹ This statement is supported by a host of articles on the racist practices found in religious congregations, many of which are centered on recruitment and admission to membership in the congregations of women religious. Sister Yolanda Tarango noted, for example, that "racism manifests itself in the way religious

²⁹Charles Burns, p.591.

³⁰Martin Carter, "An African-American Catholic Perspective on the Unity of the Church," Midstream, V.28, Oct. 1989, p.356.

³¹Pat Windsor, "LCWR Tackles Racism in Communities and Society," National Catholic Reporter, Sept. 1988, p.20.

orders recruit new members and in the way they are treated after joining.³² Sister Teresita Weind, SND recalls that "In 1960 when I decided to enter the convent out of high school, there were religious orders who were either not accepting Negro girls or taking only so many. A number of places refused me either because they wouldn't take Negroes or because they had reached their quota for the year."³³ Often the prejudice Teresita encountered alienated her from her own identity, e.g. "You're Negro, but you are not like the others. You're nice."

Sister Francesca Thompson entered an all-white congregation of women religious and attributes her success in gaining membership to a positive appreciation of her African-American heritage and an understanding of her self worth. Sister recounts the story of a young African-American aspirant who, on her investing (the ceremony in which a young woman is permitted to wear the habit of the religious congregation and fully enter its spiritual and communal life) was asked to be invested in the sacristy, a room off the main altar of the Church where the priest gets dressed for services, rather than at the altar with the other white young women who were being invested, because "we just can't afford to irritate the white

³²Ibid.

³³"Interview with Sister Teresita Weind, SND" U.S. Catholic, March 1983, pp. 24-29.

parents of the other aspirants."³⁴

Sister Jeanette Nitz comments, "I have long experienced the fruit of racism which continues a kind of enslavement for African-Americans and other people of color in our society and in the Roman Catholic Church and in our (Dominican) order."³⁵

Elaine Dillhunt, OSF, notes that religious communities must adopt a less rigid, more open mind-set relative to recruitment. "The negative attitudes toward Black people are based in fear and not in reality".³⁶

Sometimes the obstacles are subtle, and not identified as racism, but nonetheless they are barriers to membership. One former director of novices recounts her experience, "In yet other instances, language barriers and transcultural trauma affected the outcome of admission. Perhaps, in these matters I was naive in not assuming greater weight to the difficulty that such factors would bring to the formative experience when I accepted into the novitiate persons too recently arrived in this country or too recently converted to the church."³⁷ While these reasons for an individual's inability to remain in congregational life are plausible, the aspirant is, in a

³⁴S. Francesca Thompson, OSF, Sister Francesca Thompson: Black and Catholic," America, March 29, 1980, p.260.

³⁵M. Jeanette Nitz, "Bartolome de las Casas, a Cross Thread Dominican," Dominican Ashram, 1983, p.58.

³⁶M. Elaine Dillhunt, OSF, "Needed : More Black Women in Religious Life," Sisters Today, v. 60 1988, pp.91-94.

³⁷M. Ingeborg Rohner, OSF, "Answering the Call of Christ," Review for Religious, July-Aug. 1985, p. 487.

sense, blamed for this failure to acculturate or adjust to the communitarian lifestyle. There is no mention made of the attempts of the congregation to meet the needs of the aspirant who was undergoing such an enormous transcultural change.

The decision to pursue a religious vocation, while it is uniquely personal, is one that depends upon the priests and sisters who provide the needed information and support through the process of application. It is a decision which must be supported by friends and family, by mentors and role models and by the religious congregation. The individual who makes this momentous decision must know her own identity and must be proud of who she is. She must be willing to embrace many new, different and even foreign experiences and learn from them. All of this is possible when she is supported by friends, family and congregation.

What Needs To Be Done

Generally there are two major areas which are of concern to African-American women religious: one is the support and assistance of young African-American women in their career choice and the second is identifying and removing the institutional obstacles which prevent African-American women from membership in religious congregations.

Religious congregations must do more than open their doors to people of different races and cultures.³⁸ "As a

³⁸Mary G. D'Arcy, "The Challenge of Cultural Diversity," Horizons, Fall 1989, p.7.

African-American vowed woman, I'm especially challenged to share the African-American spiritual experience and journey as it relates to the formation of young African-American religious in our predominantly White congregations... A real effort must be made on the part of every member of the congregation to develop an appreciation for African-American culture, and to warmly welcome the candidate whose cultural identity is different from their own."³⁹

A positive environment offering multicultural opportunities would be optimal.⁴⁰ Often the Houses of Formation are located in all white communities with little or no access to cultural diversity. "If the initiate can actually experience his or her culture in the parish or in a specific Christian community, distinctions could be made which would identify 'yours, mine and ours'."⁴¹ It is exceedingly important for people entering religious life to realize the continuity between values they were given in their families and the values outlined in their new religious lifestyle.⁴²

The individual who wishes to join a community which has another cultural orientation must be a person who knows her

³⁹Anita Baird, DHM, "Culture and Vocation: The Black Candidate," New Views, The Newsletter of the National Sisters Vocation Conference, Summer 1987, p.8.

⁴⁰Pat Forster, OSF, "Cross Cultural Formation: Culture Does Make a Difference," Review for Religious, 1985, p.506.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Jennifer Mary Alt, "Rerooting Religious Life in South Africa," Review for Religious, July-Aug. 1992, p. 520.

own identity as different and cherishes that identity while knowingly entering into and acculturating to the community only in so far as her uniqueness and richness are not compromised.⁴³ It is imperative to provide support, networks and culturally appropriate counseling opportunities to these women, if they are to be successful.

The African-American family relies on its communitarian nature for support, that sense of community must be nurtured and strengthened if the individual is to be successful and survive in religious life.⁴⁴ Congregations must be open to change the set of experiences in the formative years which distance the initiate from the family, friends and other supportive members.

In a sense, a young African-American woman entering a predominantly White religious congregation is entering into two cultural changes, that of religious life and that of White culture. This is a complex change. "The personality of the individual will remain in spite of acculturation, and in fact, it becomes exaggerated in its strengths and weaknesses. This alone can be very difficult for an individual because without much notice the anger they knew within themselves before, seems to have twice its potential. The passivity of an individual identified previously, now seems twice passive."⁴⁵

⁴³Pat Forster, p.509.

⁴⁴Anita Baird, DHM, p.9.

⁴⁵Pat Forster, p.511 ff.

The young woman must be counseled in these normal phenomena.

In order to develop more multicultural settings, the congregations of religious women must be more open to experiencing "the dynamic joy of African-American Catholic worship and must make every effort to encourage their African-American members to share their faith experience in prayer and liturgical worship."⁴⁶

There is a need to reinforce a social supports, enhance networks of religious mentors and to provide educational and informational opportunities for those interested in entering religious life. In addition, the institutional obstacles must be identified and a process for change needs to be identified in congregations of women religious who want to meet the challenges of a multicultural society. These issues seem to be at the heart of this qualitative study for a unique program for young African-American women who aspire to religious life today.

While a similar project was undertaken in Philadelphia in the 1980's and it has since closed, there have been no studies on this aspect of congregational life for women religious. This study documents the importance of addressing multicultural issues from a theoretical and practice perspective.

⁴⁶Anita Baird, DHM, p.8.

Summary

In this section, the problems of racism in the Roman Catholic Church have been discussed. The awareness of the Church authorities about this problem is evident in the Bishops' Pastoral letter on Equality and in the Papal document on racism.

Congregations of Women Religious are also aware of the problem and have begun to address it. The needs of a multicultural society make it imperative to respond to the issues and concerns raised by African-American women religious. In particular, the concerns of preserving the identity and enhancing the acceptance of a different cultural style are articulated. Two distinct and interactive areas of concern are articulated: one is the development of network mentors and the process of the enhancement of social supports to assist a young woman in her career choice, and the second is the discovery of institutional obstacles which inhibit the success of these young women. This qualitative study, the first of its kind, is designed to begin the process of discovery to assist both the individuals and the congregations for successful initiation of a multicultural membership to respond to the needs of our American society.

Theoretical Background

Introduction

The theoretical underpinnings for the development of the project are based on the concepts of social support and the enhancement of supportive networks. It is hoped that the successful development of supportive networks and enhanced social supports will assist the participants in their career choice and provide them with the resources they will need to successfully to sustain that choice.

While specific models for this program are not available, a review of the literature on social support and attendant theoretical concepts will help in framing the analytical and evaluative portions of this study. In examining the experience of a young African-American woman engaged in the process of searching for a welcoming religious congregation, it is clear that some of the facets of this experience include: lack of control; perception of aloneness; lowered self esteem; alienation because of differences in culture, food and spirituality; and pressure to perform in a particular manner. These experiences can be stressful. Gutierrez comments that research has established that women of color struggle with the double burden of racism and sexism which exacts a toll on their mental health and restricts their opportunities.⁴⁷

The stress model indicates that there is another path

⁴⁷Lorraine Gutierrez, "Working with Women of Color: An Empowerment Perspective," Social Work, V.55, March 1990, pp. 149-153.

that can be investigated in the study of how stress affects individuals. "We have seen that the outcome of the stress process is dependent not only on the individual's ability to cope with stressful events, but also on the material and social supports that are available to the individual."⁴⁸

Definition of Networks and Social Support

A natural support system is defined as the set of presently significant others who are either members of one's social network or affiliated mental health professionals.⁴⁹ A social support network refers to a set of relationships, both quantity and structure, that provide nurturance and reinforcement for coping with life on a daily basis.⁵⁰ These networks refer to the social connections provided by the environment and can be assessed in terms of structural and functional dimensions.⁵¹ Networks are influenced by individual choice and capacity, and environmental factors.⁵²

⁴⁸S. N. Dohrewend, "Social Stress and Community Psychology," American Journal of Community Psychology, V. 6, p. 1.

⁴⁹Barton J. Hirsch, "Natural Support Systems and Coping with Major Life Changes," American Journal of Community Psychology, V.8, 1980, pp. 159ff.

⁵⁰Elizabeth M. Tracey, and James Whittaker, "The Social Network Map: Assessing Social Supports in Clinical Practice," Families in Society, V.71, October 1990, pp. 461-470.

⁵¹Mary E. Porcidano and Kenneth Heller, "Measures of Perceived Social Support from Friends and Family," American Journal of Community Psychology, V. 11, 1983, pp.1-24.

⁵²Harold Perl and Edison Trickett, "Social Network Formation: Personal and Environmental Determinants," American Journal of Community Psychology, V.16, April 1988, p.207.

The density of the network refers to the number of relationships that exist among the members of an individual's natural support system as a proportion of the total possible numbers of such relationships.⁵³

A network analysis, observing density, multiplexity and reachability, can assist in determining social embeddedness which refers to the connections that individuals have to significant others in their social environment. While the presence of the ties as potential assets for social support is quantified, the quality of the content of these ties has not been subject to scrutiny.⁵⁴ A multidimensional relationship is one in which two different kinds of activities or behaviors important to the social support of the individual takes place.⁵⁵ Perceived multidimensionality refers to the number of types of support an individual believes he or she might expect to receive from a network member during a stressful event. Perceived support reciprocity refers to the extent to which an individual believes reciprocity exists between the individual and the network members. The perceived network size refers to the number of supportive members that a person

⁵³Barton J. Hirsch, "Natural Support Systems and Coping with Major Life Changes," American Journal of Community Psychology, V.8, 1980, p.159 ff.

⁵⁴Manuel Barrera, "Distinctions Between Social Support Concepts, Measures and Models," American Journal of Community Psychology, V.14, 1986, pp.413-445.

⁵⁵Barton J. Hirsch, "Natural Support Systems and Coping with Major Life Changes," American Journal of Community Psychology, V.8, 1980, pp. 159 ff.

believes is available during times of stress. Perceived network conflict refers to the extent to which an individual believes that conflict exists between the individual and the members of the supportive network.⁵⁶ Social support is an exchange of resources between at least two individuals perceived by the provider or the recipient to be intended to enhance the well-being of the recipient.⁵⁷ Social support happens in the many different ways people render assistance to one another: emotional encouragement; advice; information; guidance; and tangible assistance.⁵⁸ Other researchers have described support in terms of when it is rendered. "Social support is a set of behaviors and interactions between an individual and other people during times of stress for that individual which serves to restore emotional and instrumental equilibrium to the individual in the midst of the stressful event."⁵⁹ The set of people who engage in these supportive activities during times of stress are the supportive network.⁶⁰ There are five overlapping components of support which appear repeatedly in theoretical and experimental

⁵⁶E. Oritt, Stephen Paul, and J. Behrman, "The Perceived Support Network Inventory," American Journal of Community Psychology, V.13, p.565.

⁵⁷Sally Shumaker and Arlene Brownell, "Toward a Theory of Social Support," Journal of Social Issues, V.40, 1984, pp.11-36.

⁵⁸Elizabeth M. Tracey, and James Whitaker, pp.461-470.

⁵⁹E.Oritt, Stephen Paul, and J.Behrman, p.565.

⁶⁰Ibid.

writings. These facets of support are: Cognitive guidance, the need for information, guidance and advice; Emotional support, the feeling of being loved and cared for; Socializing, the sense of social integration, belonging to a network of communication; Tangible assistance, assistance with physical help; and Confidant, the availability of someone for self disclosure.⁶¹ Qualitatively, social support is defined by the nature of the resources provided by one person to another or by the specific content of the social interactions.⁶² Another way of defining support is focused on its occurrence. Initiation of support-seeking behavior is the extent to which an individual actively solicits support from network members during a stressful time.⁶³ "Enacted support refers to the actions performed to render assistance to the focal person."⁶⁴ Satisfaction with support is the personal gratification resulting from the perceived effectiveness of the network members support in reducing stress and restoring emotional and instrumental equilibrium.⁶⁵ In quantitative

⁶¹Joan Fiore, Joseph Becker, and David Coppel, "Social Network Interactions: A Buffer or a Stress," American Journal of Community Psychology, V.11, 1983,pp. 423-439.

⁶²David Perkins and Murray Levine, The Principles of Community Psychology, New York: Oxford Press, 1987, p.176 ff.

⁶³E. Oritt, et. al. p.565.

⁶⁴Manuel Barrera, "Distinctions between Social Support Concepts, Measures and Models," American Journal of Community Psychology, V.14, 1986, pp.413-445.

⁶⁵Ibid.

terms, social support has been operationalized as the number of people in an individuals network, the frequency of contact with the members of the network, the degree of demographic homogeneity of the members in the network, the proportion of redundant ties, or the degree of reciprocity in the supportive transactions among the members.⁶⁶ Tardy notes that there are five facets of social support which should be considered in its definition. These five facets are: direction (who gives and who receives support), disposition (availability and enactment of support), description and evaluation (how is support offered and is it satisfactory?), content (emotional, instrumental, informational), and network characteristics.⁶⁷

The perception of support availability influences both its use and the satisfaction level of the recipient of the social support. Perceived support refers to social support at the cognitive appraisal of being reliably connected to others.⁶⁸ These intervening perceptions precede the supportive interactions between the individual and the supportive network.⁶⁹ In this perception is the belief by the individual that his or her needs for support, information and

⁶⁶David Perkins and Murray Levine, p. 176 ff.

⁶⁷Charles H. Tardy, "Social Support Measurement," American Journal of Community Psychology, Dec.1985,p. 187.

⁶⁸Manuel Barrera, pp.413-445.

⁶⁹E. Oritt, et. al.,p.565.

feedback will be fulfilled.⁷⁰ The availability of network members during stressful times is part of that belief.⁷¹

Self esteem is a personal resource which is used in appraising and dealing with problems. It may be enhanced or diminished by the self-threatening nature of stressors or the extent to which recent stress has been handled successfully.⁷² There also has been speculation as to whether support affects well-being through enhancement of self-esteem by providing coping assistance or some other mechanisms.⁷³ Coping requires both competence in problem solving and managing one's feelings effectively.⁷⁴

Social resources are defined as the strength used by the individual in the process of coping. Resources precede and influence coping which mediates stress.⁷⁵

From the literature, it is clear that the five components of support: cognitive guidance, emotional support,

⁷⁰Mary E. Procidano and Kenneth Heller, p.1-24.

⁷¹E. Oritt, et. al., p.565.

⁷²Ruth Cronkite and Rudolf Moos, "The Role of Predisposing and Moderating Factors in the Stress Illness Relationship," Journal of Health and Social Behavior, V.25, 1984, pp. 373-393.

⁷³Leora Rosen, and Linda Moghadam, "Can Social Supports Be Engineered? An Example from the Army's Unit Manning System," Journal of Applied Social Psychology, Nov. 39, p.1292.

⁷⁴Alex Gitterman, "Building Mutual Support Groups," Social Work With Groups, V.12, 1989, p.6.

⁷⁵Charles Holahan and Rudolf Moos, "Life Stressors, Personal and Social Resources and Depression," Journal of Abnormal Psychology, V.100, Feb.1991, p.31.

socializing, tangible assistance and a confidant, should be evident in any intervention which seeks to enhance social support.

Description of Social Support

Since Durkheim studied what he called "anomie" in the suicide rates and that those who committed suicide had fewer social ties, researchers have been trying to define the dimensions and facets of social support. Caplan, for example, defined social support as consisting of significant others, sharing tasks, and providing money.⁷⁶ Three areas of social support delineated by Sidney Cobb are information leading the subject to believe that he is cared for and loved called emotional support, information leading the subject to believe that he is esteemed and valued (esteem support) and information leading the subject to believe that he belongs to a network of communication and mutual obligation.⁷⁷

Cohen and McKay propose that different stressors engender needs for different types of support, and that specific sources of support are differentially appropriate for each of these needs.⁷⁸ The hypothesis on which the concepts of social support are based include the idea that psychological

⁷⁶Arlene Brownwell and Sally Ann Schumaker, pp. 1-9.

⁷⁷Sidney Cobb, "Social Support as a Moderator of Life Stress," Psychosomatic Medicine, V. 38, 1976, pp. 300-314.

⁷⁸Marybeth Shinn, Stanley Lehmann, Nora W. Wong, "Social Interaction and Social Support," Journal of Social Issues, V.40, 1984, pp. 55-76.

stress will have deleterious effects on the health and well-being of those with little or no social support, while these effects will be lessened or eliminated for those with stronger support systems.⁷⁹ Much of what is known about the effectiveness of social support is based on field studies of naturalistic relationships and transactions. Social support interventions, particularly those that attempt to create new support providers, stretch the limits of our knowledge base.⁸⁰ There is an articulated need to determine the kinds of support that are most crucial in different contexts and the conditions that maximize the beneficial effects of support.⁸¹

There have been very few studies including a multicultural environment with the dynamics of social support in that environment. A study of this type would add to the knowledge of the concepts of network and social support.

Functions of Social Support

Shumaker and Brownell list the specific functions of social support as: gratification of affiliative needs, self-identity maintenance and enhancement, self esteem validation

⁷⁹Sheldon Cohen and Garth McKay, "Social Support, Stress and the Buffering Hypothesis: A Theoretical Analysis," in Baum, Singer and Taylor, eds. Handbook of Psychology and Health, New Jersey: Erlbaum Press, 1984, pp.253-267.

⁸⁰Manuel Barrera, Jr., "Social Support Interventions and the Third Law of Ecology," American Journal of Community Psychology, V. 19, Feb. 1991, p. 85.

⁸¹Charles Depner, Elaine Washington, and Berit Ingersoll-Dayton, "Social Support: Methodological Issues in Design and Measurement," Journal of Social Issues, V. 40, 1984, pp.37-54.

and enhancement. These functions work to reduce stress and influence the outcome of the stressful situation.⁸² Wills focused his attention on the interpersonal nature of social support and described its functions as: "esteem support, which increases feelings of self-esteem; informational support, which involves providing necessary information; instrumental support, defined as providing assistance with instrumental tasks; and social companionship, which involves various kinds of social activities."⁸³ In the area of esteem support, some theorists suggest that those who believe their inability to control important outcomes is due to their own incompetence, that is, personal helplessness, will have low levels of self-esteem; while those who believe their inability to control a stressful event is due to something that no one is able to control, universal helplessness, will not show a lowered level of self-esteem.⁸⁴

In their natural settings, people encounter threats to self-esteem, that is, occurrences that raise doubts about their own ability, social attractiveness, or career performance. Having someone available with whom one can talk to about problems is called esteem support. This kind of support is expected to have its greatest effect primarily for

⁸²Sally Shumaker and Arlene Brownell, pp.11-36.

⁸³Thomas Ashby Wills, "Supportive Functions of Interpersonal Relationships," in Cohen and Syme, eds., Social Support and Health, New York:Academic Press, 1985, pp.61-79.

⁸⁴Sheldon Cohen and Garth McKay, pp. 253-267.

persons who are under considerable stress.⁸⁵

In the discussions on social support, theorists often link mutual obligation and reciprocity as relevant to the motives and actions of the recipient of supportive exchanges. While the limitations of the reciprocity model are that nurturance is somehow quantifiable and a value can be affixed to each resource, it does offer some implications for researchers to consider. They are:

"1. If one cannot return a benefit, then they will ask for help less.

2. If reciprocity is prevented, then relations between providers and recipients will diminish.

3. Some recipients will have their burden moved from the informal to the formal support system."⁸⁶

Social support offers benefits for the provider of support as well; it provides a self validating experience which may increase the feeling of self efficacy. The costs of providing support must also be considered as they will contribute to the providers ability to sustain the needed support.⁸⁷

The function of social support: providing cognitive guidance, emotional support, socializing, tangible assistance, and confidants, is an important aspect of the development of

⁸⁵Thomas Ashby Wills, pp. 61-79.

⁸⁶Sally Shumaker and Arlene Brownell, pp. 11-36.

⁸⁷Ibid.

a network of mentors.

Context of Social Support

Each supportive action has many dimensions. Generally these include the functions, resources and exchange properties of the supportive action. However, other dimensions such as the characteristics of the participants, including their affiliative needs, privacy needs, stability of self concept, autonomy, relational needs and demographic factors and the characteristics of the place, including support in a particular domain and opportunities for contact.⁸⁸

The domain and opportunities for contact provide an important aspect to the study of social support and the development of a network of mentors.

Differing Theories and Approaches

In the course of several studies, new hypotheses and different approaches have been proposed to describe the process of social support. Four of these are: the buffering hypothesis, network analysis approach, social comparison theory, and coping assistance.

The buffering hypothesis states that at high levels of life change, social support protects the person from the deleterious effects of stressful life events, but at low levels of life change, social support is unrelated to the

⁸⁸Ibid.

level of psychological stress.⁸⁹ Cohen and McKay suggest a refinement of the hypothesis, specifically, stressors and stress experiences can be categorized in terms of those that elicit coping requirements for tangible support, appraisal support, self-esteem support and belonging support and only those interpersonal relationships that provide the appropriate forms of support will operate as effective buffers.⁹⁰ At its most ambitious level, the buffer theory tries to account for the onset of psychiatric disorders; good social support reduces the risk of illness in the face of adversity.⁹¹ Dean and Lin suggest that stress buffering occurs in the primary group because this group functions: "to provide mutual responsibility, caring and concern. It gives strong mutual identification, emphasizes the person as a unique individual rather than his or her performance and provides face to face interaction and communication. The primary group also provides intimacy, close association and bonds, and is the source of support, affection, security and response."⁹² Efforts to substantiate the buffering hypothesis have been

⁸⁹Brian L. Wilcox, "Social Support, Life Stress, and Psychological Adjustment," American Journal of Community Psychology, V.9, 1981, pp. 371-386.

⁹⁰Sheldon Cohen and Garth McKay, pp. 253-267.

⁹¹Ruth Alloway and Paul Babbington, "The Buffer Theory of Social Support," Psychological Medicine, V. 17, 1987, pp.91-108.

⁹²Alfred Dean and Nan Lin, "The Stress Buffering Role of Social Support," Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease, V. 165, 1977, pp.403-417.

inconclusive but these studies have revealed new characteristics of the network. For example, depending on a person's stressor level, different network dimensions must be emphasized and strengthened.⁹³ Wilcox noted that the quality of the supportive relationship may be of much more importance than the quantity.⁹⁴ This study modestly supported the buffering hypothesis, while a large community sample (n=1,000) in Los Angeles failed to demonstrate a buffering effect on depression.⁹⁵ Using an experimental analogue, 75 female undergraduates were assigned to one of three conditions: tested alone, tested with a stranger or tested with a friend. First, the subjects completed the Perceived Social Support Scale, the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory and the Palmer Sweat Test and then they were told that after a waiting period they would be asked to answer a number of personal questions while being videotaped. Subjects accompanied by a friend showed smaller increase in state anxiety than the other two groups. No significant buffering effect was found.⁹⁶

⁹³Carl I Cohen, Jeanne Teresi and Douglas Holmes, "Assessment of Stress Buffering Effects of Social Network on Psychological Symptoms," American Journal of Community Psychology, V. 14, 1986, p.75.

⁹⁴Brian Wilcox, pp.371-386.

⁹⁵C. Aneshensel and J.D. Stone, "Stress and Depression: A Test of the Buffering Theory," Archives of General Psychiatry, V. 39,1982, pp. 1392-1396.

⁹⁶Clint Bowers and Ellis Gesten, "Social Support as a Buffer of Anxiety: An Experimental Analogue," American Journal of Community Psychology, V. 14, 1986, pp. 447-451.

Social network analysis attempts to describe systematically the composition, structure, and content of interpersonal ties in naturally occurring settings and relates these network descriptions to the study of stress, social support, and other health care issues.⁹⁷ Community ties are informal links of companionship and aid between individuals and networks are patterns formed by these links. Over time personal networks change. Networks are more than the sum of discrete two-person ties, floating free in physical and social space. They are structures that help to determine which persons are available for interaction, what resources are available for use and the extent to which these resources can flow to network members.⁹⁸ There are two popular ways of delineating personal networks in terms of a structural and stability network responses. Miliardo describes three distinct assessment strategies based on close associations, specific social exchanges, recency and frequency of interaction. Some researchers suggest that assessments that emphasize only the closest or most supportive ties may present a different picture of a person's social world than network approaches

⁹⁷Alan Hall and Barry Wellman, "Social Networks and Social Support," in Cohen and Syme, eds., Social Support and Health, New York: Academic Press, 1985, pp. 23-41.

⁹⁸Barry Wellman, "Networks as Personal Communities," in Barry Wellman and S. Berkowitz, eds., A Network Approach to Social Structures, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, pp. 130-184.

that elicit both positive and negative social relations.⁹⁹ Wellman suggests that network analysis assists the researcher by giving attention to structured patterns of relationships, showing the complexity of structural ties, demonstrating boundaries and cross linkages, showing reciprocal relationships and the scarcity of resources.¹⁰⁰ In anthropology, network analysis was developed through the work of Barnes (1954), Bott (1971) and other European anthropologists. The goal has been not only to define behavioral qualities of social linkages, but also to understand their symbolic meaning at a cultural level.¹⁰¹ The use of network analysis as a means of understanding the respondents world and as a possible technique for intervention strategies is promoted by researchers.¹⁰²¹⁰³

Cohen and McKay suggest that if "we assume that social support buffers people against stress by helping them redefine a situation as less threatening, then social comparison theory

⁹⁹Bruce Rapkin and Catherine Stein, "Defining Personal Networks: The Effect of Delineating Instructions," American Journal of Community Psychology, April 1989, p.259.

¹⁰⁰Barry Wellman, "The Community Question," American Journal of Sociology, V. 84, 1979, pp. 1201-1231.

¹⁰¹Jay Sokolovsky and Carl I. Cohen, "Toward a Resolution of Methodological Dilemmas in Network Mapping," Schizophrenia Bulletin, V.7, 1981, pp.109-116.

¹⁰²Noah Friedkin, "Social Networks in Structural Equation Models," Social Psychology Quarterly, V.53, Dec. 1990, pp.316-328.

¹⁰³Elizabeth Tracey and James Whittaker, pp.461-470.

suggests some limitations on when support will be effective."¹⁰⁴ There are four limitations suggested:

1. Stress will be reduced if the stressor is one that is socially acceptable and does not result in feelings of guilt and shame.

2. Stress will be reduced if the discussion of the stressor will not be detrimental to one's relationship with the comparison other.

3. Stress will be reduced if the support is provided by people who are perceived as providers of accurate information.

4. Stress will be reduced if the support group communicates a relatively calm reaction to the potential stressor.

One of the issues in the comparison theory is that of "upward comparison" which might enhance the skills of the successful individual, but is likely to be distressing and destructive for those who do not measure up.¹⁰⁵

Peggy Thoits views coping assistance as a reconceptualization of social support. "Empathetic understanding (based on socio-cultural and situational similarities) between a distressed person and a helper is identified as a crucial condition for coping assistance to be

¹⁰⁴Sheldon Cohen and Garth McKay, pp.253-267.

¹⁰⁵Ibid.

sought, accepted and found effective."¹⁰⁶ Ms. Thoits suggests that the reconceptualization will place emphasis on the role of the significant other and the social comparisons. These new emphases will serve to refine understanding of the process or generate new theory.

The use of network analysis is an important tool for analyzing perceived support resources and for identifying areas of support weakness.

Instruments

Instruments are designed to measure certain aspects of a concept. Networks and social support are two areas in which several instruments have been developed. It is important to understand the capabilities and limitations of the currently available instruments and to make decisions about their use based upon the concepts of the study.¹⁰⁷ Vaux also cautions that the choice of process and outcome measures should be guided by an explicit model of the support intervention.¹⁰⁸

Measures of social support and networks are varied regarding the facets of the concept to be studied. Among the instruments developed to examine social support networks, House and Kahn suggest that it is desirable on both

¹⁰⁶Peggy A. Thoits, "Social Support as a Coping Assistance," Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, V. 54, 1986, pp. 416-423.

¹⁰⁷Charles Tardy, p.187.

¹⁰⁸Alan Vaux, "Let's Hang Up and Try Again: Lesson Learned from a Social Support Intervention," American Journal of Community Psychology, V.19, 1991, p. 85.

substantive and methodological grounds that at least two and preferably three of these aspects, the existence or quantity of social relationships, the structure of personal networks, and the functional concept of relationships, be conceptualized and explicitly measured within a single study.¹⁰⁹

The utility of network analysis for mapping individuals' social worlds and studying a broad range of social processes is clear. Analyses of these networks demonstrates the importance of different sources of support varying with different contexts and the nature of the stresses.¹¹⁰ While there is agreement among researchers about the utility of the use of network questionnaires, there is some disagreement about the actual network questions. The Arizona Social Support Interview Scale asks for initials of people who provide support in answer to questions about a specific kind of support. For example, Who would you go to if a situation came up when you needed advice? (Obtaining advice is identified as enacted support). This instrument measures total network size, conflict network size, unconflicted network size, satisfaction with supports and supports needed.¹¹¹ Other researchers ask the respondents to develop network

¹⁰⁹James House, Robert L Kahn, Jane McLeod, and David Williams, "Measures and Concepts of Social Support," in Cohen and Syme, eds., Social Support and Health, N.Y.: Academic Press, 1985, pp.83-108.

¹¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹¹Charles H.Tardy, p.187.

lists. Hirsch focused on persons with whom you have had contact during a four to six week period.¹¹² Rapkin and Stein suggest that naming the people you feel closest to and know the best represents a delineation on the most intimate relations.¹¹³ In an effort to focus on problematic and non-problematic relationships, Fiore, et. al. asked respondents to list "all those people who are important to you at this time in your life whether you like them or not and with whom you have some sort of contact."¹¹⁴ Using a process to focus on the core network, McCallister and Fischer used behavioral questions to obtain the set of people in a respondent's network who are most likely to be sources of supportive interactions.¹¹⁵

In general, social network maps are constructed using seven domains: household, family, friends, work or school, clubs, organizations, religious groups, neighbors and agencies. Several questions are asked including, who is in the network?, who could be potential members?, who are the critical members? and what are the obstacles for utilizing the

¹¹²Barton Hirsch, "Natural Support Systems and Coping with Life Changes," American Journal of Community Psychology, V. 8, April 1980, pp. 159 ff.

¹¹³Bruce Rapkin and Catherine Stein, p.259.

¹¹⁴Joan Fiore, Joseph Becker, and David Coppel, "Social Network Interactions: A Buffer or Stress," American Journal of Community Psychology, V.11, 1983, pp. 423-439

¹¹⁵Lynne McCallister and Claude Fischer, "A Procedure for Surveying Personal Networks," Sociological Methods and Research, November 1978, pp. 131-148.

network? ¹¹⁶ Gottleib reports that network mapping among college students can be used as a tool to enhance and enlarge their current networks.¹¹⁷

Tardy has constructed a ten item network interview which asks respondents about significant relationships with regard to social support, counseling, companionship, and practical help. This interview elicits the social support resources and enacted types of support.¹¹⁸ Oritt, et.al. have constructed a perceived support network inventory.¹¹⁹ House and Kahn note that "the existence and quantity of contacts with friends and relatives, memberships and attendance in church and participation in voluntary organizations show positive relationships to well-being."¹²⁰ The authors suggest that the Social Network Index of Berkman and Syme covers all these aspects of social support and it can readily be adapted for other studies. Perl and Trickett recommend the use of Edwards Social Exploration Preference scale which assesses involvement, innovation, and emotional support. This instrument has been tested in both African-American and White

¹¹⁶Elizabeth M. Tracey and James Whittaker, pp.461-470.

¹¹⁷Benjamin Gottleib, Social Support Strategies, Beverley Hills: Sage, 1983, pp.83-106.

¹¹⁸Charles H. Tardy, p.183.

¹¹⁹E. Oritt, Stephen Paul, and J.Behrman, p.565.

¹²⁰James House, Robert L. Kahn, Jane McLeod, and David Williams, "Measures and Concepts of Social Support," in Cohen and Syme, eds., Social Support and Health, 1985, New York: Academic Press, p. 83-108.

settings.¹²¹

The SS-R developed by Vaux, et.al. is a 23 item self report which is designed to tap many aspects of the individual's social support network. Respondents are asked to list up to ten individuals who provide them with each of five kinds of support: emotional, practical, financial, socializing, and advice. A total of fifty persons can be identified. For each person identified, the respondent completes a series of items descriptive of that characteristic. The SS-R identifies network size and five social support modes.¹²² A related measure the social support behavior (SS-B), is an inventory of forty five specific supportive behaviors, capturing the five modes of support.¹²³

The use of a network analysis focused on the addition of mentors can provide some new insights to the process of the development of social support.

In the reports of studies on the concept of social support, operationalizations differ according to the definitions of the concept. Perceived social support, for example, is distinguished from the network measures of support because perceived support was found to be correlated with

¹²¹Harold Perl and Edison Trickett, p.207.

¹²²Alan Vaux, J. Phillips, L. Holly, B. Thompson, D. Williams, and D. Stewart, "The Social Support Appraisals (SS-A) Scales: Studies in Reliability and Validity," American Journal of Community Psychology, V.14, 1986, p.195.

¹²³Ibid.

feelings of loneliness but was unrelated to the amount of social contact with others.¹²⁴

Procidano and Heller developed two scales, perceived social support from friends (PSS-fr) and perceived social support from family (PSS-fam). The PSS-fr is a twenty item self report which is most closely related to social competence.¹²⁵ Tandy suggests that a significant problem with relying on a self report of this kind is that it measures how the respondent feels at the time the form is completed.¹²⁶ However, the authors indicate that both scales are internally consistent, and were better predictors of symptomatology than life events or social network characteristics. These instruments are limited because the direction of the relationship cannot be determined by the data collected.¹²⁷

The Inventory of Social Support Behavior (ISSB), assesses the frequency with which individuals receive various forms of aid and assistance from people around them. It is a 40 item self report which focuses on enactment of social support.¹²⁸ This instrument has been criticized as male oriented.¹²⁹

¹²⁴Mary E. Procidano and Kenneth Heller, pp.1-24.

¹²⁵Ibid.

¹²⁶Charles Tardy, p.187.

¹²⁷Mary E. Procidano and Kenneth Heller, p.1-24.

¹²⁸Manuel Barrera, I. Sandler, and F. Ramsey, "Preliminary Development of a Scale of Social Support," American Journal of Community Psychology, V. 9, 1981, pp. 435-447.

¹²⁹Charles H. Tardy, p.187.

The Social Support Questionnaire (SSQ) requires the respondent to supply the name of supporters for each of twenty seven problems or subjects and then rates the level of satisfaction with the total support for the issue along a six point continuum from very satisfied to dissatisfied. The SSQ yields scores for the perceived number of social supports and satisfactions with social support that is available. The instrument was tested on four different groups of university students and was found to have high internal consistency.¹³⁰ The focus of this measure is on the source of support, particularly emotional support.¹³¹ Researchers have found the SSQ sensitive to different ranges of social support and gender differences.¹³²

The Social Relationship Scale (SRS), found to be reliable over time, provides adequate information about the overall picture of a respondent's supportive network.¹³³ Tardy notes that the SRS describes sources of support, types of support

¹³⁰Irwin Sarason, Henry Levine, Robert Basham and Barbara Sarason, "Assessing Social Support: The Social Support Questionnaire," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, V.44, 1983, pp.127-139.

¹³¹Ibid.

¹³²B. Sarason, E. Shearin, G. Pierce, and I. Sarason, "Interrelations of Social Support Measures: Theoretical and Practical Implications," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, V.52,p.813-832.

¹³³Allan McFarlane, Kelly Neale, Geoffrey Norman, Ranjan Roy and David Steiner, "Methodological Issues in Developing A Scale to Measure Social Support," Schizophrenia Bulletin, V.7, 1981, pp.90-100.

content, availability and satisfaction with support giving and receipt, both negative and positive support. However, it may only measure instrumental support.¹³⁴

It is clear that the instruments used in any study of social support need to be sensitive to the kinds of support received by the respondents and their perception of that support.

Studies and Outcome

In a study conducted by the U.S. Army's Unit Manning System, which sought to promote stress buffering supportive social relationships in military units and communities, questionnaires were distributed at three points in time to twelve combat battalions. The questionnaires measured two kinds of support, perceived and instrumental, and two network characteristics, frequency of communication and contact among the members. "This study does highlight the fact that social supports do change over time and that these changes are associated with membership in certain clearly defined groups, suggesting that social factors play some role in promoting or decreasing social support."¹³⁵ A limitation of this study was that African-Americans were under-represented. However, it was clear that the social factors which promoted perceived support are those which gave people greater opportunities for meeting and keeping potential support providers.

¹³⁴Charles Tardy, p.187.

¹³⁵Leora Rosen and Linda Z.Moghadam,p.1292.

In a study of college students on a predominantly white Mid-western campus, seventy five African-American and one hundred and one White students were asked to list network members providing five areas of support: emotional, practical assistance, advice, socializing, and financial. The frequency of contact, closeness, and the degree of different roles, called multiplicity, receipt, nature, setting, and ethnicity were also measured. The aim of this study was to assess social support among African-American and White respondents. Supportive behavior was assessed on a 45 item inventory, perceived support, on a 23 item measure consisting of statements regarding the extent to which the respondent was loved, esteemed, respected, involved with family, friends and others. A twenty item scale using willingness to use support services indicating a positive or negative belief regarding support use. In the evaluation of these questionnaires it was found that both African-Americans and Whites reported very similar high levels of support. Eighteen unique support network members with about 7 or 8 providing each mode of support were reported by both groups. The characteristics of the relationships in the support system involving frequent contact, were closely balanced and complex, consisting predominantly (over 90%) of family and friends of the same ethnicity as the respondent. African-American respondents reported greater closeness to network members and labelled fewer of them friends than did white respondents. African-

American students reported more advice from their families. Significantly, African-American women reported less emotional support from friends than did white women. African-American women reported more support from their families than their white counterparts. "The predominantly white university is enmeshed in white culture, and it may well engender feelings of isolation and alienation in African-American students. Yet the African-American students in this sample were able to develop and maintain, ethnically congruous support systems that were equivalent to those of their white counterparts. The existence of this African-American culture on campus must certainly diminish any feelings of isolation."¹³⁶

In a study of 160 college students, 96 African-American and 64 White, between the ages of 18-25 years, strong family support was evident. Each respondent was given a daily hassles scale, and an assessment of coping. Three indices of social support were used: the Inventory of Social Support Behavior (ISSB), Perceived Social Support (Porcidano and Heller), and CES-D depression scale which correlated with the Hopkins Symptom Checklist. The results of the study indicate that African-American students report more hassles, particularly economic, than do the White students. White students reported more hassles in the work category. Overall, the severity of

¹³⁶Doreen Steward and Alan Vaux, "Social Support Resources, Behavior and Perceptions Among Black and White Students," Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development, V. 14, 1986, pp.65-72.

daily hassles was related to depression and perceived family support was related to lower depression. Among African-Americans, support from family was related to lower depression and for whites, support from friends was related to lower depression. Coping by seeking support had a strong relationship to the availability of social support. There was greater use of avoidance coping by African-Americans.¹³⁷

In a study of minority students in graduate school, DeFour and Hirsch examined the social integration and social support related to academic performance and psychological well-being among 89 African-American graduate and professional students. A social network list questionnaire was used to identify the members of each student's social network. To measure network density, respondents listed the same names on a matrix noting who knew whom, and the Black-Black and Black-non-Black ties. The outcome measures consisted of the student's academic performance, assessed psychological well-being, four indices of perceived academic performance and a potential attrition list. Psychological well-being was assessed with the Bradburn ten item list developed in 1969, and the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-D) developed by Radloff in 1977. The findings indicate that the African-American graduate students were not well integrated into their academic environment. Students in

¹³⁷John Jung, and Hari Krishan Khalsa, "The Relationships of Daily Hassles, Social Support, and Coping to Depression," Journal of General Psychology, October 1989, pp.407-418.

relatively more integrated departments were better adjusted, had higher grades and perceived themselves to be making good progress in their graduate work. These students were also less likely to have considered dropping out of school. The frequency of out of school contact with a African-American faculty member and the number of African-American students in a department were important social integration and social support variables. Higher satisfaction with academic performance was associated with more satisfaction with personal supports from non African-American network members. Positive affect was related to high satisfaction with a African-American network member, support for personal matters, and denser connections between African-American and non-Black network members. High satisfaction with non-Black personal support and with African-American academic support was related to low scores on the CES-D, Depression scale. African-American students were less likely to have thought of dropping out of school if their network had a denser Black-non-Black boundary and if they had more contact outside of school with African-American faculty members. "Contact with African-American faculty members may be especially important because of their unique ability to serve as role models for African-American graduate students."¹³⁸ These findings are also supported by the work of Okun, Sandler and Bauman who found that teacher

¹³⁸Darlene DeFour and Barton Hirsch, "The Adaptation of Black Graduate Students: A Social Network Approach," American Journal of Community Psychology, V. 18, June 1990, p.487.

support was critical in boosting the effect for positive events and that buffering negative effects was evident when the family was critical.¹³⁹ Wilson and Tolson comment that social network support among African-American families consists of frequent socializing, a high degree of residential propensity among related households, an emphasis on participation in family occasions especially funerals, moveable feasts, holiday celebrations, and birthdays. Relatives are often listed as friends and the nature of the extended family is to include the neighborhood and the church, incorporating the community.¹⁴⁰ Hofferth reports on data from a national survey of families showing that African-American and White families with children under 18 differ in kin network participation. White families are more likely than African-American families to receive money from outside relatives; African-American families are more likely than White families to live with others in an extended family household.¹⁴¹

Twenty recent widows and fourteen women returning to college were respondents in a study focused on the

¹³⁹Morris Okun, Irwin Sandler, and Donald Bauman, "Buffer and Booster Effects as Event Support Transactions," American Journal of Community Psychology, V.16, June 1988, p. 435.

¹⁴⁰Melvin Wilson and Timothy Tolson, "Familial Support in the Black Community," Journal of Clinical Child Psychology, V.19 Dec. 1990, pp.347-358.

¹⁴¹S. L. Hofferth, "Kin Networks, Race and Family Structure," Journal of Marriage and Family, V.46, 1984, pp. 791-806.

relationship of the natural support system and symptomatology, mood and self esteem. Logs were set up to reflect each interaction and interviews with respondents followed up on the data. Five categories of social supports were the independent variables: cognitive guidance, social reinforcement, tangible assistance, emotional support and socializing. Mood, symptomatology and self esteem were dependent variables. Social network lists and social support maps were used. The findings indicate that higher self-esteem is most strongly related with socializing experiences. Cognitive guidance emerged as the most critical of the five supports for women. "Helpful guidance may, therefore, help delineate necessary from unnecessary tasks, alternative coping behaviors, environmental resources, and outcome criteria for judging effectiveness of ones' coping efforts."¹⁴²

In a study examining the number of social ties in the network which are sources of problematic and or supportive interactions and the number of social ties which are the source of consistently supportive or consistently problematic interactions, results indicated that interactions with individuals who are consistently problematic may negatively impact on well being. Greater levels of life satisfaction were reported by those with no consistent sources of negative interactions as well as by those with more total sources of

¹⁴²Barton J. Hirsch, "Natural Support Systems and Coping with Major Life Changes," American Journal of Community Psychology, V. 8, April 1980, pp.159 ff.

support.¹⁴³

Using the data from a small scale ethnographic study, Edwina Uehara, examined the social network mobilization among African-American women who had recently experienced job loss. Using two tenets of dual exchange theory this study focused on: 1. The informal support exchange in natural settings taking the form of generalized or restricted exchange. 2. The generalized exchange systems as they are associated with greater degrees of solidarity and social support. Generalized exchange refers to exchange between the system and not the individual, A gives to B who gives to C who gives to A. In this relationship trust is engendered. The principle of indirect reciprocity implies generalized duties to others from whom one cannot directly expect the fulfillment of one's rights. Restricted exchange refers to the elementary exchange form in which pairs of exchange units reciprocate between the two units. There is a high degree of accountability. Seventeen women participated in the study. Each respondent was interviewed in Time Frame 1 and in Time Frame 2, the respondents and their network members were interviewed (105 interviews). Each interview described the helping and support process. Five groups emerged on a continuum: self-helpers who suffer through it, reluctant exchangers, selective support

¹⁴³Gail Brenner, Nancy Norvell, and Marian Limacher, "Supportive and Problematic Social Interactions: A Social Network Analysis," American Journal of Community Psychology, December 1989, p. 831.

seekers, frequent borrowers who always return the help but are more flexible and open, and gift receivers who blur the difference between a gift and a loan. Concepts from network analysis, including density, encapsulation and proportional intensity offer useful tools for analyzing the structure of the support exchange networks. Important concepts derived from the study include how the exchange mode is characterized by the exchangers, the timing of the reciprocity, the explicitness of reciprocity expectations before entering into the exchange, the laxity with which exchange partners view delinquency of returns, the collectible or individualistic nature of exchange interactions, and the direct or indirectness of reciprocity.¹⁴⁴ Investigating both helpful and upsetting aspects of social networks, a longitudinal study of spouses caring for a husband or wife with Alzheimer's Disease studied interview responses and daily interaction ratings for relationships with overall network satisfaction and depression at an initial period (n=68) and ten months later (n=38). Social network information was gathered by asking respondents, "who is important to you at this time in your life?" Each respondent was asked to rate 15 persons on a helpfulness scale in six areas including, cognition, emotional support and tangible support, to submit a two week log of contact and globally rate their networks. The results strongly support the

¹⁴⁴Edwina Uehara, "Dual Exchange Theory, Social Networks, and Informal Social Support," American Journal of Sociology, V. 96, November 1990, pp. 521-527.

likelihood that upsetting relations in one's network play an important role in the etiology and maintenance of emotional problems.¹⁴⁵

Confidants, people you can confide in or turn to for help in an emergency, are members of an individual's social network. Increased satisfaction with one's network was reported by Stokes up to the point of seven confidants. Increases in the number of confidants after this point are not associated with increased satisfaction. "An interpretation of this result which is consistent with the data is that there are two types of networks associated with relative dissatisfaction; small networks with a high percentage of relatives, and large networks with a low percentage of relatives."¹⁴⁶ Network size had a curvilinear relation to satisfaction. Network density was not predictive of satisfaction.

Researchers are now beginning to develop studies which address ethnic and racial differences. Social resources among Mexican Americans were studied, measuring social integration, the existence and quantity of relationships and social support measuring the functional content of

¹⁴⁵Mark Pagel, William Erdly, Joseph Becker, "Social Network: We Get by with (and in spite of) a Little Help from Our..." Journal of Personality and Social Behavior, V. 53, 1987, pp. 793-804

¹⁴⁶Joseph P. Stokes, "Predicting Satisfaction with Social Support from Social Network Structure," American Journal of Community Psychology, V.11, 1983, pp. 141-152.

relationships including emotional concern and instrumental aid. Ethnic and cultural differences were attributable to three sources: smaller kinship networks, demographic characteristics and social resources.¹⁴⁷

Richard Ball focused on 111 respondents in a Southern non-metropolitan area to examine kinship network. This study examined four components: the examination of the existence of kin and nearby friends, the frequency of contact with them, the perceived helpfulness regarding a real problem, and the actual frequency of the request for help with a real problem. The findings indicate that the 111 low income African-American family members demonstrated a highly developed network of kin and friends on a problem solving dimension, but that they did not actually call upon this network for instrumental aid.¹⁴⁸ This kinship network provides great potential in assisting African-American families to function under adverse economic and social conditions. Malson contends that African-American families traditionally help each other, provide economic support when able, and function to provide support services to each other. Using this premise, a study of 126 families was developed. Seventy families were functional and 56 had one symptomatic member. Three interviews were held over a two

¹⁴⁷Jacqueline Golding and Lourdes Baezconde-Garbanati, "Ethnicity, Culture and Social Resources," American Journal of Community Psychology, V. 18, June 1990, p.445.

¹⁴⁸Richard E. Ball, "Family and Friends: A Supportive Network for Low Income American Black Families." Journal of Comparative Family Studies, V.14, 1983, pp.51-65.

year period. Both groups matched in reasons for singleness and demographic data. There was no difference in family structure or income, though the non-clinical sample were more satisfied with their earnings. There was no significant difference in network size, the number of connections, the age of the members, and the length of time known. The authors suggest that it may be the quality and not the quantity of networks that determines their effectiveness.¹⁴⁹ Allen indicates in his study of the African-American family that racial segregation was most responsible for the disruption of African-American families.¹⁵⁰ The frequency of kin contact and the density of a network are cited as two significant findings in two studies involving low income populations. In the first study high risk women referred to a clinic for parenting sessions attended fewer sessions if her network was dense and the more contact with her kin the fewer parent group sessions she attended. In a second study, low income women participating in a supplementary food program were respondents. The women whose networks were characterized by lower density and less frequent kin contact were more likely to pursue professional child-rearing information and advice than women in denser more kin involved networks. One's sense

¹⁴⁹Marion Lindblad-Goldberg and Joyce Lynn Dukes, "Social Support in Black Low Income Families," American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, V. 55, Jan. 1985, pp. 42-58.

¹⁵⁰Walther R. Allen, "Black Family Research in the United States," Journal of Comparative Family Study, V. 9, 1978, pp. 167-190.

of competence as a parent and the structure of one's network was found to determine overall frequency of information seeking.¹⁵¹

Social networks among women have been found to be more focused on emotional aid, while male counterparts were focused on fixing things.¹⁵² Among college students, sex and sex role was studied in relation to three levels of social support: network characteristics, availability of several modes of support and perceived supportiveness of family and friends. Previously tested social support instruments (Procidano and Heller) and the Bem Sex Role Inventory were used. The results indicate that women have superior social resources compared to men, and women report larger networks composed of people seen as similar to self. Women perceive social support at higher levels than men. In general feminine networks were more supportive than their masculine counterparts.¹⁵³ Gwen Moore investigated the structural perspective of network composition in a study on the volume of contacts and the diversity of alters. There were twelve dependent variables including:

¹⁵¹Richard Birkel and N. Dickson Reppucci, "Social Networks, Information Seeking and the Utilization of Services," American Journal of Community Psychology, V. 11, 1983, pp.185-205.

¹⁵²Barry Wellman and Scott Wortley, "Different Strokes from Different Folks: Community Ties and Social Support," American Journal of Sociology, V. 96, Nov. 90, pp.558-588.

¹⁵³Philip Burda, Alan Vaux, and Thomas Schill, "Social Support Resources Variations Across Sex and Sex Role," Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, V. 10, 1984, pp.119-126.

network size, absolute composition, number of kin, non-kin, neighbors, friends, group members, advisors, coworkers, relative composition and the percent of kin and non-kin, the different kin and non kin types. The independent variable was gender. She found that "women have a larger number, a higher proportion and greater diversity of kin ties in their personal networks than do men, even when compared with men in similar socially structured positions."¹⁵⁴ Sampling 120 widowed women between the ages of 60 and 89, Rook used a standardized interview, life satisfaction scale and social network analysis to assess the relationship between positive and negative social experiences, the relative impact of supportive and problematic interactions with others, the personal characteristics of women with many problematic ties and those with few problematic ties. Problematic social ties were defined as angry, difficult, or failed to keep promises. Respondents were asked to identify persons who were helpers and persons who were problems. In general, the results suggest that positive and negative interpersonal experiences were related independently of each other in the sample. For some women, low levels of social support were associated with higher levels of social problems, and for others low support was associated with having fewer problems. This study lends support for the idea that negative social interactions have

¹⁵⁴Gwen Moore, "Structural Determinants of Mens and Women's Personal Networks," American Sociological Review, V. 55, Oct. 1990, pp,726-736.

more potent effects on well being than positive social interactions.¹⁵⁵

Using four common operationalizations of social support concept: frequency of network contact, satisfaction with support, perceived available support, and use of support, researchers investigated their relationship to two measures of psychological adjustment (Beck Depression Inventory and Symptom Checklist-90) and one measure of physical adjustment, Cornell Medical Index, in a sample of 68 highly stressed caregivers to spouses with Alzheimer's Disease between 45-85 years old. Results indicate that of the four operationalizations, satisfaction with support was the only significant predictor of depression and general psychopathology.¹⁵⁶ In a related study with forty four caregivers to spouses with a diagnosis of Alzheimer's Disease, respondents were asked to identify how helpful and how upsetting each network member was in five different support categories. There was a highly significant relationship between perceived network upset and depression.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵Karen Rook, "The Negative Side of Social Interaction: Impact on Psychological Wellbeing," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, V. 46, 1984, pp. 1097-1108.

¹⁵⁶Joan Fiore, David Coppel, Joseph Becker and Gary Cox, "Social Support as a Multifaceted Concept: Examination of Important Dimensions for Adjustment," American Journal of Community Psychology, V.14, 1986,p.93.

¹⁵⁷Joan Fiore, Joseph Becker, and David Coppel, "Social Network Interactions: A Buffer or Stress," American Journal of Community Psychology, V.11, 1983, pp.423-439.

McFarlane, et. al, investigated the internal locus of control and adequate social supports among 515 respondents from a Family Practice Physician's Office. Each subject was interviewed three times and received a Life Change questionnaire. The results indicated that the locus of control or mastery was stable with respect to the impact of life events. However, the impact of life events seemed to increase the size, while reducing the helpfulness of the network.¹⁵⁸

These studies illustrate the importance of social supports and networks in reducing stress. Significantly, family ties among African-Americans was indicated as an important consideration for college students, mothers, and others. The existence of African-American cultural outlets reduced the sense of isolation on a predominantly White college campus and African-American mentors or role models were found to be very important to the success of African-American students in graduate and professional programs. Upsetting social network encounters also have been found to have tremendous impact on vulnerable individuals, those care givers of Alzheimer's patients and widowed women. Changes in the size of an individual's social network can have a significant impact upon the quality of her life and can influence the satisfaction with the support.

¹⁵⁸Allan McFarlane, Geoffrey Norman, David Streiner and R. Roy, "The Process of Social Stress," Journal of Health and Social Behavior, V. 23, 1983, pp. 160-173.

Institutional Perspective

Blackwell comments that African-Americans have been restricted or barred from entry, individually and collectively, into the central fabric or into the educational, economic and political life of America. He maintains that underrepresentation is a reflection of the horrendous political, academic and institutional behavioral barriers which continually exclude African-Americans.¹⁵⁹

Allen studied African-American students at a predominantly White Southern university and found that of all the problems faced by African-Americans on a white campus, psychosocial ones arising from alienation and a lack of support from the general environment seem to be the most serious. One hundred thirty five respondents to a 1977 survey of African-American under graduates at the University of North Carolina were obtained to identify and estimate the relative importance of factors that influence African-American student adjustment, achievement and aspirations. The findings show that the student academic performance level is highest where college satisfaction is high and feelings of alienation and academic anxiety are low. A significant finding was that African-American students feelings of alienation and academic anxiety were greatly reduced when African-American students perceived that the university was committed to providing them

¹⁵⁹J.E. Blackwell, "Historical Context of Mainstreaming," Mainstreaming Outsiders, Bayside: General Hall, 1981, pp.8;18.

with the necessary supportive services. African-American students enter the white university as the victims of sustained personal and institutional discriminations. Even after they enter the university incidents of discrimination do not cease and subsequently African-American students experience adjustment and academic performance difficulties. The outcomes of African-American students on predominantly White campuses is the result of a combination of personal and institutional factors.¹⁶⁰

Clearly, personal and institutional supports can greatly influence the development of a successful process aimed at multicultural living.

Developmentally, awareness of racial differences occurs by four years old, followed by labelling and formation of stereotypes. "Racial hostility most often develops as a result of attitudes picked up from parents, people in the neighborhood and the media."¹⁶¹ Sarason postulates that attitudes are shaped by one's ethnic culture. People who are socialized in those cultures are imbued with attitudes and characteristics that are rooted in history. They form a kind of "second nature," learned, absorbed and inculcated with all the force, subtleness and efficiency of the processes of

¹⁶⁰Walter Allen, "Correlates of Black Student Adjustment, Achievement and Aspirations at a Predominantly White Southern University," in G.E. Thomas ed., Black Students in Higher Education, Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981, pp.127-137.

¹⁶¹Lillian Katz, "Interracial Awareness and Acceptance," Parents Magazine, July 1981, p.94.

cultural transmission.¹⁶²

The sharp rupture between the social lives of Whites and African-Americans promotes ignorance about African-Americans among Whites. This ignorance feeds erroneous, oversimplified, negative beliefs about African-Americans which engender feelings of hostility and discriminatory social and political predispositions toward them.¹⁶³ While this observation explains the reason for discrimination and racism, it does not offer a solution.

One solution suggested to overcome the problem of racism is discussed in the contact theory. The Contact Theory holds that proximity has a pronounced positive effect on the levels of informal interaction and friendship with African-Americans and both of these factors have a strong positive effect on attitudes towards African-Americans. In a 1975 survey of 1914 housing project residents, 1648 of whom were white, researchers found that proximity is strongly related to friendship and that interracial contact changes racial attitudes. It is also clear that whites' affective social dispositions toward African-Americans change with greater ease than their beliefs about African-Americans, or more

¹⁶²J.Hale, Black Children: Their Roots, Culture and Learning Styles, Provo,Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1982,p.28.

¹⁶³Mary Jackman and Marie Crane, "Some of My Best Friends are Black," Public Opinion Quarterly, V. 50, 1986,pp. 459-486.

dramatically their racial policy views.¹⁶⁴

The institutional barriers or obstacles presented to young African-American women who are interested in religious life are embedded in the structure of the outreach and recruitment process and only a holistic investigation of the process will assist in discovering these features, identifying them and developing strategies to change them to more supportive and humane structures.

¹⁶⁴Ibid.

Summary

In this section, the definition, characteristics, structure and function of social supports are reviewed. Network analysis is a key feature in understanding the perception and use of social supports by the individual. Studies and outcomes reviewed indicate the importance of social supports, the need for supportive networks and the impact of negative episodes on the individual. Institutional barriers create further difficulties which weaken the individual's ability to respond to stress. When institutional support is combined with increased social support, there is a higher level of achievement and adjustment.

While the contact theory indicates that racial stereotypes and attitudes can only change when individuals live in close proximity to each other, it is necessary to identify the institutional barriers which prevent unbiased contact and identify ways to promote a multicultural environment.

"EQUALITY AND I WILL BE FREE"

The Development of the Project

Introduction

The work on the development of a program to assist young African-American women who want to enter religious life began about ten years ago. A group of Sisters of Saint Dominic from Amityville who were engaged in different fields of work in Brooklyn and Queens among minority groups met to discuss this issue. This project is an outgrowth of those preliminary discussions. The issue of racism was readily defined at the meeting as a primary obstacle for African-American and Hispanic women who sought to enter the congregation. This ethnographic study was shaped in part from these early discussions. During the initial meeting two facets of the problem became clear; one was that members of a predominantly white congregation of religious women felt that membership was open to everyone and that there were no institutional obstacles, and the other that the experiences of former African-American and Hispanic members told an entirely different story. It was clear that there was a need to describe and define the obstacles faced by minority women who seek to join congregations of women religious.

The Search

In June 1985, a group of women religious from the Sisters of St. Dominic met in Brooklyn, N.Y. to discuss the problem of the dearth of minority vocations in their religious

congregation. The first meeting was held by the Director of Vocations, Sister Peggy McVetty, OP, primarily to find out why African-American women were not entering the Dominican congregation. The Sisters who attended this meeting articulated their concerns about the racism within the membership of the congregation. From that initial meeting, a sub-committee was formed to continue to work on the concerns raised by the larger group. This sub-committee developed three major activities: a panel discussion, and two conference days. The first was a panel discussion on the dearth of African-American and Hispanic vocations with concerned Sisters, Catholic women and interested aspirants. In December 1985, the panel discussion was held at St. John Cantius parish hall with over fifty participants. As a result, it was evident that the issue of racism had to be discussed in more depth in the Amityville Dominican Congregation and by the committee. A consultant, Ms. Joanne Evans, a former member of a religious congregation and a former director of the now defunct Mariama House (Swahili for gift of God) in Philadelphia, was engaged by the committee. Ms. Evans' experience with a similar problem helped to refine the ideas and proposals of the sub-committee. The sub-committee organized two conference days focused on the Amityville Dominican congregation, one day to address the Assembly, a policy making body for the Amityville Dominican Congregation, and the other day was to address the entire group on African-

American spirituality. During the presentation to the Assembly, the need for a special program to encourage young African-American women in their search for a religious congregation was articulated. The second conference day organized by the committee in 1988 was a day on African-American Spirituality.

By 1989, the group now called the SEARCH was actively looking for a place to house the program for young African-American women interested in religious life.

The purpose of this unique program, the first of its kind in the United States, was to provide a nurturing, supportive environment for young African-American women who were interested in religious life and to provide a vehicle to affect attitudinal change through education of the congregations of women religious. Its work would complement the work of Sojourner House in Detroit, Michigan which offers spiritual direction to African-American women. In May 1990, the house became available at 410 Grant Avenue in Brooklyn, and was offered to the sisters for this new project. The Dominican sisters contacted several other religious congregations and invited them to join in this new venture. Sisters representing three other religious congregations, Sisters of Mercy of Brooklyn, Sisters of Charity of Halifax and Good Shepherd Sisters, joined the committee and brought with them financial and moral commitments to support the house. By the fall of 1991, two young women interested in

entering religious life moved into the house and a job description for a director was developed.¹⁶⁵

The goals of the program are:

To provide an environment to study African-American heritage and spirituality.

To provide a network of support for young women considering a vowed commitment to religious life.

To provide educational and spiritual day programs for schools, parishes and youth groups.¹⁶⁶

To provide a resource center for young people interested in religious life.¹⁶⁷

To assist predominantly white congregations of religious women in the change to accommodate multicultural membership.¹⁶⁸

Nia House

The name of the new foundation was sought and Nia, meaning purpose, was selected by the Operations committee. Nia, one of the seven principles of Kwanzaa, is "to make as one's vocation the building and developing of our community in

¹⁶⁵Sally Butler, OP, "Chronology of the Minority Vocations Committee, May 1990, unpublished.

¹⁶⁶Ibid.

¹⁶⁷Sally Butler, OP, "Minutes of the January 23, 1991 meeting of the Operations committee," unpublished.

¹⁶⁸Sally Butler, OP, "Chronology of the Minority Vocations Committee," unpublished.

order to restore our people to their traditional greatness,"¹⁶⁹ This principle represents one of the elements in the search the aspirants will contemplate.

In January, 1991 the original sub committee, now called the Operations committee, developed a Board of Trustees who are representative of the African-American Catholic community. Among the trustees, two sisters represent the predominantly white religious congregations. By design, the Board is 70% African-American. Among the religious leaders on the Board of Trustees are: the Director of the Office of Black Catholics in Brooklyn, the former Director of the National Office of Black Catholics, the Director of the Institute of Black Catholic Studies in New Orleans and the President of the National Black Sisters Caucus. Several prominent African-American Catholic women are also members of the Board. The Trustees are a policy making body responsible for offering guidance to the director and support for the mission of the project.¹⁷⁰

At the first meeting of the Board of Trustees in October 1991, the concept paper for this study was presented and approved by the Board. A sub-committee was formed to search, interview and recommend a director for the house. In the

¹⁶⁹Maulana Karenga, "Nguzo Saba: The Seven Principles," OMB Observer, Newsletter of the Office of Black Ministry of the Brooklyn Diocese, Vol. 1 March 1992, p.6.

¹⁷⁰Margaret Dempsey, RSM, "Minutes of the SEARCH, January 23, 1991.

spring of 1992, a director recommended by the Trustees was hired. Sister Jayne Simon met with the Board of Trustees and described the needs of the house and the program, currently under development, for the residents.¹⁷¹ The Board also approved the flyer and membership covenant (rules of the house) developed by a sub-committee of the Board and the Operations committee.

The Board developed standing committees for program, publicity, evaluation, and fund raising. At the June 1992 meeting, the Board members expressed concern about the overlapping relationship between the Trustees and the Operations committee. The need to develop by-laws and begin the incorporation process became evident.

In July 1992, one additional congregation of women religious, Sisters of St. Joseph of Brentwood, joined the group bringing the total to five. Financially, the house received start-up donations of money and furniture from the participating congregations of women religious.

The Operations committee engaged in developing plans to ensure the success of the program. The members worked with the Trustees in planning fund raising events to support the work of the program, spreading publicity about the program, and assisting in networking within the predominantly white congregations of women religious. Its members were and are

¹⁷¹Margaret Dempsey, RSM, "Minutes of the Board of Trustees, June 14, 1992.

resources to the Board of Trustees.

The plan for the work of the Operations committee was articulated in the January 23, 1992 minutes. The work will consist of three phases:

1. Recruit the director and candidates. The director was hired in June 1992, and candidates were interviewed. Three candidates lived at the house.

2. Start up activities for the House. An Open House was held on October 24, 1992 to coincide with a Board of Trustees meeting. In addition, flyers and other publicity were disseminated to congregations of women religious, parishes and youth groups.

3. Education of the predominantly white congregations of women religious.

As part of the work of the Nia House project, the Board of Trustees and the Operations Committee saw the development of an education program as essential to the success of the project. This ethnographic study seeks to address the discovery of specific obstacles present in the outreach and recruitment of predominantly white congregations of women religious by exploring the experiences of African-American women members and former members and identifying them. Once identified, these issues and concerns will become part of the ongoing education of the predominantly white congregations.

This study offers opportunities for congregations of women religious, for the young women who are searching for

membership in religious congregations, and for the development of a process toward a lifestyle which is more adaptable for multicultural living.

On a much broader level, the study will contribute to the development of knowledge of the role of mentors in the social support process. It is an important study because it will begin the process of the development of models for the future.

Interest

The local interest in this project is from the members of the new program, the Office of Black Ministries in Brooklyn, the National Black Sisters Caucus and the National Office of Black Catholics. These groups want to demonstrate the need to address the obstacles faced by young African-American women who seek membership in predominantly White religious congregations.

The local religious congregations are interested in this project because they want to dispel any notion that African-American women are not welcome to become a part of their membership.¹⁷²

The findings of this project can be of interest to those engaged in work in schools, and programs which seek to bring together different cultural groups and develop working relationships among them. Social workers and agencies that provide services in predominantly African-American

¹⁷²Sisters of St. Dominic of Amityville, "Executive Board Notes," Feb. 11, 1992, unpublished.

neighborhoods will be able to use the findings of this study.

The Board of Trustees and the participants have been informed about the purpose of the study and have given approval for its implementation.

Members of the Operations committee, who represent the five predominantly White religious congregations, have given their permission for interviews regarding the recruitment and outreach process.

Contribution

Clearly the ethnographic study will make a contribution to the program and to the strategies employed to maintain the program in the future. It is hoped that this program will become a model for similar programs across the United States among congregations of women religious.

On a broader scale the development of this study will help to describe the process of social support among a marginalized group, and the enhancement of social networks through the development of a cadre of mentors for the program participants. It will also begin to identify institutional obstacles which discourage full multicultural participation in the setting.

In recent educational literature there has been great interest in developing multicultural settings and multicultural awareness. This study may be a first step in the process of identifying the obstacles to the development of these settings.

Summary

In this section, the problem of racism is a central issue in the development of this study. The history of the project at Nia house and the need for the qualitative approach to the study of a program for young African-American women who are seeking membership in predominantly White congregations of women religious is identified. The proposed study is timely because it has the interest of identified publics, access to the project is available, and support for the project has been articulated.

It is hoped that the study will make a contribution to the knowledge of social supports, networks and assist in identifying a process to address institutional obstacles to multicultural living.

Study Design

Introduction

The study focusing on the process of the development social support and the enhancement of social networks to assist young African-American women entering predominantly white congregations of women religious is applied research. In addition, the study helps to discover the obstacles in outreach and recruitment among several predominantly white congregations of religious women. This intervention is described by Gottlieb as a second class intervention, "which aims to improve helping processes so as to enlarge access to social support. These interventions extend to settings where people tend to be socially isolated or marginal and among populations whose social networks are resource deficient or structurally too weak to provide adequate access to support."¹⁷³

The literature on social support is replete with analogs, such as the Army's Manning Unit, African-American students in predominantly white universities, and African-American students in graduate and professional schools but none of these studies capture the essence of the experience which is both transcultural and transcendental in nature. Wills notes that measures providing information about the specific supportive functions that persons derive from church attendance would add considerably to the understanding of the

¹⁷³Benjamin Gottlieb, pp. 83-106.

beneficial effects of social supports.¹⁷⁴ Social network studies have indicated that there is an important threshold of Black-Black and Black-non-Black ties. This study is an attempt to focus on the development of mentors in the social networks of African-American women contemplating entering predominantly White congregations of women religious. It is also a discovery of the process of enhancement of social supports. The organizational link, discovering and identifying the obstacles to multicultural living, is an essential component for the focus of this program in the future.

In this study the experience of what is called "the discernment process," is the focus. "Discernment" to religious congregations includes the outreach and recruitment elements of organizational programs. In this process, both the organization, in this case, the religious congregation, and the aspirant develop an ongoing relationship which culminates in the decision regarding the aspirant's career choice. For African-American women in America this process is further complicated by the "de facto" segregation of the predominantly White congregations of women religious and the culturally imbued racism of our American society. The goal of this study is to discover and describe the elements of the outreach and recruitment process, from both the African-American women who have experienced it and from the congregations of women religious, to inform and assist in the

¹⁷⁴Thomas Asby Wills, pp.61-79.

development of an intervention designed to develop and enhance social supports and networks of mentors for young African-American women who want to join predominantly White congregations of women religious and to discover and describe the organizational issues which can be addressed on the institutional level.

Qualitative Inquiry

Patton describes the purpose of applied research as: "to inform action, enhance decision making and apply knowledge to solve human and societal problems."¹⁷⁵ This kind of information helps the researcher to see the world as the respondents see it.¹⁷⁶

While the quantitative approach allows the researcher to obtain broad and generalizable information from a large number of people, it does not produce a wealth of detailed information about the smaller number of people.¹⁷⁷ The unique functions of qualitative research are that it involves the perspective of the respondents in the formulation of the research questions, it searches for differences in meaning among the responses, and it uses the exact words of the respondents to express their personal experiences. Often there is confusion in quantitative research about the meaning

¹⁷⁵Michael Quinn Patton, Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods, Newbury Park:Sage, 1990, p.12.

¹⁷⁶Ibid., p. 24.

¹⁷⁷Ibid., p.14.

of a particular set of responses; however, in qualitative research the search for meaning is the primary focus.¹⁷⁸

There is a need to recognize the ecological context of the support process. The use of formative evaluation, and more flexible designs should be encouraged.¹⁷⁹ Burda, et.al. observe that "while we know quite a bit about the distribution of disorders across different groups in society, we know virtually nothing about the corresponding distribution of social support resources across sex, ethnic, or socio-ethnic groups nor about the influence of personal or environmental settings variables on support."¹⁸⁰ Gottlieb notes that it is necessary to study the mobilization process of the network through naturalistic inquiry.¹⁸¹ Leon Ginsberg indicates that we must learn more about the nature of prejudice, about the consequences of discrimination and about variations and complexities in the American family.¹⁸²

Patton comments that one of the essential decisions of the study is to locate the study among the ten theoretical

¹⁷⁸Charles Depner and Elaine Washington, and Berit Ingersoll-Dayton, pp.37-54.

¹⁷⁹Alan Vaux, "Let's Hang Up and Try Again: Lesson Learned from a Social Support Intervention," American Journal of Community Psychology, V. 19, Feb. 1991, p.85.

¹⁸⁰Philip Burda, Alan Vaux, and Thomas Schill, pp.119-126.

¹⁸¹Benjamin Gottlieb, p.58.

¹⁸²Leon Ginsberg, "The Changing Nature of the American Family: Implications for Black Family Life," Journal of Multicultural Social Work, V.1, 1991, p.82.

perspectives. Each tradition focuses on different core questions. "These differences in focus have implications for the kinds of questions a particular researcher will ask.."183

Among the most notable traditions is ethnography. "Ethnographies are analytic descriptions or reconstructions of intact cultural scenes or groups."184 Fetterman notes that ethnographers conduct research in the native environment to see people and their behavior with all the real world incentives and constraints.185

In this study, however, the focus is on the description of the experience of recruitment and outreach. This focus is more closely associated with the phenomenological tradition. Patton describes the phenomenological approach: "put simply and directly, phenomenological inquiry focuses on the question: "What is the structure and essence of experience of this phenomenon for these people?"186 This perspective therefore requires a focus on the experience and the interpretation of the world as the respondents see it. It can also add the dimension that the researcher participates in the

¹⁸³Michael Quinn Patton, p. 66.

¹⁸⁴Judith Preissle Goetz and Margaret Dunne LeCompte, Ethnography and Qualitative Design in Educational Research, New York: Academic Press, 1984, p.3.

¹⁸⁵David Fetterman, Ethnography : Step by Step, Newbury Park: Sage, 1989, p.41.

¹⁸⁶Michael Quinn Patton, p.69.

experience.¹⁸⁷ The questions in the interview instruments flow from this tradition because the description of the experience is core focus of the study. Through the analysis of these descriptions, both from the individual and organizational perspectives, a list of important elements for the program at Nia House will emerge, and an organizational focus to address the issues and obstacles to multicultural living.

Therefore, the applied qualitative research design has been selected in order to discover and describe the social support and the enhancement of social network resources among young African-American women seeking membership in predominantly white congregations of women religious and the practices by predominantly white congregations of women religious which act as barriers to African-American women who seek membership in these institutions.

Questionnaire Development

The questionnaire guide was revised on several occasions prior to its use in the study. The original guide was developed by the researcher who has a personal experience of life in a religious congregation. The researcher met with several different persons, a Director of Novices, sisters and former sisters, the Nia House Board and a group of African-American women who were currently engaged in the pre-membership and membership processes in several different

¹⁸⁷Ibid. p.70.

religious congregations. In June 1992, the researcher met with six young women who are members of different congregations of religious women to discuss the project. This meeting was extraordinarily helpful in framing the second draft of the questionnaire for those who have entered congregations of women religious. Finally, the suggestions of the Doctoral Committee of Advisors were incorporated into the questionnaire in an effort to touch the core of the experience of the participants.

During the course of the interviews, the researcher met with the Board of Trustees of the Nia House Project and the Operations committee to discuss the preliminary findings. On several other occasions the researcher consulted with African-American women religious who, while not part of the interview process, could assist the researcher in accurately reflecting the trends reported in the study.

Sampling

When considering the units of analysis, the issue of collecting the data which provides information in these areas is an important consideration. Unlike quantitative evaluation where random sampling is important for a generalizable finding, qualitative evaluation relies on "information rich cases" which will provide in depth data for the study.¹⁸⁸ The study uses a non probability sample including the participants in the program at Nia House project, and employing an extended

¹⁸⁸Ibid., p.169.

snowball technique, using the names of individuals suggested by participants of the study. This form of sampling is identified by Patton as maximum variation purposeful sampling. The core of the study focused on two groups of African-American women who have entered predominantly White congregations of women religious, both those who have stayed and left.

The institutional view as described by the congregations of women religious is represented by the Vocation Directors, the gatekeepers of information to women interested in religious life, is a very small sample which is designed to present the institutional perspective only and not to represent the general practices of congregations. It provides a contrast to the experience of the participants and helped in the understanding of the issues from the organizational perspective.

Sample Size

"Sample size depends on what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what's at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available time and resources."¹⁸⁹ In this study, forty African-American women who are currently members of predominantly White congregations of women religious or who entered and left the predominantly White congregations have been interviewed. This represents approximately 10% of the

¹⁸⁹Ibid., p.184.

overall membership of African-American women in predominantly white congregations of women religious. At the outset of the study, it was hoped that 20 current members and 20 former members would be participants. In the execution of the study, due to time, availability and travel restraints, this was not possible. The current study represents 31 current members of religious congregations and 9 former members. It was often difficult to find and obtain the consent of former members for an interview. In part, it is because the former members have put this part of their life behind them and find it difficult to relive the painfulness of this time and also because they were not invested in the outcome of the project. The study is limited by time and resources. There is one African-American Sister in all of Brooklyn and approximately three in Manhattan who are members of predominantly White congregations of women religious. Most of the respondents are in the Baltimore and Washington, D.C. area. However, this sample does draw information from the various important groups within the study. Patton notes the recommendation of Lincoln and Guba, gather information to the point of redundancy.¹⁹⁰ Therefore, one of the criteria for adequate information has been the repetitiveness of the responses in the interviews.

Another limitation of this study is that it is of a purely qualitative nature. While different perspectives of the experience of "discernment," outreach and recruitment, are

¹⁹⁰Ibid., p.186-187.

observed and described, the study relies on the discovery of the issues and is flexible to the emergent issues. This has implications for the validity of the findings. However, the nature of this study is to provide information for a program that is just beginning. While the findings are program specific, they open new arenas for future study. In addition the study uses several different methods of gathering data, interviews, program documents and observations. The triangulation of data gathering "increase the validity and reliability of evaluation data."¹⁹¹

Interview Process

Each of the women interviewed was known to the Nia House project directly or was referred by the other sisters who were asked to participate in the study. Of the forty respondents, five (22%) were present or former members of the Board of Trustees or its committees. Each woman interviewed suggested names of other sisters and former sisters who might consent to an interview. In all, thirty-one participants are presently sisters and nine are former sisters representing twenty-seven different predominantly white congregations of women religious. Twelve (44%) congregations or provinces were centered in the Northeast, thirteen (48%) in the Midwest, and two (7%) in the West.

The interviews took place at the respondents' homes, at Nia House, at work settings, in restaurants and at the

¹⁹¹Michael Quinn Patton, p.245.

interviewer's home. The interviewee generally selected the place for the interview.

Five interviews were recorded on a microcassette tape recorder. In two instances, the tape recorder malfunctioned. Notes were taken during each of the forty interview sessions which lasted two to three hours. Observations were written during and after each interview. The tapes, when available, notes and observations were transcribed as soon as possible after the interview. The data was entered by keyword into a professional file computer program.

All respondents were assured of the confidentiality of the interviews. Pseudonyms have been used in the documentation of this report. Information detailing specific history of the congregation of women religious have been deleted to protect the respondents. Respondents were aware of the purpose of the interview and the content areas it would cover and could refuse to answer any questions. An interview guide was used through out the process and the same interviewer conducted all the sessions. These interviews took place from January 1993 to February 1994.

A similiar process was followed in the interview of the Vocation Directors. The Vocation Directors were all known to the Nia House project. Each of the interviews took place at the respondent's home. The respondent was made aware of the aims of the study and the kinds of questions which would be asked. The respondents could refuse to answer any questions.

Each respondent was assured of the confidentiality of the interview and therefore, pseudonyms have been used in the documentation for this report. The same interview and interview guide was used in each interview. Each interview was taped on a microcassette recorder, notes and observations were written down by the interviewer during the interview period. The tapes, notes and observations were transcribed by the interviewer as soon as possible following the interview. The data was entered by keyword into a professional file computer program. These interviews took place in November and December of 1992 and January of 1993.

Units of Analysis

Patton indicates that "each unit of analysis implies a different kind of data collection, a different focus for the analysis of the data and a different level at which statements about findings and conclusions would be made."¹⁹² In this study the units of analysis are the recruitment and outreach process described from the experiences of African-American women who want to enter congregations of women religious, African-American women who have entered congregations of women religious, and from the congregations of women religious; and a description of the elements of the program which provide the development of a network of mentors and enhance social support.

As the study progressed, it became evident that the

¹⁹²Ibid., p.167.

experiences of the participants fell into two main categories. The factors that influence the experience of African-American women in predominantly white congregations of women religious and the components of the experience, which are indications of the preception of these experiences by the participants. The factors and components of the experience are evident in every phase of recruitment, outreach and membership. The analysis of the findings began with the development of a process/outcome matrix as conceptualized in Patton.¹⁹³ As the analysis continued, new categories of factors were added, for example, in the initial design of the questionnaire the sense of 'always teaching' was overlooked. Later, as this component of the experience emerged, it became evident that it was a significant consideration in the analysis of the data.

Reliability and Validity

Patton indicates that there are "basically four kinds of triangulation that contribute to verification and validation of qualitative analysis: (1) checking out the consistency of findings generated by different data-collection methods, that is methods triangulation; (2) checking out the consistency of different data sources with the same method, that is, triangulation of sources; (3) using multiple analysts to review findings, that is, analyst triangulation; and (4) using multiple perspectives or theories to interpret the data, that

¹⁹³Patton, p.415

is, theory/perspective triangulation."¹⁹⁴ In the current study the triangulation of sources, through the use of information from written documents, observational data and the interviews themselves, was an integral part of the design. Through the consultation with advisors on the Nia House Board of Trustees and other consultants there was analyst triangulation. The use of the institutional perspective is directed at perspective triangulation. The study is limited because it does not use data collection triangulation. Future work in this area would enhance the findings of this study.

Summary

This study is an effort to observe and describe the process of enhancing social networks to develop increased social support among individuals entering sometimes hostile environments. The study focuses on the experience of African-American women who seek membership in predominantly White congregations of women religious. It includes the experiences of African-American women who are members of congregations of women religious and African-American women who entered and left these congregations. The institutional perspective of the study is the description of the experience of congregations of women religious. The theoretical focus of this study is phenomenological, that is, the description of the experience of the respondents. The study is focused on the enhancement of social networks and the development of social

¹⁹⁴Ibid. p. 464.

supports in the program at Nia House. This qualitative study uses variation sampling and is limited by the sample size and the specific needs of the program. It is based on forty interviews with African-American women which were analyzed by focusing on the factors and components of the experience. The issues of validity and reliability, the use of triangulation of the sources, the analysts and the perspectives were addressed.

"YOU DO OWN TO HEAR ME FAINTLY"

Interviews

Introduction

This section addresses the interviews with Vocation Directors, who are the gatekeepers, of three major predominantly white religious congregations in an effort to underline the gaps which must be addressed by these religious institutions. Interviews with African-American women who are presently members of predominantly white congregations of women religious and African-American women who are former members of predominantly white congregations of women religious are included in the next section. These interviews are at the heart of the study and it is from them that the obstacles facing African-American women are more clearly defined.

The interviews with the Vocation Directors help to provide a picture of the difficulties and the obstacles that must be addressed by the predominantly white congregations of women religious and the program planners at Nia House who want to assist them in confronting the issues, and they represent the institutional perspective of the gatekeepers of these institutions. While the interview sample is limited, it provides a glimpse of the institutional mindset regarding the issues of outreach and membership.

The Vocation Director is responsible for outreach and recruitment and is the person who will recommend acceptance of

the applicant to the congregation. Her understanding of cultural differences, her ability to use that understanding to foster policies to welcome women of different cultural and racial backgrounds and her willingness to make changes in the outreach and recruitment program are essential in laying the groundwork for overcoming some of the obstacles faced by African-American women as they contemplate entering congregations.

Among the Vocation Directors, there is an understandable protectiveness of the dominant culture and a "call for mutuality." The sisters describe this term to mean that by permitting someone "different" to enter the congregation, the institution has taken a giant leap and therefore, the applicant should make changes in her life so that she is "more like us." Clearly, there is little or no understanding of the enormity of the tasks ahead or of the changes which must be embraced to welcome African-American women into predominantly white congregations of women religious.

The African-American women unanimously have each recounted incidents of racial bias and prejudices. All of the women describe isolation and alienation which led to the undermining of self-esteem to some extent. Older women who left congregations of women religious prior to Vatican II were very careful to indicate a great love for the sisters and the congregations with which they were affiliated. However, the themes of alienation and isolation were evident in their

language and their expressions describing the life with their respective congregations.

The Vocation Directors Speak

Introduction

The three vocation directors represented major congregations of women religious in the United States. Each congregation has a total membership of approximately 600 to 1,000 women world wide. Regionally, two of the congregations have a membership of less than 500 women and one has a membership of greater than 500. Ethnically, these congregations are predominantly Irish-American in membership today, although their roots are from three different European countries. One Vocation Director described a subtle ethnocentrism which existed when she entered the convent over two decades ago as "the whole world was Irish."¹⁹⁵

Each of these congregations, since the Second Vatican Council (1964), has experienced tremendous change in dress (called habit), rules, and formation or training. Two of the sisters interviewed experienced those changes directly and one sister entered during the transition period after the Second Vatican Council. The sisters generally agree that the 1990's demand new changes in religious life. "It's a transition time, it's a creative time and it's a difficult time. The whole understanding of our relationship to world affairs, and the Church and who we are and how we respond to different

¹⁹⁵Interview with Gail A., Vocation Director, November 25, 1992.

cultures."¹⁹⁶ This period of time is a time of great personal and organizational tension.

Background

History of Other Cultural and Ethnic Integration

The three representative congregations came to the United States to offer service to immigrant Catholic communities before the Civil War. The congregations accepted new members from the parish communities where they ministered, caring for orphans and the sick, operating schools, hospitals and nursing homes. Over time, the new applicants represented other ethnic groups than that of the founding pioneers. In one congregation, the European membership gave way to Irish-American and then, Italian-American women who wanted to become nuns. The acceptance of these new cultural and ethnic groups caused a great deal of individual and organizational tension. Questions regarding ethnic integration were included in the interview instrument to reference a set of changes that the organizations attempted to allow for greater variety in multicultural living. These questions regarding ethnic integration offer an opportunity to understand some of the issues which the congregations of women religious have in some way resolved. It should be understood that this kind of integration is in no way analogous to the more demanding racial integration which the Nia House project addresses. The history of slavery, prejudice and racism is a legacy that was

¹⁹⁶Ibid.

not and is not carried by the other ethnic groups which have successfully integrated into predominantly white congregations of women religious.

Nevertheless, historically each of the congregations accepted these new and different members with great difficulty. "The Irish feasts were always celebrated." Italian feasts were not. On rare occasions Italian food was served, but there was always an alternate meal for those who did not want to try the strange new fare.¹⁹⁷ Another sister remembered that she always heard stories about how hard it was for the Italian sisters because they really felt discriminated against. It took almost 40 years for a sister of Italian-American descent to be elected to a policy making position in the congregation.¹⁹⁸ One sister of Italian ancestry noted, "When I entered over 20 years ago, it wasn't blatant, but it was there. And yet you look back and its nobody's fault, but it was there. You know, little innuendos." People weren't even aware of what they were saying because they had never conceived of doing things differently.¹⁹⁹

One sister described the adjustment as noticeable because she was used to a different style of interaction regarding family. The things that seemed natural to her just were done

¹⁹⁷Interview with Alice S., January 12, 1993, p.103.

¹⁹⁸Interview with Mona M., p. 108.

¹⁹⁹Interview with Gail A., p.115.

differently. "I got used to it, but it was an adjustment."²⁰⁰ At this time, there was no thought of accommodating to the needs of the new applicants; the applicants had to make the changes in order to survive the formation or training process.

Today awareness of different cultures is more prevalent, the congregational memberships are more educated and more open to diversity. Some of this change has been prompted by the recognition of the need to attract new members at a time when numbers of applicants have been diminishing. There are, however, still instances when an individual may say or act in an offensive way using the ethnic difference as a reference point. For example saying "You are nice. You are not like those other _____."

For many sisters, the sensitivity to other cultures and the richness of these differences will be an important reference point. As will be documented later, the activities of the leadership teams are crucial to setting the tone of tolerance for change and intolerance for insensitivity and prejudice.

Alternate Forms of Membership

In addition to full congregational membership requiring the profession of vows of poverty, celibacy and obedience and communal lifestyle, all three congregations have alternate forms of membership which allow men and women to join in the

²⁰⁰Interview with Alice S., p.116.

prayer life of the religious congregation. Only one of the alternate memberships groups is integrated. An African-American woman asked the sisters to begin the program for one congregation. Gail A. describes the group: "It is the most culturally diverse and its wonderful and I mean they've added great life to the congregation."²⁰¹ One group recently started and has only four members. In the third congregation, the group is white. Several years before two African-American women were interested in joining the alternate membership program but the Vocation Director was not sure what happened since she was not in charge of that area.²⁰² These programs are generally advertised through a brochure sent on request, at convocations once or twice a year, and by word of mouth. It is important to note that the outreach in this most non-threatening associative membership is limited by two of the congregations and that failure to attract African-American women to this level of membership further isolates the congregation.

One Vocation Director evidenced her congregation's sensitivity to the cultural and ethnic issues because the congregation attracts African-American women who serve on Boards of Trustees and Advisory Boards for the congregation.²⁰³ And another Vocation Director described

²⁰¹ Interview with Gail A., p.115.

²⁰² Interview with Mona M., December 8, 1992, p. 32.

²⁰³ Interview with Alice S., January 12, 1993, p. 38.

African-American women as being employed in policy making positions at the congregational schools and social service agencies. But none of the Vocation Directors indicated that African-American women were in any way involved in the work of recruitment and outreach.

All of the congregations serve in African-American neighborhoods offering education, social services and pastoral ministry to the African-American community. One congregation has one African-American member.²⁰⁴ As will be noted in the final section of this report, the religious congregations, like many social service agencies, serve African-American clients and do not have professionals who represent that community on their staff. The congregations and the social service agencies must address this problem to increase their effectiveness among the populations of these neighborhoods.

National Formation Meetings

The three Vocation Directors were aware of the National Formation Conference. Several of these meetings have addressed the issue of cultural diversity and racism. One sister attended a meeting which addressed the issue directly. "The thing that impressed me the most about the woman is that she talked about what it was like to be an African-American in a white community and like how people didn't know and didn't have the skills to know what to do and so they would say

²⁰⁴Interview with Alice S., p.42.

outrageous things."²⁰⁵

These interviews allow us to see some of the difficulties large organizations face in beginning a change from a predominantly eurocentric way of life to a more multicultural way of living. After the Second Vatican Council (1964), American congregations of women religious carefully studied their way of living and began to look at the essential rules which must be a part of a vowed religious congregation, such as prayer life. Non-essential rules, such as travelling with a companion or wearing a habit, were areas where change could take place. These congregations set about the task of "modernizing," that is, meeting the needs of the members and society by changing the non-essential rules.

In spite of the many exterior and interior changes which were made over the last twenty five years, there has been only recent interest and awareness of the problems of racism in congregations of women religious. In general, congregations have been less than enthusiastic in recognizing and confronting these issues. The stories of the African-American sisters will demonstrate this point. Among the Vocation Directors, each woman was able to discuss the issue but all three show varying degrees of awareness of the obstacles faced by African-American women as they enter predominantly white congregations of women religious. One Vocation Director stated that her congregation has no problem with racism; it

²⁰⁵Interview with Gail A., p.23.

was the problem of the candidates. There was not enough "mutuality." Sister used the term to indicate that the African-American woman should be more ready to change and accept the established way of life.²⁰⁶ On the other side of the spectrum, one Vocation Director indicated that changes in prayer, liturgy, meals, household decorations, and music would only begin when the African-American woman entered the congregation.²⁰⁷

All the Vocation Directors agreed that they wanted to make the applicants welcome, but disagreed about how that would come about. Clearly, the major difficulty seems to be that the representatives were not sure how to go about this task.

In the following sections, I will discuss key areas which were addressed during the interviews. The major focus of this document is on the recruitment and outreach process, including candidacy, the application process and obstacles to integration as seen by the Vocation Director.

Recruitment and Outreach

Vocation Literature

The key item used in recruitment or marketing of the work and the communal opportunities of the congregation of women religious is the use of brochures and flyers. The "vocation literature" generally gives a brief explanation of the kinds

²⁰⁶Interview with Alice S., p.20.

²⁰⁷Interview with Mona M., p.30.

of work opportunities and explains the communal lifestyle of the congregation. The special trait or charism the particular congregation is focused on is included. For example, the Benedictines are known for their devotion to the liturgy, the Franciscans to poverty, and the Dominicans to the preaching about the truth. This marketing device reflects the composition of the congregation through the use of pictures. In the last few years, the predominantly white congregations of women religious have begun to reevaluate this literature. The three Vocation Directors described an on-going process by which this literature was developed. In all three instances, the multicultural material was not yet available but was expected in the near future. While all three Vocation Directors saw the need for multicultural material, not all carried that awareness into practice. One Vocation Director remarked, "A committee put together a brochure last year. It's a collage type thing with pictures of our sisters involved in ministry, prayers and socializing. It is multicultural to the extent that there are two pictures of Latin American children. It would have been possible to show sisters working with African-Americans but no one thought of it. It wasn't deliberately not included."²⁰⁸ This clearly does not deal with the real issue and treats the obstacles facing African-American women as simply a lack of thoughtfulness.

²⁰⁸Interview with Mona M., p. 19.

Vocation Talks

At times, the Vocation Directors are asked to give talks about the work of the congregation but in recent years the demand for speakers has lessened considerably. One Vocation Director has been in the work for four years and hasn't given a talk yet.²⁰⁹ One Director described this as very frustrating but explained that thinking about vocations is not everyone's priority. Only one Director had spoken to an African-American audience.²¹⁰

Outreach Process

Each of the Vocation Directors described a similar initial process, that is, an interested young woman would be referred to the Director by a Sister in the congregation. "I think if a person is actively interested in pursuing us, we provide information."²¹¹ The three congregations do some advertising in newspapers, but rely on the members who work in hospitals, educational institutions, social service and pastoral service agencies to do the initial outreach.

One congregation has a formal monthly program which focuses on religious life, decision-making and the discernment process, feminism in the Church and other related topics. The topic of diversity or multicultural living was not a part of the program, although the Vocation Director acknowledged its

²⁰⁹Interview with Gail A., p.29.

²¹⁰Interview with Mona M., p. 26-27.

²¹¹Interview with Alice S., p.45.

importance during the interview.²¹² These monthly meetings reflect the Eurocentric focus of the Director and the participants at the present time. The Director encourages all of the members of this group to participate in "taking duty" at a program and home for women ex-offenders who are African-American or Hispanic. "In a sense, it's my small contribution to cultural immersion, which is African-American and Hispanic, which many of (the searchers) the women have never had the opportunity to come in contact with or work with."²¹³ This is the only program of the three congregations which in some way addresses racism. It must be noted that the issues are addressed only in a service setting in which the clients are African-American and Hispanic and the providers are white. It is important for the women in the search program to meet with African-American women who come to them, not as clients or subordinates, but as equals. Indeed, the issues concerning respect for liturgy and prayer will never be addressed in this setting. Limits are also placed on the period of time a woman can continue to join the group. "If you are 36 and I've been seeing you for the last two years and you can't make a decision, then maybe the decision is being made." The Director continued that one thing to avoid is the danger of having someone lingering and using the group as a crutch.²¹⁴

²¹²Interview with Mona M., p.48,50.

²¹³Ibid. p. 51.

²¹⁴Ibid. p.52.

The other two congregations describe a much less formal structure but one that requires the interested person to meet with the Vocation Director several times before initiating a more formal process.²¹⁵ "At the present time, I am working with three women ranging in age from 24 to 40. The first time I brought them together, I was a nervous wreck saying, 'How will we do this with a 24 year old and a 40 year old?' And yet for what we did it was okay. I sort of take my cue from them, when and how we do things."²¹⁶ One congregation requires several board members to interview the prospective candidate prior to beginning the process of application.²¹⁷

None of the Vocation Directors described any other kind of outreach, such as taking part in college career days or speaking at large gatherings of Catholic groups (e.g. Sunday Mass). There were no reports of investigating positive marketing techniques or any descriptions of more pro-active recruitment strategies. Once the person identifies herself or shows an interest in a particular congregation, the Vocation Director is responsible for following up to find out if other information or contact is needed. Gail A. described writing notes to young women who were interested just to let them know she was available to them if they had questions.²¹⁸

²¹⁵Interview with Gail A., p.71.

²¹⁶Ibid. p.72-73.

²¹⁷Interview with Alice S., p.53.

²¹⁸Interview with Gail A., p. 158.

Only one group was large enough to meet regularly with the Vocation Director. The other groups relied on the programs developed by the Bishop's Diocesan Office. This generic program brings together individuals interested in religious life to socialize, pray and discuss issues. This group is multi-ethnic and integrated. While the group is on-going with no limit to the length of time for membership it is, of its nature, a transitional group with new members joining each month and others leaving. This is a much less formal group and there is no pre-screening of members as is the case with the congregational programs.

Once the young woman has "made the connection"²¹⁹ and is able to demonstrate to the Vocation Director that she is serious about the commitment, understands its meaning and is a mature person, she will be asked to begin the steps for application to the respective congregation. As will be noted in Part Two, the stories of the African-American women, it is at this point that delays can occur. The Vocation Director can recommend that an individual wait until college is completed or until there is a demonstrable change to a more mature behavior. "We had one woman I asked to wait. Everytime we met it was as if there was another issue; no matter how I questioned her I couldn't get her to open up to me. Later on, I discovered that this woman wanted to find a

²¹⁹Interview with Alice S., p.53.

place where she would be sure to be taken care of."²²⁰ Another Director described refusing a young woman who had a dependency on others and had attempted suicide in the last several years. "One thing I look for is stability. If someone is excessively devout I want to know what's underneath this behavior. I go by my gut a lot and there are sometimes you just know."²²¹ Regardless of the individual's difficulties this Director will meet with the searcher to discuss the issues.

While only one Vocation Director explicitly indicated that the recommendation or non-recommendation of a searcher is a process which is very subjective in part, the other Vocation Directors in fact described similar criteria. Cultural, ethnic and racial differences can easily be misinterpreted as will be demonstrated in part two. The Directors did not describe participating in any workshops or programs which would help them understand different cultural nuances. These workshops are available through Nia House, Sojourner House and the Institute for Black Catholics at Xavier University.

Application Process

In the precandidacy process, the individual is more formally bonded to the particular congregation of women religious. She is asked to have a medical examination, psychological testing and obtain character references. One

²²⁰Ibid. p.58.

²²¹Interview with Mona M., p.62.

group requires a college degree or some professional preparation and a written autobiography.²²² One Vocation Director described the criteria as, "sustained capacity for growth, service, availability, a sense of who you are, prayer, community and ministry. Relationships should be few and community centered and there should be a level of maturity."²²³

The psychological testing is arranged by the congregation. Each group uses a different psychologist. In the past, this testing was a very important element but today it is a part of a total picture. In addition, one congregation uses a written behavioral assessment to augment the data from the other required submissions.

Mona M. indicated that "one of the things we've spoken about as a team is if the time comes when we do receive an African-American or Hispanic there has to be sensitivity for the type of testing that a person receives. We need to find a test and tester who will be sensitive to cultural nuances."²²⁴ One Vocation Director was aware that tests of this kind can be culturally biased, but was concerned about locating someone (an African-American psychologist) who would have some sense of religious life.²²⁵ And finally one

²²²Interview with Mona M., p.68.

²²³Interview with Alice S., p.84.

²²⁴Interview with Mona M., p.78.

²²⁵Interview with Gail A., p.81.

Vocation Director would not consider a change in the test or tester because "the psychologist is a former religious woman herself."²²⁶

The testing is always a difficult process for the applicant. Yet none of the congregations had listings of other than white psychologists. The level of comfort in answering questions and the framing of those questions to allow for cultural nuances was at least a consideration of one of the groups but the other two Vocation Directors were not even sure someone capable could be found in the African-American community. This is an indication of the "attitudinal obstacle" which must be overcome in these congregations. Historically, it reflects the view of the broader American Catholic Church at the turn of the century, which held that African-Americans were not capable of higher education and were not competent to abide by the rules of the Catholic Church.²²⁷

During the process of pre-candidacy, the women are encouraged to find a spiritual director, someone who will act as a guide as the searcher thinks about the meaning of the Scriptures, spiritual books, and prayer life. Generally, each Diocesan office has a list of available spiritual directors. The Vocation Directors reported that the list includes only

²²⁶Interview with Alice S., p.76.

²²⁷Cyprian Davis, The History of Black Catholics in the United States, (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Co., 1993.) pp.134-135.

white persons who offer this service. "Usually in pre-admission we encourage them (the searchers) to work with a spiritual director. And if they don't have one, we try to direct them to one. Our African-American candidate had an African-American spiritual director."²²⁸ One Vocation Director indicated that she would ask the aspirant to select a spiritual director from a list but in the case of an African-American it would not necessarily be a list of only African-American persons, but it would be a list of women.²²⁹ Another Director indicated how she would investigate the names of Spiritual Directors who could offer an African-American woman the perspective and understanding which the Vocation Director considered very important. She gave an example of how she had accommodated a Hispanic woman by finding a Spiritual Director who was fluent in the language and culturally aware.²³⁰

It is important to note the relationship between culture and religious expression. For African-American women in predominantly white religious congregations a cultural link and the encouragement of a consonant religious expression is an important support to the individual woman. In part two, the struggles associated with being the "only one" or a member of a small minority are clearly defined. It is clear that the

²²⁸Interview with Alice S., p.92.

²²⁹Interview with Gail A., p.97.

²³⁰Interview with Mona M., p. 98.

Vocation Directors of predominantly white congregations of women religious need to provide access to a network of other persons who will support the African-American candidate both culturally and spiritually.

Candidacy

Following the acceptance of the aspirant to the candidacy program, the Vocation Director generally encourages the woman to live with the sisters in community in a local convent house. "I believe the formation (or training) happens through the community and not through me."²³¹ Each congregation has a different evaluative strategy but generally these strategies are designed to allow the aspirant and the congregation six months to one year before any public acceptance of the individual is declared. During this time, the candidate continues to work at her regular job. When the candidate enters the formal formation program called postulancy, she must begin to do the job which reflects the ministry or service of the congregation.²³²

Steps Toward Full Membership

During the period of postulancy, which lasts from six months to two years, the aspirant lives in a local convent community and engages in the ministerial work of the congregation with others who are already full members of the congregation. The Postulant is evaluated by the Director of

²³¹Interview with Gail A., p.85.

²³²Interview with Mona M., p.74.

Postulants and the sisters of the local convent house providing the Executive Board of the congregation with a recommendation or non-recommendation to the second stage, the novitiate program.

In the novitiate, the aspirant assumes all of the duties and responsibilities required of the members of the religious congregation but is free to leave at any time. One year, the canonical novitiate, is focused on the study of the vows and religious life, and the second year, a less formal period, provides an opportunity for the aspirant to experience different ministries available in the congregation. In the novitiate, the Director of Novices is responsible for the evaluation of each aspirant. At this juncture the non-recommendation of a novice is often accompanied by a request that she leave the novitiate. As will be noted in part two, the ability of the Director of Novices to understand cultural differences and to support African-American candidates is crucial throughout the novitiate process.

Following the successful completion of the novitiate, the aspirant is invited to publicly profess temporary vows. As a sister in the community, she assumes her role with other sisters in the work of the congregation. The Director of Temporary Professed Sisters is responsible to evaluate the candidate and with the local community and sisters throughout the congregation must recommend or not recommend either renewal of temporary vows or completion of the formation

process by inviting the candidate to publicly profess final or perpetual vows.

Throughout this process, individuals can be deferred from entering into the next step in this developmental process. Each of the congregations employ different strategies regarding evaluation, ministry and residence. However, the basic steps remain constant.

Obstacles To Membership

The obstacles facing African-American women entering predominantly white congregations of women religious as perceived by the Vocation Directors demonstrate their awareness of the racism of our society and its attendant problems in the religious congregations. "The biggest obstacle faced in multicultural living are the cultural differences and the ability to construct an umbrella environment that will allow for each culture. To find adequate ways of interacting is very important. The differences in family structure and reticence with regard to sharing is very important."²³³

Racism

Racism was named the prime obstacle by two of the Vocation Directors. "A unique obstacle that she would face that perhaps a white woman would not face is her color and what people (sisters) would carry with that."²³⁴ One Director understood the importance of providing a support

²³³Interview with Alice S., p.126.

²³⁴Interview with Gail A., p.127-128.

network, but warned that the network could not become more important than the local community.²³⁵

While these Directors recognized the issue and the high expectations of the aspirants, they warned, "Any one who thinks everything is wonderful in religious life, well there's something wrong here, because reality, your own reality, is going to tell you that life is going to be up and down. And also if you are a person in our culture who is African-American or Hispanic and you're denying this, then that's something you really need help to touch."²³⁶ Both Directors agreed that the aspirant must understand that everything that happens is not done deliberately or out of insensitivity but may be done out of ignorance.²³⁷

While this is a plea to understand that racial intolerance exists, it does not address the more crucial root issue, that is the elimination of this kind of intolerance. It is indeed a superficial response and as will be demonstrated in the stories of the African-American sisters, it creates a sense that the organization cannot be trusted by its members. One Director indicated that the African-American or Hispanic woman must not be so defensive.²³⁸ In a sense, this plea also fails to address the issue of intolerance and in addition it

²³⁵Ibid. p.129.

²³⁶Ibid.,p.143.

²³⁷Ibid. p.129.

²³⁸Interview with Alice S.,p.138.

blames the victim for not submitting to the abuse quietly. It is perhaps the most violent of the suggestions, because it suggests that when unwarranted personal attacks happen, the individual should ignore them and submit to them without comment.

One Vocation Director described a problem with an African-American candidate, "I think one of the things was the cultural differences. It was so different from the others. The family structure and she was so private and quiet."²³⁹ Others tried to reach out to her supportively, the Director observed. The Vocation Director indicated that she did not "see color. There are differences that are always going to be there but that doesn't make them a disadvantage."²⁴⁰

In two instances Vocation Directors described the Hispanic applicants as very light skinned. This helped to make them more acceptable and less open to the ravages of racism. One Vocation Director told the story of a Hispanic member who was not light skinned and had more African features. "I've heard people say she has a chip on her shoulder because she felt discriminated against and was treated differently than the other Hispanic women."²⁴¹

Gail A. related the story of an African-American woman who tried to join her religious congregation over twenty years

²³⁹Ibid., p. 131,139.

²⁴⁰Ibid., p. 150.

²⁴¹Interview with Mona M., p.152.

ago. "The candidate left because she said we were too nice to her. I asked myself what does that mean, and I think we ignored her color."²⁴²

Other Obstacles To Membership

Two of the Directors mentioned that "being the only one" was an obstacle. "Today we have so few applicants that everyone puts them under a microscope and has an opinion of how they should do certain things."²⁴³ This kind of isolation can lead to serious alienation, if it is not addressed programmatically. There must be a way to acknowledge the richness of the differences and to avoid a judgmental ranking of cultures. While this obstacle is mentioned there seems to be no plan developed by these congregations to deal with this real problem.

Although prayer and worship were mentioned by only one director, "After having attended certain liturgies in the motherhouse, the other experiences I've had with African-American and Hispanic religious just the whole area of prayer and worship would be something and probably be an issue. It would be very difficult for an African-American or Hispanic."²⁴⁴ The director was referring to the blandness of the motherhouse worship services. In her experience, the African-American liturgies are far more expressive and involve

²⁴²Interview with Gail A., p.155.

²⁴³Ibid. p. 128.

²⁴⁴Interview with Mona M., p.133.

the participants in the experience. This director did not suggest that perhaps the sisters who worship in the motherhouse community should be exposed to a different form of praise.

Foods and food preparation are another important aspect of communal life. Much of the cooking today is done by the sisters who live in the local convents, each one takes a turn. The openness of the group to accept and try new foods is very important as is the realization for the African-American candidate that she won't often be eating the foods she is most accustomed to.²⁴⁵

One final area addressed by the Vocation Directors is sensitivity to the use of language. "I guess having suffered with the language of the Church as a woman I would try to be sensitive to that, but I will need help to make me more aware."²⁴⁶ "I often worry about words causing discomfort, " but it wasn't a problem in our multicultural setting. The difficulty was described as more about using colloquialisms with persons who were learning the English language.²⁴⁷

The Need for Education

All of the Directors recognized the need for the members of predominantly white congregations of women religious to educate themselves regarding racism and the ways to be more

²⁴⁵Ibid., p.135.

²⁴⁶Interview with Gail A., p.146.

²⁴⁷Interview with Alice S., p.166-167.

open to different cultural lifestyles. Most agreed that there was "unconscious bias" and that sisters did not like to be labeled as racists. "We probably need to be educated more. I think the defensiveness is a problem. Understanding both sides of the issues, what is appropriate in one's culture is not appropriate here. I don't like being attacked on the issue, more balance is needed."²⁴⁸ "I think at least through my research, the kind of societal prejudice Americans have is very different from what's around the world and we really have to address it as a society. I don't believe we have a choice as a congregation because this is the right thing to do."²⁴⁹ From these comments, it is evident that the congregational representatives do not know how to address this issue and that there is a basic unwillingness to enter into a program to create fundamental change in the congregations. The sisters express a desire to reach the goal and are willing to make some cosmetic changes, like including one talk on multicultural living in the pre-candidacy program.

Nia House Project

Each of the congregations is committed to the Nia House project out of a concern for the African-American women who are asking questions regarding religious vocations. One Director said, "One of the reasons we got involved in Nia

²⁴⁸Interviews with Alice S., p.138, 159. and with Mona M., p.173.

²⁴⁹Interview with Gail A., p.142, 144.

House is that we noticed that we keep attracting ourselves."²⁵⁰ While all of the Directors indicated the importance of the project, none of them had made use of the project in their own programmatic plans.

Observations and Discussion

All three directors demonstrated a certain discomfort during the interview process. Each tried to explain that if "unconscious bias" was expressed it was because the members of the congregation were by and large well meaning and not malicious. However, the sisters did not see the importance of taking the responsibility to educate themselves and eradicate this problem. And each felt that if the African-American woman could understand and change, then she would find great openness among the members of the congregation. As will be noted in part two, African-American sisters have experienced this expectation throughout their association with the religious congregations. The "mutuality" or fairness that the Directors mentioned seemed to indicate that the aspirant should understand the changes and struggles of the congregation and not take the difficulties and problems personally. Rather she should accept the opportunity gratefully. On a recent visit to a congregational motherhouse, one Vocation Director confided that an African-American applicant should feel grateful to be welcomed and therefore, should not look for other signs of acceptance. It

²⁵⁰Interview with Alice S., p.170.

must be noted that no white woman would be treated in this manner.

Perhaps one of the most telling obstacles the congregations of women religious must face is "just not thinking about it." It is time to attract members to committees who will help the congregations think about multicultural representations and multicultural issues. This must not be considered the sole province of an African-American candidate.

All of the facets of the outreach and recruitment process are touched by the "attitudinal" obstacle which was expressed in different ways. For example, the concern that a competent African-American psychologist who understood religious life could be found for psychological testing, or the failure to understand the importance of an African-American spiritual director for a woman who will be marooned in a eurocentric culture and worship.

The identification of obstacles, while it focuses on what needs to be changed immediately, became the problem of the aspirant. Congregations need to take note of the problems and look for solutions. Vocation Directors, as the gatekeepers, need to have more cultural immersion to help them become more sensitive to the needs of minorities. Denying the problems, which has been the case in the past and continues to be a problem for at least one of the respondents, has not worked. It is time to act.

There is an expressed need for education. One of the major problems will be presenting the issue in a way which challenges growth and at the same time does not cause the defensiveness which was so readily expressed. Congregations and their leaders need to define this issue for their membership. Fairness, understanding both sides of the issue, and excusing unconscious bias can no longer be tolerated if a multicultural environment is to be constructed. A program to enhance racial tolerance is needed.

These three congregations represent an important realization that the issue of racism must be addressed. It is very uncomfortable, but as will be demonstrated in part two, it is devastating to live with the scepter of racism each day. While the Vocation Directors admitted that there was a need to address racism, none of the congregations have made any policy statements on this issue.

Summary

In this section, three interviews with Vocation Directors from predominantly white congregations of women religious were presented. These interviews were presented as an institutional referent point to the stories of the African-American women who have experienced the obstacles of racism as members of predominantly white congregations of women religious. Each of these major congregations of women religious experienced some change in the ethnic composition of its membership. This change often caused individual and

organizational tension and has been fraught with difficulties. Ultimately, however, the new members have entered the main stream of congregational affairs. Today the congregations have alternate forms of membership which is integrated in only one instance. African-American women serve on Boards of Directors and are policy making employees in education and social service agencies for at least two of the congregations. Yet all of the groups serve in African-American neighborhoods and parishes with only one African-American woman member. This situation is analogous to the many social service and educational institutions which serve the African-American community but do not employ its members in policy-making roles.

The Vocation Directors have attended various national meetings, and have been represented at a Vocation Awareness Day held at Nia House.

The areas of recruitment and outreach, including the development of vocation literature, speaking engagements, and individual contacts are all important to the development of a program which is inclusive of all ethnic and racial groups. Gaps in these areas include failure to advertise in African-American papers and parishes to present vocation awareness programs, and the lack of inclusion of African-Americans on the various recruitment and outreach committees.

The pre-candidacy and admission process requires aspirants to have a psychological test and work with a

spiritual director. In both areas, there is a need to expand the current resources to include African-Americans and Hispanics. Criteria for admission generally lacked cultural sensitivity. The candidacy process and the steps to full membership were explained. Promotion through out this process is very subjective and often African-American women are misunderstood and experience delays from one step to the next.

Obstacles as perceived by the Vocation Directors included racism, isolation caused by being the only one, differences in prayer, worship, food and the use of language were expressed. All of the Vocation Directors expressed a need for education and called for a sense of fairness in the development of plans for change. The Nia House project while identified by all the directors has not yet been used as a resource.

Among the observations, the most pressing need is to begin to address a new more inclusive way of thinking which will allow for multicultural differences and not judgements. There is still a great deal of education needed and the leaders of the congregations have an important opportunity to set the tone which will expand the cultural and racial tolerance of the members and address the issues of intolerance and racism directly and clearly. Perhaps the most pressing obstacle, which was not addressed by any Vocation Director, was the need for the congregation to take on the issue of racism in a pro-active way and develop a program aimed at the membership to address attitudes and policies which

discriminate against African-Americans. Finally, it must be noted that there is generally an acknowledgement that something needs to be done to address the issue of racism, but a real lack of understanding about what it should be. There are no plans to use consultants or experts to research the possibilities of what could be done to address this problem.

African-American Women Speak

Introduction

In this section, the interviews with forty African-American women religious and former members of religious congregations will be explored. Thirty-one of the interviews engaged African-American women who are members of predominantly white congregations of women religious, and nine women were former members of congregations of women religious. The twenty-seven different congregations represented different areas of the United States, namely, the Northeast, Midwest and West. Seventeen (62%) of the congregations have less than 500 members, seven (25%) of the congregations have a membership of 501-1,000 women, and three (11%) have a membership of 1,001 or more women. Twelve (44%) of the congregations have more than one African-American member, ten (37%) congregations have one African-American member and five (19%) congregations presently have no African-American women members.

Of the nine former members, three of the African-American women were the only women of color for the ten years of their association with their respective congregations. Two of the former members left religious life prior to the Second Vatican Council (1964) and seven left religious life after the Vatican Council. The former members represented seven different congregations, one from a congregation larger than 500 members, the others from smaller congregations. Two of the former sisters were members of predominantly white

congregations of women religious with more than one African-American member.

The ages of all of the forty participants range from 28-70 years old. Seven (17%) women were members of religious congregations for more than forty years, three (7%) for thirty to thirty-nine years, five (12%) for twenty to twenty-nine years, fifteen (37%) for ten to nineteen years and ten (25%) for less than ten years.

Each of the women has related at least one story of a particular incident which she felt was an expression of racism. For most of these women, the incidents were not isolated and for those who stayed such incidents continue to be part of their lives. In the next few pages, we will explore the dynamics of the many incidents that affect the lives of these courageous women.

The women were quick to share supportive and positive references in their experience. The former religious were particularly protective of their former religious congregations. These women express great love for their congregations and the opportunities they enjoyed in religious life. The thirty-one (77%) women who remained in religious life demonstrated both an understanding of their sisters and a need to see a change. Nevertheless, the daily struggles the women faced were evident. The alienation and isolation are also evident in their stories.

In this section, we will explore the stories of the women

from their first interest in religious life through the recruitment process to membership. Seventeen (43%) of the sisters interviewed experienced delays at some point in the membership process. Thirty-eight (95%) women also perceive racism as the primary obstacle, but they offer a different perspective from that of the Vocation Directors who advocate change in the individual candidate. The difficulty of "being the only one" and "always teaching" are clearly articulated by the respondents. The consequences of these struggles are explored, including lowered self-esteem, isolation and alienation.

Outreach and Recruitment

Initial Interest

Almost half of the respondents indicated that they were never invited to join the predominantly white congregations of the sisters with whom they shared the desire to become a sister. Tammy B. recalled, "Recently, at a Eucharistic Congress, one of the sisters I stayed with asked me, 'You were always with our sisters, why didn't you join us?' I replied that I was never invited."²⁵¹ Darlene explained, "The sisters all said I had a vocation, but no one invited me to their congregations."²⁵² Hillary indicated that "I always wanted to be a nun. I met a sister social worker and another sister who is a teacher, but none of them invited me to join

²⁵¹Interview with Tammy B., Dec. 13, 93, p.II-338.

²⁵²Interview with Darlene D., Feb. 21, 94, p.II-284.

them. I thought that no one believed in my desire."²⁵³

Over forty years ago, one sister recalled, "I ran around with a group of people from which seven entered religious life. My best friend entered and I thought I would be welcome. At a national Catholic meeting of students, Monsignor Sheen gave a talk on vocations and urged us to join religious life. I got up and asked why were congregations turning away vocations? There was a flurry created by my question and Monsignor Sheen offered to help me find a welcoming congregation in his diocese."²⁵⁴ In 1989, a young African-American woman described her search for a welcoming congregation, "In the first congregation I went to, the Vocation Director gave me the impression that she was not pleased. It was a real turn off. I never went back. Next I called a Vocation Director from a local predominantly white congregation, but she never responded. Finally, I found the sisters here. They were welcoming and we have worked together on cultural issues. I have hope."²⁵⁵ Even though these experiences are separated by forty years of time, the contents are similar.

Twelve (30%) women were not Roman Catholics when each met a woman religious for the first time. "I am what they call a convert. I grew up as a Baptist. In my teenage years, I

²⁵³Interview with Hillary L., Oct. 1, 93, p. II-309.

²⁵⁴Interview with Nina T., Oct. 18, 93, p.II-320.

²⁵⁵Interview with Diane B., Oct. 7, 93, p. II-296.

became attracted to the Catholic faith and, in turn, from there to religious life."²⁵⁶ Laura explained, "I was interested in religious life in the third grade. I became a convert and found that there were no Churches or schools for African-Americans in our town."²⁵⁷ The other women (70%) were members of the Catholic Church and were drawn to religious life in different ways. "When I was a young woman I was impressed by the movie THE MIRACLE OF FATIMA. I went to the priest and he told me to pray on it. I couldn't tell my family. When I was sixteen I actively pursued my search."²⁵⁸ Several women recalled their Catholic School days: "I went to Catholic school. On eighth and ninth grade retreats, I thought about entering the convent. I was enthralled by the sisters in general. I never saw an African-American nun. The nuns seemed to understand the goodness of life. Some sisters were encouraging."²⁵⁹ Wendy remembered, "I went to Catholic schools all my life. I always wanted to be a teacher and a sister. When I was a little girl, I remember playing nun. In High School, I focused on being a nun. My High School teacher suggested an all African-American congregation but I said no. I wanted to join the sisters who taught me in school."²⁶⁰

²⁵⁶Interview with Agnes B., Jan. 13, 93, p. I-15.

²⁵⁷Interview with Laura H., Sept. 30, 93, p. II-337.

²⁵⁸Interview with Edith E., Feb. 17, 93, p. I-7.

²⁵⁹Interview with Martha L., Oct. 1, 93, p. II-318.

²⁶⁰Interview with Wendy T., Nov. 12, 93, p. II-289.

Rita's family was very involved in her local parish. "Two of my Aunts were nuns. I often played nun. My Uncle was a priest. I had a desire to become a sister. I had strong Catholic encouragement from my family."²⁶¹ Laura found another motivation, "When I was a sophomore in High School, I heard a preacher urging us to think of the future. There were challenges and questions about non-violence of the civil rights movement. I was very active in civil rights with many members of my family. I realized that all along whites concluded what was good for ME. I had a sense of advocacy. I wanted to be of service. I felt that understanding could change the picture. I made this career choice."²⁶² Jill recalled, "I went to Catholic School. In my family it was said: 'If you can't heal bodies, heal souls.' I thought being a sister was a good way to spend one's life. From seventh grade, I knew I wanted to enter religious life. Ultimately, I entered the congregation of the sisters who taught me in elementary school."²⁶³ And Gina, as an adult, was challenged by her observations. "I taught in an inner city High School. I began to ask why only white women were at the school for African-American kids. These adults tell children what to do, by why couldn't I do this? I always knew I would do a

²⁶¹Interview with Rita B., Nov. 27, 93, p. II-325.

²⁶²Interview with Laura H., Sept. 30, 93, p. II-314.

²⁶³Interview with Jill C., Oct. 8, 93, p. II-313.

challenging task for God."²⁶⁴ It is evident that several of the women arrived at their career decisions in a manner not unlike their white counterparts, but Laura and Gina recognized a particular task in their career choice.

Thirty-five (88%) women described sisters as role models. "I became interested in religious life when my mother became ill. She was in the hospital and I was impressed by the care that the sisters gave her."²⁶⁵ Diane B. commented, "One sister in my parish was a role model for me. I wanted to share in her mission and ministry."²⁶⁶ Eileen explained "When my sister was taken to the hospital, my mother had to go to stay with her. I was left at home to care for the younger ones. The nuns visited my home. I was struck by the compassion and care of the nuns. I hadn't seen an African-American nun. I expressed a desire to enter and I felt encouraged."²⁶⁷ Amy was inspired by her teacher. "Initially in the fifth grade, I became interested in religious life because I admired a music teacher in my Catholic School. I began to think of the possibilities."²⁶⁸

Often the women reported that they received no reply to

²⁶⁴Interview with Gina R., Dec. 14, 93, p. II-303.

²⁶⁵Interview with Sylvia S., Feb. 2, 93, p. I-1.

²⁶⁶Interview with Diane B., Oct. 7, 93, p. II-296.

²⁶⁷Interview with Eileen B., Dec. 14, 93, p. II-300.

²⁶⁸Interview with Amy W., Feb. 6, 94, p. II-290.

inquiries about admission to congregations of women religious.²⁶⁹ Thirty (75%) of the women indicated that their letters were unanswered. Carol explained, "The Church was part of my life. The Pastor was influential in my vocation. He encouraged me to write to the Vocation Director of the congregation. I wrote several times, but she didn't respond. Ultimately, I went to another congregation."²⁷⁰

One woman recalled that when she was sixteen, she contacted a congregation of women religious and asked for an application. She received a letter which said, "we don't accept colored girls." Saddened by the rejection, she continued her search.²⁷¹ She volunteered her time in a local Catholic Hospital and was befriended by one of the sisters who worked in the laboratory. This sister told me she would never invite me to join her congregation."²⁷² This kind of discouragement was evident to other African-American women as well. Karen recalled that at "age sixteen I told my mother I wanted to be a nun. She said to me that there were no African-American nuns. I figured I couldn't do it."²⁷³ "A discouraging aspect of my search was why didn't we know about

²⁶⁹Interview with Agnes B., Jan. 13, 93, p. I-86.

²⁷⁰Interview with Carol R., Dec. 13, 93, p. II-282.

²⁷¹Interview with Edith E., p. I-34.

²⁷²Interview with Edith E., p. I-26-27.

²⁷³Interview with Karen J., Nov. 17, 93, p. II-285.

African-American nuns?," Bertha H. commented.²⁷⁴ Odetta shared that "Before I entered my congregation a sister came to me and said, 'They are not ready for you.' I was concerned about this, but I believed in my vocation."²⁷⁵

Seventeen (42%) of the women recounted episodes of delay after delay. Some of the women were instructed to go to college first, then finish college, and then live independently for a year. One respondent was in ROTC and completed her training before she was allowed to apply. Several respondents stated they felt that they were treated differently from other applicants. Rhonda said that, "I was treated differently from the white women who entered. When they told me they were accepted I was hurt by that. Here I've been doing this for years and they come in and in a year were accepted. I don't think that the congregation thought they were doing anything different for me but they were. I know that some others were accepted who had not finished college and I was told I had to complete college."²⁷⁶ Elizabeth finished college and was delayed again. "I began to wonder, when would it be my turn?"²⁷⁷ The opportunity did not come for another two years. Sylvia S., a convert to Catholicism, expressed a formal interest in religious life when she was in

²⁷⁴Interview with Bertha H., Nov. 16, 93, p. II-291.

²⁷⁵Interview with Odetta B., Sept. 3, 93, p. II-280.

²⁷⁶Interview with Rhonda R., Jan. 8, 93, p. I-41.

²⁷⁷Interview with Elizabeth H., Jan. 28, 93, p. I-44.

high school. "I made a formal application and they sent me to a secular institute for some experience. Later, after I joined Pax Christi, I discovered my contemplative vocation."²⁷⁸ Sylvia applied to a contemplative monastery in the South, "and the Provincial instructed the sisters to reject my application. They encouraged me to go elsewhere."²⁷⁹ Finally she was accepted by a monastery in the Midwest.

Five (12%) of the women described feeling encouraged by the responses of congregations in which they had an interest. "I didn't have any contact with the congregation. I was thirty-one years old and was used to moving freely in the white world. The sisters were open to my application."²⁸⁰ Susan recalled that "I asked questions about religious life from my senior year in high school and all through college. The sisters were very welcoming."²⁸¹ Lilly indicated that she contacted the Vocation Director and went on weekend retreats. "I made my decision and felt encouraged."²⁸²

Women who are interested in entering religious congregations often volunteer their time to assist the sisters. It offers them an opportunity to see the sisters in

²⁷⁸Interview with Sylvia S., p. I-31.

²⁷⁹Ibid., p.I-32.

²⁸⁰Interview with Evelyn L., Sept. 10, 93, p. II-301.

²⁸¹Interview with Susan P., Dec. 13, 93, p. II-287.

²⁸²Interview with Lilly M., Nov. 3, 93, p.II-315.

a working situation and gives the sisters an opportunity to observe the candidate in the experience. For some African-American women this experience can be a very negative one. Rhonda recalled that she went to a school to help out. When lunch time came, Rhonda was sent to the cafeteria to eat with the children and was not invited to the convent where the sisters were eating lunch. When she finished eating, instead of waiting in the school cafeteria with no one to talk to, she went to the convent to ask if she could wait in one of the visiting parlors until the lunch period was over. A sister showed her to the room. A few minutes later, another sister came by, asked her what she was doing in the parlor, and suggested she leave. "And she took me through the kitchen and the person I was waiting for never said anything. She opened the back door and put me out. I still remember that. I hope I'm never missioned there. Every time I go there I think about it."²⁸³ Norma recalled that she volunteered in a school as part of a pre-entrance program for two years. Everyone knew she wanted to enter the congregation. "One day I was summoned to the motherhouse, sister said if God wanted me to be a sister, then He would have given me the gifts that were needed. I was so upset that I had wasted two years." After two more tries, Norma found a welcoming congregation.²⁸⁴ This kind of discouragement and scrutiny is

²⁸³Interview with Rhonda R., p. I-142.

²⁸⁴Interview with Norma D., Sept. 15, 93, p.II-323.

not generally experienced by the white women who enter predominantly white religious congregations.

Formal Application Process

The African-American women in this study made application to congregations during two different eras of religious life, namely before Vatican II (1964) and after the Council. The period prior to Vatican II is marked by more traditional, monastic training, often held in one place, the novitiate. And the period after Vatican II was much more oriented to the mission experience. In the early 1960's, many congregations instituted formal psychological testing as an element of the application process.

Of the study group, twenty-four (60%) young women were sent for psychological testing; the remaining sixteen (40%) women entered many years before this requirement was introduced. Twenty-one (87%) of the sisters interviewed, who entered after 1960 and were required to complete psychological testing, were sent to white psychologists for testing. The discomfort of this situation was expressed by each one of the young women. Susan felt that the decision should be made with the potential candidate.²⁸⁵ For the most part the women felt that, at the time, they "bought the whole package, and had no choice." The women expressed a concern that the psychologist did not understand their lived experience. Carol noted that "After I made formal application to the congregation, I asked

²⁸⁵Interview with Susan P., Dec. 13, 93, p. II-286.

if an African-American woman psychologist could do the testing. My request was denied. They sent me to a white male priest."²⁸⁶ Thelma described grave misgivings about the process. "The testing was not a positive experience. I asked for a copy of the psychological but received only a summary. I paid for the test. I was tested by a white psychologist."²⁸⁷ Karen described her experience, "I was sent to one of our sisters for the psychological. She was not sensitive at all to the cultural nuances."²⁸⁸ Darlene noted that "The psychologist was white. There was no sensitivity on the part of the congregation that an African-American psychologist might be better. It is a pity."²⁸⁹ Often the referral to see the psychologist is made without out a thought that the African-American woman will be uncomfortable with the psychologist generally used by the congregation. This kind of "oversight" is just the kind of obstacle which sends the message that the African-American candidate is not welcome in the congregation.

Elizabeth described her hopes and her difficulties in gaining entrance to a congregation. "I had this dream that I graduated from high school and would enter. As I got older, I became aware that wasn't the reality. At the time I saw the

²⁸⁶Interview with Carol R., Dec.13,93, p. II-281.

²⁸⁷Interview with Thelma E., Dec. 11,93, p. II-332.

²⁸⁸Interview with Karen J., Nov. 17, 93, p. II-255.

²⁸⁹Interview with Darlene D., Feb. 21, 94, p. II-253.

delay because I was African-American only on some days. I had a constant battle with the Vocation Director. She focused on my mother, her divorce and my family. She didn't understand my culture and my resistance to discuss these private matters with her. Once I submitted the formal documents there were no more delays."²⁹⁰

Rhonda experienced a three year delay in gaining acceptance to the candidacy program, so she had to reapply to the program and then begin her two year commitment before she could be considered for acceptance to the congregation.²⁹¹ Rhonda remembered that her mother wanted her to reconsider her decision only because she didn't want to see her daughter hurt. "I understand now why my mother didn't want me there because she did not want to see me hurt. I was hurt many times when I was in candidacy."²⁹²

Ann G. was asked to wait one year during which she worked and lived with the sisters. She was a recent convert to the religion of Roman Catholicism and this was a common practice at the time.²⁹³

One woman remembered when she was finally accepted, one sister on the formation team came to her and said, "There was a time when I was going to ask you to leave the affiliate

²⁹⁰Interview with Elizabeth H., p. I-48-49.

²⁹¹Ibid., p.I-116.

²⁹²Ibid., p.I-110.

²⁹³Interview with Ann G., p.I-35.

program because I didn't think you were ready." Readiness, she observed is very subjective. "I feel like I'm on the spot. You're always being analyzed."²⁹⁴ Yolanda recalled that in a pre-application interview she was asked, "What does it feel like to be an African-American?" "I told them for me God is the center. I noticed right away that the answer didn't please them because the question for them had nothing to do with God."²⁹⁵ Rita remembered "When I was interviewed by the Vocation Director, she was very honest with me. She said 'We only let in the first Italian ten years ago. It will not be easy.'²⁹⁶ Nora received several letters of rejection indicating that "Negro girls are not accepted." Finally she found a congregation to accept her.²⁹⁷ In describing her experience, Jill indicated that she was turned down by her congregation on two occasions. "I figured that if I helped them get to know me, then they would agree I was okay and let me become an aspirant." After winning a scholarship, she was finally accepted to the congregation.²⁹⁸ Laura indicated that "Before I could enter I had to go through a battery of tests to see if I was educable. I was the only one who had to take these tests. This was my first personal brush with

²⁹⁴Interview with Rhonda R., p. I-41.

²⁹⁵Interview with Yolanda A., Dec. 16, 93, p.II-334.

²⁹⁶Interview with Rita B., Nov.27,93, p. II-270.

²⁹⁷Interview with Nora C., Sept. 14, 93, p. II-268.

²⁹⁸Interview with Jill C., Oct. 8, 83, p. II-264.

racism."²⁹⁹

One congregation required that a prospective candidate resign from her seventeen year military career and all her professional memberships.³⁰⁰ However, Diane described her first visit to her congregation. "When I went there, I was all set to find out the truth. I was looking for racism, but I found out that I was comfortable and at home. The President of the congregation sat down with me to talk about the experience of African-American women in the Catholic Church. She admitted to problems in the past. Her honesty helped a lot. She said I was welcome."³⁰¹ Her experience is markedly different from many of her counterparts. Yvette recalls that the Vocation Director visited her home as part of the pre-application process. "Even my mother said that she didn't want her in our house, because she insulted my family."³⁰² "During the application process I went to the formation house for the weekend," Karen recalled. "We had a meal together and were all helping with the dishes when I volunteered to do the dishes. It was 1987, and Sister said, 'Come and I'll show you how to do the dishes.' The other women who were my age were treated differently. It seemed to me that the younger white

²⁹⁹Interview with Laura H., Sept. 30, 93, p. II-265.

³⁰⁰Interview with Lisa W., p. I-58.

³⁰¹Interview with Diane B., Oct. 7, 93, p.II-295.

³⁰²Interview with Yvette R., Sept. 1, 93, p. II-277.

woman was treated with more maturity than me."³⁰³

With the completion of the documents for application to the congregation, the candidate is accepted into the formation program which consists of two stages of varying lengths of time. Marilyn noted that "I was examined much more closely than the others. They couldn't find anything wrong so they took me."³⁰⁴ Darlene described feeling relieved when she received word that she was accepted. "Now I see I overlooked a lot of things."³⁰⁵ Christine noticed that her application was scrutinized more than the others. "I was delayed from entrance for a year."³⁰⁶ Eileen recalled that "I found out that I would be accepted if I agreed to a mission experience. This was very disturbing to me. I was labelled as being sheltered."³⁰⁷

Membership Process

The first stage is that of Postulant. This period can last from six months to one year. The young woman lives with a community of sisters and is invited to try out the lifestyle. She is not bound by any promises or vows, retains financial responsibilities and is free to leave the congregation at any time. In the second stage, the novice is

³⁰³Interview with Karen J., p. II-649.

³⁰⁴Interview with Marilyn P., Nov. 3, 93, p.II-316.

³⁰⁵Interview with Darlene D., Feb. 21, 94, p. II-283.

³⁰⁶Interview with Christine W., Nov. 3, 93, p. II-257.

³⁰⁷Interview with Eileen B., Dec. 14, 93, p. II-260.

obliged to live the lifestyle, including observing the vows, and spends at least one year, called the canonical year, studying the vows and their meaning. This stage can be as short as one year, the canonical year, or as long as three years. Generally, most congregations have a two year novitiate, one canonical year and one year of ministry. The final stages are temporary vows and then, final or perpetual vows. The period of temporary profession can last from one to ten years. As a vowed member, the sister assumes all the responsibilities and benefits of membership in the congregation. With final or perpetual vows, the sister becomes a full member of the congregation.

Postulancy

After entrance, the postulant Directress or Formation Director is responsible for supervising the applicants. This may include living with the candidates and directing, observing and training them about religious life and the life style of their congregation. Prior to the 1970's, the Postulant year was lived in a congregational novitiate under the watchful supervision of the Postulant Directress. Postulants and Novices lived the same schedule and formed a community together. More recently, congregations have moved their postulant experience to the local convent. This effort provided the postulant the opportunity to live with an established local community, to learn about the life style of the congregation and to take part in the ministerial work of

the congregation. It must be noted that many of these changes were changes of necessity; reduced numbers of applicants made it inefficient to operate large common novitiate structures. Of the study group, twenty-five (63%) women were part of the new formation programs and fifteen (38%) of them were essentially part of the more monastic style.

Women who shared the more monastic-style Postulancy described several common experiences. To all of them, it was evident that everyone who entered the convent at the time were experiencing a kind of culture shock. In a sense, every woman who entered gave up her past heritage and took on the heritage of the congregation. This experience was a great equalizer, and created a bond among the women who faced this new and strange experience.

"It's Too Bad That You Are Colored."

For African-American women, there were added difficulties. The women also faced racism which tended to alienate and isolate them. Christine recalled, "The Mistress of Novices always singled me out. She would say, 'You are fun, it's too bad your are a Colored.'"³⁰⁸ Gwen remembered, "In my first year, our congregation was asked by the diocese to give eye tests to all the sisters in the area. I was sent to help the sisters assigned to the task. The white sisters wouldn't receive me, I wasn't allowed to help with the eye tests. In the end, I was sent to help the cook who agreed to work with

³⁰⁸Interview with Christine W., Nov. 3, 93, p. II-508.

me."³⁰⁹ Ann G. was actually given a different schedule from her white counterparts, "My schedule kept me isolated from the others."³¹⁰

Evelyn faced an even more difficult conflict. Before entrance she had been active in the civil rights movement, and in the motherhouse the white and African-American workers ate in separate dining rooms. "When I raised a question about this practice, I was told that young sisters didn't deal with these issues. The message was I wasn't supposed to notice or question the practices. Finally, the separation in the dining room did come down."³¹¹

At congregational celebrations, the Postulants had the opportunity to meet the sisters of the congregation. At one of these celebrations Rita was 'welcomed' by a sister who said, "I'm so glad you are here. You are not like those greasy, dirty Puerto Ricans." Rita added, "I've found that people who say one thing about others will say it about you."³¹² This kind of remark is by itself alienating and causes great distrust on the part of the recipient. Nora described an experience she had when she was encouraged by the sisters to visit the elder sisters in the congregational infirmary. "I got up to the second floor and one of the old

³⁰⁹Interview with Gwen H., Nov. 16, 93, p. II-664.

³¹⁰Interview with Ann G., p. I-57.

³¹¹Interview with Laura H., Sept. 30, 93, p. II-667.

³¹²Interview with Rita B., Nov. 27, 93, p. II-672.

nuns yelled 'Get out' because she thought I was one of the students from the boarding school."³¹³ It is important to note that the Postulant outfit was distinctive to that particular congregation and was not worn by the students in the boarding school. At the time, the elder sister didn't believe that an African-American could be a postulant. Sylvia remembered, "I was counting altar bread and one of the professed sisters began to re-count them. She told me that colored people didn't know how to count."³¹⁴

Being The Only One

The women who shared the newer, less-structured Postulancy found many differences in the experience, but they agreed that racism caused them to feel alienated and isolated. While some of the rules were relaxed, it is important to note that fewer women were entering religious life. In some cases, only one or two women were candidates at the same time. This places them under extraordinary scrutiny from the other sisters in the congregation. For the only African-American in a congregation it can be a very lonely and isolating experience. Lisa W., remarked that "Although there were problems about being the only one, I had a good postulant year, but I was always keenly aware that I was the only one."³¹⁵ Ruth described how she approached this new

³¹³Interview with Nora C., Sept. 14, 93, p. II-670.

³¹⁴Interview with Sylvia S., p. I-64.

³¹⁵Interview with Lisa W., p. I-64.

experience. "At the start of the process, I let the directress know who I was. I know what I am about. There would be no surprises from me. I told her what I needed and expected. I was able to continue to keep my ties with the African-American clergy in the area."³¹⁶ Elizabeth H. explained what it was like for her, "The formation person was always judging me. I always had to be careful. There was no free flowing-relationship at this time. Every thing I said or did, if I didn't screen my expressions, would be criticized. There was no consideration for me or for my culture."³¹⁷ While all candidates are evaluated, Elizabeth felt this more keenly because the Director of Formation made no attempt to get to know her in the same way she knew and enjoyed the company of the other white candidates in the novitiate. Yvette evaluated her experience, "I know that I was immature in many ways. I did a lot of growing up. I didn't get a lot of support or help. I knew I had to work on myself by myself. I never felt that they (the congregation) believed in me."³¹⁸ Darlene described her Postulant experience as both exhausting and full of conflicts. "I was assigned as the Director of a Religious Education program in a local parish. In addition, I was given two other jobs. It seemed like I got everything everyone hated to do. The workload was incredible and the

³¹⁶Interview with Ruth F., Dec. 10, 93, p. II-271.

³¹⁷Interview with Elizabeth H., p. I-82.

³¹⁸Interview with Yvette R., Sept. 1, 93, p. II-276.

superior of the house made it clear that she wanted to 'use me for many projects.' The directress of Postulants did nothing to help me in this situation."³¹⁹

Helen recalled that as a Postulant she felt that she was treated as inferior. "I was treated as "less than;" I was a special case. There was no understanding of my African-American experience. In the mind of my directress, all African-Americans were poor. She judged me to be hostile, angry and suggested that I didn't know how to share." The evaluation process caused a great problem for Susan. "In my second year, I came up for evaluation. I was clueless. For two years, I had been told that everything was fine and now the message was entirely different. It was clear to me that the problem was that I was not submissive and passive. If I asked a question, the allegation was that I was angry and didn't know my place. Whenever I needed to discuss something, it was always a battle. My behavior was positively motivated, but it was interpreted in a negative way. I felt like I was expendable and not respected."³²⁰ It was suggested to Susan that she leave and reapply to the congregation after the terms of the present leadership team were completed because she would not be permitted to go forward with the present team. Gina recalled that she was sent to live in a white, middle class area which was about 2% African-American. "There were

³¹⁹Interview with Darlene D., Feb. 21, 94, p. II-501.

³²⁰Interview with Susan P., Dec. 13, 93, p. II-645.

no supports. I had to travel across town to an African-American parish. Some sisters had a problem with my attending Mass there. In the middle class parish school, I had to prove myself as a teacher and as an African-American woman."³²¹

Because she was the only one in the Postulant program, Lisa sought out younger professed sisters to talk with, "I was told to be careful about what I said, particularly if it was about racism. My director said that everyone didn't need to know our business and that the other African-American sisters might get involved."³²² Yvette commented that, "Relationships are censored and this is a cause for great concern. When an African-American woman enters, she is alone because she cannot freely associate with the other African-American sisters until final profession or there will be consequences during the evaluation process."³²³ The way in which these incidents were ultimately handled had a significant effect on the African-American candidate, her understanding of systemic and institutional change in the congregation, and her trust of the white sisters in the congregation.

Yolanda noted that her postulant year was the best year she ever had.³²⁴ Diane's experience was particularly encouraging. "My postulant year wasn't easy for me but it

³²¹Interview with Gina R., Dec. 14, 93, p., II-662.

³²²Interview with Lisa W., p. I-68.

³²³Interview with Yvette, Sept. 1, 93, p. II-678.

³²⁴Interview with Yolanda A., Dec. 16, 93, p. II-677.

wasn't overly difficult. The day I entered the congregation, the liturgy was African-American. The whole tone was geared to acceptance of my culture. I felt the congregation embraced my culture. Everyone celebrated the gift of my culture to the congregation. The President (of the congregation) said we will struggle together to learn and work together."³²⁵

When leadership took a pro-active change role, the candidate felt valued and respected. Sylvia remembered, "In the refectory (dining room), there was a note left in the book that I was to read out loud to the sisters during the meal. The note was not complimentary to me. When my director saw it she told me she would take care of it. She really worked at addressing racism in the community."³²⁶

However, a more typical response is described by Lisa. She recalled, "Once we were watching a television show and there was a report about Buffalo. I said I had relatives in Buffalo and a sister responded that my relatives were not affected by this event because they lived on the East side; everyone knows that the Blacks live together on the East side. I told her that I felt offended by her racist remark. When my directress heard about the incident, she told me I had no right to speak that way to a professed sister."³²⁷

³²⁵Interview with Diane B., Oct. 7, 93, p. II-656.

³²⁶Interview with Sylvia S., p. I-65.

³²⁷Interview with Lisa W., p. I-70.

Novitiate

At the completion of the Postulant year, the candidate enters the novitiate. During this time, the candidate has the opportunity to live by the rules and regulations of the congregations and to learn about the vowed life and the history of the congregation. Prior to the 1970's, the Novitiate building was in a secluded place in order to provide time for contemplation and discernment. "I went to a place over 500 miles from my home. My family and friends couldn't visit me there."³²⁸ Nancy's experience was one of total segregation. "When my novitiate began there were two other African-American women who were part of this experience. The decision was made to keep the three of us in one place, separate from the other white novices. I didn't see the congregation's motherhouse and novitiate for many years. Later, my novice mistress told me that it was by design that we were not invited to the motherhouse."³²⁹ Gina recalled, "In the novitiate, I was told I lacked interpersonal skills. As a novice, the associate director met once a week with me. She said I was aloof. The difference in humor was evident. There was great importance in the way of communication and this was couched in religious terms. It was very difficult."³³⁰ Gwen had a particularly difficult experience

³²⁸Interview with Edith E., p. I-63.

³²⁹Interview with Nancy E., Dec. 10, 93, p. II-252.

³³⁰Interview with Gina R., Dec. 14, 93, p. II-213.

which had serious results. "I was always being corrected for small things, some of it was plain foolishness. To survive, I became a buffoon. I know my sense of humor saved me. Once when I was feeling ill, I was told to stop complaining and continue to do my work. I really had appendicitis and the delay in getting treatment caused my appendix to burst. I spent two weeks in the hospital and when I returned I had to pick up my regular schedule immediately. I made a mistake during prayers and some of my classmates giggled. I was given a penance (punishment) for my error and as a result my stitches burst and I was back in the hospital again. My novice directress was not a loving woman."³³¹ The entire experience was very unsettling to Jane who commented, "I was there (in the novitiate) before I realized that there was not a picture in the house that looked like me. The food was very different too. The manner of interaction and communication were different. I felt like a psychic transplant. Not only was it institutional but it was never home."³³² Eileen had a similar experience, "In the novitiate, I realized that nothing affirmed my culture. There was no Gospel music or African-American music. Subscribing to EBONY just doesn't do it. Often we get the magazine and the only persons who read it are the African-Americans. There weren't any African-Americans in the neighborhood or working on the staff. I felt very

³³¹Interview with Gwen H., Nov. 16, 93, p. II-516.

³³²Interview with Jane L., Nov. 9, 93, p. II-520.

isolated."³³³ Odetta evaluated her behavior and experience when she commented, "Mostly during the novitiate I was quiet. I could joke about things, that helped me a great deal. My friend (another African-American woman) was assertive and she often protected me. She was in trouble all the time. I was never in trouble. I really did get positive feedback during this time, but my friend did not. It was plain that the congregation accepted only passive women of color."³³⁴ Rita recalled that one of her teachers "really tried to destroy me. This teacher kept saying I couldn't do the work in the classroom and that I would never measure up. I'm very stubborn so that made me try all the harder."³³⁵ Wendy recalled that during her novitiate there were cliques among the novices and postulants. "I never felt that they were racial, but my group consisted of me and the woman who entered from Puerto Rico. Our world view was entirely different from that of the other applicants. For us, life was not frivolous, it was very serious."³³⁶ Two important aspects of this experience related by Wendy are that she understood something that the formation personnel were unable to comprehend: that her world view, her understanding of choice and commitment were different because she had in fact experienced racism. In

³³³Interview with Eileen B., Dec. 14, 93, p. II-660.

³³⁴Interview with Odetta B., Sept. 3, 93, p. II-531.

³³⁵Interview with Rita B., Nov. 27, 93, p. II-534.

³³⁶Interview with Wendy T., Nov. 12, 93, p. II-652.

fact, although Wendy demurs from calling the experience a racial one, it was an experience marked by the inability of the congregation to meet different needs, the needs of the women of color.

Bertha, a member of a very small congregation, found her experience very affirming.³³⁷ Marilyn indicated that her novice mistress understood that "I had a more difficult time. She knew I was raised to talk issues out. She talked to me and this helped me walk around the craziness. I spent my time assessing my vocation."³³⁸ Evelyn recalled her novitiate experience as one in which "we were all tested and threatened. Power was a real issue. I say, let people live happy."³³⁹ Odetta commented, "I never felt racism in the congregation until I was missioned. My classmates didn't allow negative talk."³⁴⁰

In more recent years, the novitiate experience remains a time of contemplation, meditation and study of the vows. However, the strictures regarding visiting family members and meeting others outside the immediate community have been dramatically changed. For African-American women, the one thing that has not changed is the experience of racism. "I guess in the novitiate is where I became aware of the

³³⁷Interview with Bertha H., Nov. 16, 93, p. II-505.

³³⁸Interview with Marilyn P., Nov. 3, 93, p. II-524.

³³⁹Interview with Evelyn L., Sept. 10, 93, p. II-510.

³⁴⁰Interview with Odetta B., Sept. 3, 93, P.II-192.

differences. I first noticed differences in relationships to my directress. The other novices aligned themselves with the Directress and I felt I needed to move away. They were like so tight, it made me uncomfortable. All four of us had to go to this one novice's house whether we wanted to or not. They never went to my house. I don't think my director was sensitive to the fact that I wasn't white, I didn't have the same interests. She was not sensitive to that I wasn't white, I wasn't Irish and I didn't have those things that bound the others together. That was my first crisis," Elizabeth commented.³⁴¹ Rachel remarked that, "I am really angry about the novitiate. Some sisters said that they were really disgusted by me. They said I was oversensitive at a workshop on racism. All I did was share my experiences and they said that I made up the stories; that I didn't live in reality."³⁴² Karen recalled that her Novice directress accompanied her to the Institute for Black Catholics in New Orleans. "She was really overwhelmed by the whole experience, but would not discuss it with me. She complained to other sister friends that she felt oppressed at the Institute because African-Americans were running everything."³⁴³ Carol felt the oppression of her surroundings when she noted that, "I felt like my Novice mistress was out to get me. My

³⁴¹Interview with Elizabeth H., p. I-87.

³⁴²Interview with Rachael C., Oct. 18, 93, p.II-533.

³⁴³Interview with Karen J., Nov. 17, 93, p. II-502.

telephone calls were censored. I began to substitute work for acceptance. The more I asked for, the more I got to do. My feeling was, "I am not going to let you break me." For me, race is not an issue nor is the formation structure. The problem, it seems to me, is one of control. Some sisters are threatened."³⁴⁴ Although Carol would not characterize her experience as racism, the issue of power and control are central to the problem of racism. Gina remembered the isolation of the experience, "I didn't see another African-American for six months. It's difficult to get hair care products in that neighborhood. Other African-American sisters could not come to visit me."³⁴⁵ Helen felt isolated during her novitiate experience because her colleagues indicated that she received special treatment. "African-Americans were invited to our novitiate to provide guidance and support to me. This was helpful, but my colleagues did not learn about African-American issues. It was frustrating to me."³⁴⁶ Ruth remembered, "I was the only person of color in the neighborhood. It as a 'rare' experience. I audited classes and I was comfortable among the sisters. I taught the sisters gospel songs. Generally, I was not comfortable in the neighborhood. I arranged a celebration for Martin Luther King Day and a discussion on racism during Black History month.

³⁴⁴Interview with Carol R., Dec. 13, 93, p. II-497, 500.

³⁴⁵Interview with Gina R., Dec. 14, 93, p. II-513.

³⁴⁶Interview with Helen C., Nov. 29, 93, p. II-518.

These things are not going to turn the whole experience around."³⁴⁷

One sister took a broader view, "Recently at least five or six of our African-American sisters have left the congregation. The response administratively is that it is their problem, but others are asking, how can it always be their fault?"³⁴⁸

Among the more positive experiences, Karen described her visits with the elder sisters. "The older nuns were very life giving. During my canonical year, I spent a great deal of time with the old nuns. I am self-actualized and I am not threatened. The older nuns were able to make changes. Together we set up an anti-racism task force and I was on it."³⁴⁹ Diane commented that "The president of the religious congregation initiated a celebration for Martin Luther King Day, followed by several educational events during Black History Month. It wasn't just 'my thing.' I felt very supported. Many other sisters participated."³⁵⁰ Yolanda recalled that "In the novitiate, the director asked questions that were helpful. I bought posters and pictures to represent people of color for the Novitiate House. In that neighborhood, however, hair care products were difficult to

³⁴⁷Interview with Ruth F., Dec. 10, 93, p. II-536.

³⁴⁸Interview with Agnes B., p. I-79.

³⁴⁹Interview with Karen J., Nov. 17, 93, p. II-503.

³⁵⁰Interview with Diane B., Oct. 7, 93, p. II-655.

find and getting a hair cut was a problem."³⁵¹

Temporary Profession

At the end of the novitiate experience, the candidate is advanced to temporary profession. This period of temporary vows can last from one to ten years. It is the final step toward full membership. During the period of temporary membership, the candidates live and work in the local communities. Generally, the sister is accorded all privileges and responsibilities of the full members including involvement in the congregation's policy-making process called chapter. However, temporary members cannot vote in the election of congregational leaders, i.e. President, Vice President, Treasurer and Regional or Provincial Delegates. Some congregations recognize this trial period as a time of decision making and therefore, restrict temporary professed sisters from studying and other "special circumstances."

Even after many difficulties, African-American women enter into temporary profession hoping that they can answer God's call in their lives, help make changes in their congregations, and establish a more welcoming environment for other African-American women. Gwen remembered, "I made it to profession. I invited my family. At the ceremony, our mission assignments were announced. Everyone in my group was sent to school to learn a skill for their future work. When my name was called, my assignment was to go to a local

³⁵¹Interview with Yolanda A., Dec. 16, 93, p. II-538.

congregational house and cook for the sisters. I never went to school the entire time I was associated with those sisters. Later, after I left, I went to college and completed undergraduate and graduate degrees. My Novice Mistress kept me from studying."³⁵² Wendy recalled, "After I completed one year in temporary vows, I left. Part of the reason was my own immaturity, but we need to change the scenery [that is, admit women of color] and the attitudes."³⁵³ Jill continued her undergraduate studies during temporary profession. "I had an English teacher (a member of my congregation) in college who did not want me to write on African-American literature. She said it was communist. The most disturbing experience came when I got involved with other African-American students. I thought that my involvement was important to the sisters and to the college, but the sisters denied my presence in the group. I just didn't exist."³⁵⁴ Later, Jill had an opportunity to share with the international members of her congregation the experience of being an African-American in a predominantly white congregation. "The nuns from Europe understood my difficulties. The nuns from the United States did not understand at all."³⁵⁵ For Marilyn, the first year in temporary profession was difficult. "I felt marginalized.

³⁵²Interview with Gwen H., Nov. 16, 93, p. II-759.

³⁵³Interview with Wendy T., Nov. 12, 93, p. II-755.

³⁵⁴Interview with Jill C., Oct. 8, 93, p. II-763.

³⁵⁵Ibid., p. II-764.

Really, I've had five to six years of good community life out of thirty-four years of living in mainstream houses. In the first year, there was an incident and the novice mistress came and visited and asked about my experiences. She advocated for me and this meant a great deal to me."³⁵⁶ Christine's experience seemed to underscore just how expendable she was to the congregation. "While I was still in temporary profession, the administration suggested I find an all African-American congregation and join it. The sisters I lived with advocated for me, but I was delayed a year from final profession. Another suggestion the administration made was that I leave and become an associate member and have a family."³⁵⁷

In preparation for each of the steps in the process, the candidates spend time on a retreat, meditating and contemplating about the importance of this step in their lives. At first, when Laura had many misgivings about the retreat she was scheduled to attend, she was told that "what was good for one was good for all of us." Laura persisted and raised her concerns to the administration of the congregation and they understood her need to have a more culturally congruent experience. "They were not threatened by my request. I could see that they wanted what was good for me."³⁵⁸ Jane had a wonderful profession experience. "I said

³⁵⁶Interview with Marilyn P., Nov. 3, 93, p. II-767.

³⁵⁷Interview with Christine W., Nov. 3, 93, p. II-770.

³⁵⁸Interview with Laura H., Sept. 30, 93, p. II-766.

my vows with my class and then I went to my local parish and did the ceremony over again. It was very important to me and my family to have the parish experience."³⁵⁹

In more recent times, the themes remain constant. Rhonda commented, "With the Directress of Temporary Professed, I don't think she understands who I am as an African-American woman and how that is important to me. I don't think she takes the time to do her homework, even when I suggest things to her. For instance, there was a formation workshop in Detroit for directresses on the African-American experience. Her response was, 'well that's too far.' Obviously, that's not an interest for her. Often I am told that if I want any Afrocentric events I must plan them myself. I don't think this is fair."³⁶⁰ Yolanda recalled that "profession was a hurtful experience. As time got close, the liturgist insisted that at my ceremony there had to be a balance of European and African-American ritual. My song selections were criticized. It was a fight. The message I got was that only Western European ritual and songs were correct. Finally they said 'yes, we will give into you, but recognize what we are doing for you.' I also did an African dance."³⁶¹

At the point of first profession of vows and profession of final vows, African-American women are often discouraged by

³⁵⁹Interview with Jane L., Nov. 9, 93, p. 771.

³⁶⁰Interview with Rhonda R., p. I-111.

³⁶¹Interview with Yolanda A., p. II-772.

the suggestion that they wait for a period of time, often six months to a year, before taking this step. Rhonda was asked to wait a year before final profession because the congregation did not know her. "I've been associated with these sisters for ten years, how is one more year going to make the difference?" Helen had a similar experience. "The Directress of Temporary Professed asked me if I thought the sisters I lived with had a sense of me. The sisters said that during the year I lived with them that they really didn't know me. This was a devastating experience. I felt like I had done everything the congregation had asked for (five) years and a six months delay just wasn't going to help them know me any better or change the current situation. At first I thought that I would leave. I told my family and they were supportive. I kept thinking that this is not fair."³⁶² A delay at the time of temporary profession or final profession is the institutional response which indicates that the candidate has failed to meet the minimum standards for full membership. The responsibility to get to know the candidate is as much an institutional one as it is an individual one. However, cultural differences and the lack of knowledge of African-American culture create institutional obstacles to full membership. A denial of profession can be personally devastating. Martha indicated that not making profession was linked to her own self-esteem. "I didn't think I was good

³⁶²Interview with Helen C., p.II-762.

enough."³⁶³

These remarks raise a whole host of questions regarding cultural differences, use of language, family, food friendship, living environments, and intellectual ability. These are areas of concern for African-American women in predominantly white congregations of women religious throughout their community experience. In the next section the issues, factors and components of the experience will be explored.

Summary

In this section interviews with Vocation Directors and African-American women are explored. The interviews with the Vocation Directors describe the institutional perspective of these congregational gatekeepers. The Vocation Directors, as the institutional representatives to the aspirants, make the decisions regarding the readiness of the applicants to enter into congregational life. In their interviews the Vocation Directors describe some of the obstacles faced by African-American women who seek membership in predominantly white congregations of women religious.

The African-American women describe the process from pre-candidacy through temporary profession. These stories indicate important concerns which will be addressed in the following section on the factors and components of the experience.

³⁶³Interview with Martha L., p. II-526

"I KEEP ON MARCHING FORWARD"

Core Issues Of The Experience

The issues which form the common threads in the experiences of African-American women who are members of predominantly white congregations of women religious are divided into two different categories: the factors that influence the experience and the components of the experience. The factors that influence the experience of an African-American woman in a predominantly white religious congregation include how her family is treated, what kind of food is shared in the local convent, what the living environment is like, the educational opportunities available, the network support and friendships. These factors demonstrate the tangible obstacles to a welcoming environment. The components of the experience include alienation, isolation, the sense of individual and organizational mistrust, comparison and scrutiny, the feeling of "always teaching," and the effects on self-esteem of being disregarded. The components indicate how the experience of these obstacles are perceived by the African-American women in the study. In the next few paragraphs, we will explore these common issues and their influence on the participants in the study.

Factors That Influence the Experience

These factors tangibly demonstrate the obstacles in the development of a welcoming environment. The obstacles act to undermine the progress of institutions and individuals toward integration and inculturation. While this ethnography is focused on African-American women in a particular setting, many of the same issues arise in predominantly white institutions which are developing toward a more multicultural focus. In the next few pages, the comments of the African-American women regarding family, food, friends, educational opportunities, use of language, living environment and network support will be explored. These factors are at the heart of the experience of community living and influence the coping ability of the African-American women who are seeking membership in predominantly white congregations of women religious.

Family

Prior to the Second Vatican Council in 1964, the candidate was encouraged to make the congregation her new family. Contact with family members was restricted and often limited to visiting days or afternoons. Telephone calls were never permitted. Ann G. recalls, "During the visiting times, which were once a month for three hours on a Sunday afternoon at the convent, my family was as comfortable or uncomfortable as any other family. I think no family was really ever

comfortable."³⁶⁴ Rita's family had a unique experience, "Many years later, my mother told me that the night I entered the convent, the Mistress of Postulants called my parents to say I was okay. This meant a great deal to them because I am an only child. I know she didn't call the parents of the other white women who entered that night. This made a big difference to my family."³⁶⁵

Following Vatican II, there were more relaxed rules about visiting family members. In fact, the family was regarded as an important support system for the sister. Therefore, candidates were more able to stay in contact with parents and siblings and remain a part of their lives.

Each of the participants indicated that they had close family ties. Twenty-five (62%) participants related a story about how their families were perceived and treated by their congregations. The African-American family constellation often extends beyond parents and siblings. Cousins, Aunts and Uncles, Godparents and Grandparents are important members of the family. When African-American women are asked to limit, for example, the number of family members who are invited to a congregational celebration this dilemma is not understood by the more nuclear family-oriented white sisters. Jane remembered, "In 1980, only immediate family could come to the vow ceremony. We each had six tickets. I have a large

³⁶⁴Interview with Ann G., p. I-155.

³⁶⁵Interview with Rita B., p. II-153.

extended family; there were fifty-five people who wanted to witness the ceremony. I told them all to come because I felt that I shouldn't have to chose who should be allowed to come and who shouldn't. I counted on the graciousness of the sisters and I wasn't disappointed."³⁶⁶

The participants indicated that they felt a responsibility to the family. Diane was confused by questions from the sisters about "detaching" from her family. "I feel like I belong to my family. This is part of my culture and I cannot give it up."³⁶⁷ Wendy noted that for her it was a necessary part of life to offer assistance to family members. "If you couldn't count on one another's help, then you are really in trouble, who should you count on?"³⁶⁸ For Jane, there was no question when her father died. "My dad died when I began my doctoral studies. I withdrew from school and helped my mother through a difficult time."³⁶⁹ Eileen recalled that she was criticized for her close family ties, "I was labelled as being sheltered. The sisters did not understand my family ties."³⁷⁰ Darlene noted that sisters were allowed visits from their families at any time, "but I found out (the hard way) that after certain hours, it was UN-

³⁶⁶Interview with Jane L., Nov. 9, 93, p. II-141.

³⁶⁷Interview with Diane B., p. II-131.

³⁶⁸Interview with Wendy T., p. II-123.

³⁶⁹Interview with Jane L., p. II-142.

³⁷⁰Interview with Eileen B., p. II-132.

holy to see them."³⁷¹

Christine described being "very careful" about my family. "Some of the sisters thought I was ashamed of my family, but I just didn't want to see any of my family members hurt."³⁷² Helen indicated that the sisters have been gracious to her family, but "I'm still anxious. I don't want to see them hurt."³⁷³ For the celebration of her twenty-fifth anniversary (called Jubilee) in the convent in 1980, Christine remembered that her family couldn't stay in the city where the celebration was held because African-Americans were not welcome in the local hotels. "They travelled over six hundred miles in one day just to be present at the ceremony."³⁷⁴ Thelma described a particularly difficult situation where she is presently living. "This town is a segregated town. It's been featured on national television programs because of the racism. I worry about my family coming to visit me here. Are they ready for this experience? Should they be forced to go through it?"³⁷⁵ Both of these experiences are a cause for isolation and could have been prevented by institutional awareness. Christine's celebration could have been held in a more welcoming community or the sisters could have provided

³⁷¹Interview with Darlene D., p. II-647.

³⁷²Interview with Eileen W., p. II-130.

³⁷³Interview with Helen C., p. II-140.

³⁷⁴Interview with Christine W., p. II-129.

³⁷⁵Interview with Thelma E., p. II-156.

overnight accommodations for her family. In the case of Thelma, organizational awareness of the obstacles of racism in a local town must be taken into consideration and be discussed with the candidate in order to prevent isolation from an important source of social support.

The participants described the family support which they enjoyed. Odetta recalled, "My family helped me to see that my call was greater than the difficulties. They helped me put things and people in perspective."³⁷⁶ For Ruth, family support meant understanding how serious she was about this life decision.³⁷⁷ Norma's mother offered to cook for the Martin Luther King celebration and was warmly received.³⁷⁸

For Yvette and others, caution is very important. "I live in a quiet middle class community. My parents have worked very hard to buy the house and send all of us through school. On one of my recent visits, a group of sisters dropped me off at my family home. When we got there, one of the sisters said 'Oh, is that where you live?' She acted surprised that an African-American could have such a home."³⁷⁹ Evelyn noted that she makes it a point to bring a carload of sisters with her each time she goes home for a visit. "It's a nice cultural sharing, but it wasn't always

³⁷⁶Interview with Odetta B., Sept. 3, 93, p. II-149.

³⁷⁷Interview with Ruth F., Dec. 10, 93, p. II-154.

³⁷⁸Interview with Norma D., Sept. 15, 93, p. II-148.

³⁷⁹Interview with Yvette R., p. II-126.

this way."³⁸⁰ When African-American visitors come to the convent, Evelyn indicates that "It seems I am responsible for every African-American who comes into this house. I will be asked questions about the visitors: who they were, what they do, and who is part of the family? Sometimes the sisters interrogate these guests and the questions seem prying to the visitors. Sisters don't understand that African-Americans are very private people. They don't always feel comfortable sharing their business."³⁸¹

Gina remembered that it wasn't always easy to bring her family to the convent. "My family came from a Baptist tradition. Liquor was not allowed. In the convent at the celebrations, wine and liquor were always served. It was very difficult for my family to understand."³⁸²

Twenty five percent of the participants described their congregations as welcoming to their families. Nora recalled that when she made first vows, "My family came a long distance to be there. The sisters put them up in a guest house because they understood the economic implications of the trip for my family."³⁸³ For others the welcome mat was put away. Karen, who entered religious life after she raised a family, recalled, "My family was not welcomed. If they called, I did

³⁸⁰Interview with Evelyn L., p. II-134.

³⁸¹Interview with Evelyn L., p. II-133.

³⁸²Interview with Gina R., p. II-135.

³⁸³Interview with Nora C., p. II-146.

not get the message. My youngest daughter told me about some very nasty incidents."³⁸⁴ Karen explained that her daughter was interrogated about the reason for her call and she was told that she was bothering the sisters; the families of the white sisters did not receive this treatment. Gwen remembered that the families of the other women in her congregation were welcomed to stay in the guest facilities, but her family was never welcomed. "This was very difficult for me to understand. My Grandmother married an Irish chauffeur and had thirteen children. I have cousins who are "passing." Whites are in my family."³⁸⁵ It was also unacceptable for Gwen to visit her family overnight. "Unlike my white sisters, I couldn't stay at my mother's house. I had to bring a companion home with me during a daytime visit and stay at a local convent in the evening."³⁸⁶

These incidents, for the most part, demonstrate a basic misunderstanding of the family and its importance in the lives of the African-American women. Failure to accept and welcome the family and its members is perceived by the candidate as a more basic failure, that is, not to accept the culture of the African-American woman and the woman herself. This kind of experience alienates the African-American woman from her white sisters and the congregational institution and places her in

³⁸⁴Interview with Karen J., p. II-121.

³⁸⁵Interview with Gwen H., p. II-136.

³⁸⁶Ibid., p. II-138.

conflict in regard to her family.

Food

Generally in the pre-Vatican II period, food preferences were never taken into consideration for anyone. Christine remembered, "The food was strange to me. We had sausage beef and I learned a good nun takes some of everything."³⁸⁷ Bertha described the food as very bland.³⁸⁸ Martha waited until she was able to visit her family at home to have familiar foods.³⁸⁹ For Jill, the food was very different, but it was not an adjustment.³⁹⁰ Sylvia recalled that "most of our food was donated, so we never thought about preferences."³⁹¹ Ann G. indicated that, "we ate what the sister cook knew how to prepare. When I was able to cook, it was really American cooking."³⁹² In Jane's congregation, food was never a priority. "We ate food from different cultures, but never Southern or African-American food. I didn't push it."³⁹³ Gwen, who was a sister cook, noted that she cooked European-American style. "In my convent, I was tolerated. I cooked a variety of foods, but the important

³⁸⁷Interview with Christine W., p. II-166.

³⁸⁸Interview with Bertha H., p. II-165.

³⁸⁹Interview with Martha L., p. II-179.

³⁹⁰ Interview with Jill C., p.II-175.

³⁹¹Interview with Sylvia S., p. I-161.

³⁹²Interview with Ann G., p. I 162.

³⁹³Interview with Jane L., p. II-174.

factor was that the meal was on time. I cooked three meals a day, seven days a week."³⁹⁴

Odetta commented that many of her sisters think fried chicken is African-American cooking. "Well, it isn't," she said emphatically.³⁹⁵ Rita remembered that "Sometimes my food preferences are criticized by sisters. Once when I made chitterlings, I heard a remark and said to the sister, 'Don't worry I made that for myself.'³⁹⁶ Evelyn indicated that when foods of different countries are served, "they (the sisters) make terrible comments about the food, like 'it stinks.' You can't say that, its someones' food."³⁹⁷ Nora indicated that during her training she was not able to have any of the foods she grew up with, "When I was sent to my first mission house (local convent), the sister-cook talked with a parish member and at Thanksgiving there was a sweet potato pie served at our meal. It was a very thoughtful gesture."³⁹⁸

Tammy noted that when she cooks gumbo, everyone enjoys it.³⁹⁹ Odetta learned to make "a mean German potato salad."⁴⁰⁰ Marilyn has noticed that there is a change in the

³⁹⁴Interview with Gwen H., p.II-171.

³⁹⁵Interview with Odetta B., p.II-183.

³⁹⁶Interview with Rita B., p. II-185.

³⁹⁷Interview with Evelyn L., p. II-169.

³⁹⁸ Interview with Nora C., p. II-181.

³⁹⁹Interview with Tammy B., p. II-187.

⁴⁰⁰Interview with Odetta B., p. II-182.

cuisine at the motherhouse. "It includes healthier foods which I prefer."⁴⁰¹ For Laura there really wasn't an adjustment because the cook was African-American and the food was served in a Southern style.⁴⁰²

In the post Vatican II era, more attention has been paid to different kinds of foods. It must be noted that there are very few sister-cooks in convents, and that sisters often share the cooking. The rotation of the responsibility of cooking has increased the variety of types of food shared in convents.

Lisa commented that, "One of my duties was to learn to cook. Mostly, I retrieved things for the older sisters who were cooking. When I was sent to the Western part of the United States, I learned to cook Eurocentric dishes. I never learned to cook dishes from my background. Really, I never felt free enough to share the African-American cooking I did know. Soul food meals were a rarity."⁴⁰³ Yolanda commented that for her "Food is an issue. In one house in which I lived, I had to eat everyone else's food. My food was not accepted, that was hard."⁴⁰⁴ Gina noted that when vegetables are prepared, like green beans, its really different. "African-Americans generally like their vegetables very well

⁴⁰¹Interview with Marilyn P., p. II-178.

⁴⁰²Interview with Laura H., p.II-176.

⁴⁰³Interview with Lisa W., p. I-163.

⁴⁰⁴Interview with Yolanda A., p. II-190.

done which is different from the way the white sisters cook vegetables."⁴⁰⁵ Helen's experience was much more difficult to deal with. "I would cook chicken and (collard) greens and the nuns would act funny. They would poke at their food and say, 'What's in this?' I was hurt because I eat their stuff without a problem."⁴⁰⁶ Darlene noted that "When I cooked soul food, some sisters would say, 'I don't like this.'" But they never discussed anyone else's food preparation in the same way."⁴⁰⁷ Eileen remembered that when she lived at the motherhouse, her mother sent her soul food and seasonings. "Generally, food is not a problem in this house (local convent) because we have an African-American cook. The sisters here do complain that the food is not Irish."⁴⁰⁸ Yvette described the food as "nasty." "We have lots of food that looks like leftovers. I never suggest any African-American foods, I am just not like that. At Thanksgiving, the food preparation is totally Eurocentric. The foods are basically the same, but the seasonings and tastes are different. It never really feels like Thanksgiving."⁴⁰⁹ When Elizabeth cooked, the sisters enjoyed it, but generally,

⁴⁰⁵Interview with Gina R., p. II-170.

⁴⁰⁶Interview with Helen C., p. II-173.

⁴⁰⁷Interview with Darlene D., p. II-160.

⁴⁰⁸Interview with Eileen B., p. II-168.

⁴⁰⁹Interview with Yvette R., p. II-191.

there were no allowances for food preferences.⁴¹⁰ Susan felt she shared her culture and her food. "It was hard so far away from home and everyone I knew."⁴¹¹ Lilly, Rachel and Ruth commented that the sisters enjoyed their cooking and even tried some of the Afrocentric dishes.⁴¹² Karen observed that the food was "very white, but it was not a problem for me."⁴¹³ Diane's experience was unique and was one of sharing. "At this house, I put down what I want. I cook and some sisters have asked me to teach them how to do some foods. I am learning how to do their favorite foods too."⁴¹⁴

On a recent summer retreat experience Rhonda noted that, "we were asked to indicate our preferences. When the cook made some of the things that I like, everyone made such a big deal about it. When someone else has a favorite food, they don't make such a fuss over it. I really hate it."⁴¹⁵ This kind of attention highlights the separateness felt by many African-American sisters. It often underscores the feeling that the other members of the congregation are doing a special favor for this very different person. Wendy pointed out that

⁴¹⁰Interview with Elizabeth H., p. I-165, 169.

⁴¹¹Interview with Susan P., p. II-162.

⁴¹²Interview with Lilly, M., p. II-177. Interview with Rachael C., p. II-184. Interview with Ruth F., p. II-186.

⁴¹³Interview with Karen J., p. II-161.

⁴¹⁴Interview with Diane B., p. 167.

⁴¹⁵Interview with Rhonda R., p. I-166.

although none of her foods were ever served, there was a special focus on "Italian night." "It seems to me," Wendy commented, "that it should be just good food night."⁴¹⁶

Agnes recalled that in the novitiate there were no allowances for food preferences and the African-Americans and Native Americans "were always hungry. Many times after supper, we would return to the novitiate and make cereal, eggs, toast and whatever else we could find. The novice director couldn't understand why we were hungry. Without the flavorings and seasoning, no meal could be satisfying to us."⁴¹⁷

Another issue around food is the choice of a restaurant. Several times during the year for various celebrations, a group of sisters in the local convent decide to go out to eat. Helen described the difficulties she faced, "When we would go out as a house (the sisters in the local convent together) to eat, I would suggest a place in the African-American community and the white sisters would say, 'We can't go there.' But, I could go to the white community all the time. It's emotionally wearing and psychologically draining. I get very anxious."⁴¹⁸

Food is an important issue on several different levels: In a physical way, the sharing of different foods is a

⁴¹⁶Interview with Wendy T., p. II-163.

⁴¹⁷Interview with Agnes B., p. I-167.

⁴¹⁸Interview with Helen C., p. II-172.

recognition of the sharing and blending of cultures. This sharing communicates a sense of belonging to the participants. In Roman Catholicism, the sharing of a meal is a central religious theme. The community lives of sisters is built around the sharing of meals. African-American sisters must struggle with this conflict about the importance of sharing and at the same time have their contributions criticized or never even tried.

Friends

In the discussions on friendship, two major points became apparent: one regarding how friends who visit African-American sisters in the convent are treated, and the other regarding the development of friendships between African-American sisters and their white colleagues. Actually, for the women who entered the convent prior to Vatican II, the question of visitors is moot. They were simply not permitted. Having anyone just stop by was indeed out of the ordinary for any sister.

After Vatican II with more relaxed rules regarding visiting, the incidence of having visitors increased dramatically. African-American women report that African-American guests are treated differently from other guests. "I never felt comfortable bringing friends to my convent home. The few times that I did so I found the other sisters very judgmental," Lisa recalled.⁴¹⁹ Rhonda commented that, "In my

⁴¹⁹Interview with Lisa W., pl I-170.

last house, my friends said to me they were uncomfortable coming to the convent. When they came, they were put in a visiting room called a parlor. The door was closed and they had to wait for me there. As soon as I came into the room, they couldn't wait to get out of there."⁴²⁰ Yvette commented, "I'm not comfortable bringing my friends to the convent, even though its supposed to be my home. It's just something there. One sister was upset because I brought my friend to my room. In this house there are a lot of comments about the telephone calls I get. Friends and people from the parish call me, the sisters are always commenting when the telephone rings and saying 'well, it must be for Yvette."⁴²¹ Elizabeth indicated that she would invite her friends over when no one was home. In that house, "when friends would drop by in the evening, the sisters would be all upset. 'Who are these people?' The sisters didn't understand that my friends did not know the convent rules. My friends were treated badly, even by the younger sisters. So one of my tactics was not to encourage people to drop in."⁴²² Elizabeth used this tactic to avoid conflict, but it also isolated her from her friends who were an important element in her social support system. Odetta described how difficult it was for her in one of her living situations, "When my friends visited the

⁴²⁰Interview with Rhonda R., p. I-174.

⁴²¹Interview with Yvette R., p. II-213.

⁴²²Interview with Elizabeth H., p.I-186.

convent, I would be asked, 'Are they trustworthy?' The sisters did not ask this question regarding white visitors."⁴²³ Laura remembered that in one place that she lived, "Before my company came, the sisters would move precious things and count the silver after they left. This did not happen when a white sister had visitors."⁴²⁴ These incidents have created a fearfulness about how friends and family visitors will be treated by the sisters. Helen commented, "I've never felt comfortable bringing friends home. I'm always nervous about how my friends will be treated."⁴²⁵ Eileen observed that "the way the telephone is answered tells you if you are welcome. I'm not comfortable inviting my friends to my home. Now I would rather go out than have them come to the convent."⁴²⁶ Mistrusting family members of the African-American woman places her in a very conflictual situation. It often leads to the kind of conclusion that Eileen has made. Removing herself and her visitors from her home is the only way she can find a comfortable accepting environment. Karen felt strongly that none of her African-American friends were welcome.⁴²⁷ Yolanda noted that she did not stop bringing her friends home, but that she noticed that

⁴²³Interview with Odetta B., p. II-207.

⁴²⁴Interview with Laura H., p. II-302.

⁴²⁵Interview with Helen C., p. II-200.

⁴²⁶Interview with Eileen B., p. II-199.

⁴²⁷Interview with Karen J., p. II-195.

sisters would just leave the room.⁴²⁸ Rita indicated that although she brought friends to the celebrations in her home, she was aware that some of her sisters didn't like it.⁴²⁹ Rachel felt a special scrutiny about her friends. "I was asked many questions about my friends that other sisters weren't."⁴³⁰

Ten (25%) of the participants reported that they felt comfortable bringing friends to their convent home. For these women, careful choice of a living environment was the way they were able to overcome unwelcoming experiences.

The development of a support system is very important to any person. The African-American sister in a predominantly white religious congregation needs to develop a support system which includes both her white sisters and African-Americans from her own milieu. Lisa observed that, "I don't have any difficulty making friends with white women generally. In the Army, I had all kinds of friends. When I came to the religious congregation it was different. All of a sudden, there were judgements. I felt the need to be very careful, but I was not careful enough. My friendship and trust were betrayed by my directress because she made an issue out of everything."⁴³¹ Gwen remarked that the only sisters she was

⁴²⁸Interview with Yolanda A., p. II-212.

⁴²⁹Interview with Rita B., p. II-209.

⁴³⁰Interview with Rachel C., p. II-208.

⁴³¹Interview with Lisa W., p. I-177-178.

friendly with were a Native American, Mexican and Puerto Rican. "They were sent to school, when I was sent to cook. I found out that they fought the same things I did."⁴³² Laura observed that there are many cliques among the sisters in her congregation. "I've made friends with some. I'm on an acquaintance level and a professional level with many others."⁴³³ Yolanda commented that "color does make a difference in the United States. I know I do stand out culturally and I want to fit in. I am friendly with people as much as they want to share my culture. Sometimes it feels like 'show and tell.'"⁴³⁴ Rachel explained that her friendships were very limited. "I've attempted to be friends, but the sisters are not always willing. My efforts have had little understanding."⁴³⁵ Yvette noted that she has a few white sister friends. "Sadly, I learned not to trust. I thought many of the sisters were my friends and then I found out that they were not. It is very difficult to trust."⁴³⁶ Darlene commented that she did not make friends among the sisters she lived with. "Generally we tolerated each other."⁴³⁷ To combat the feeling of isolation, Darlene became

⁴³²Interview with Gwen H., p. II-193.

⁴³³Interview with Laura H., p. II-291.

⁴³⁴Interview with Yolanda A., p. II-227.

⁴³⁵Interview with Rachael C., p. II-223.

⁴³⁶Interview with Yvette R., p. II-229.

⁴³⁷Interview with Darlene D., p. II-214.

immersed in her work. She loved her job and never wanted to go home to the convent. This became a double isolation, because the community of sisters would remind her about her lack of attendance at community functions. The sisters would then feel justified in further isolating her from future activities in the convent. This was done, for example, by setting a date for a meeting and not consulting with Darlene about her availability. The justification by the planners of the meeting was that Darlene never attended the meetings anyway. This attitude further isolated Darlene.

Sylvia, who was in a traditional pre-Vatican II setting recalled, "There were several novices in the novitiate with me. We would giggle together. I was comfortable speaking with them. You just had to roll with the punches. There were good days and bad days."⁴³⁸ In this group, this experience was the exception and not a part of the general trend.

Agnes warns that it is important to know who your friends are, "I find that the white sisters with whom I am friends are real. They do not have a problem talking with me about any issues. They don't change because I am African-American. They are very honest with me."⁴³⁹ Edith recalls, "While I have had white friends all of my life, when I entered the convent I learned to guard my heart. I was not going to be hurt again. It was a learning experience, but you learn to

⁴³⁸Interview with Sylvia S., p. I-101.

⁴³⁹Interview with Agnes B., p.I-184.

deal with isolation."⁴⁴⁰ For Edith, the isolation became a factor in her decision to leave religious life. Elizabeth relates her perception, "I also realize that the relationships are so different because there are some things that they (the white sisters) don't understand about me and never will understand. It can make me so angry. There are just so many layers and it just makes me crazy because on some levels I do have the expectation of making friends with them. It's so much easier not to have the expectation."⁴⁴¹ Evelyn noted that "the white sisters in my congregation are very supportive and I have many good friends among them. I've heard African-American sisters say they aren't friends with white sisters, that is really terrible because of the isolation."⁴⁴² Marilyn indicated that her professional focus makes it difficult to maintain friendships among the sisters in her congregation.⁴⁴³

Rita related a unique experience, which provided her with a deep appreciation of her friend and the understanding of her own experience. "There is one sister who is a good friend of mine. We went on a retreat together. This retreat was offered by an African-American congregation. My friend got the idea of how it was for me in a predominantly white

⁴⁴⁰Interview with Edith E., p. I-176.

⁴⁴¹Interview with Elizabeth H., p. I-148.

⁴⁴²Interview with Evelyn L., p. II-231.

⁴⁴³Interview with Marilyn P., p. II-232.

situation by immersing herself in a predominantly African-American situation. It also helped her to understand the challenge of being the only one."⁴⁴⁴

Ten (25%) of the participants felt that they had no difficulty in making friends with white sisters in their respective congregations. Odetta notes that, "One thing I tell young women 'if you don't have a friend in your congregation you can trust, then get out now.'"⁴⁴⁵ Eileen indicated that "I force myself to be open to everyone."⁴⁴⁶ Wendy commented that "I got along well with everyone; no one ever accused me of not being friendly."⁴⁴⁷

The experiences of the African-American women who bring their friends to the convent to visit are varied. Some of the women have had the positive experience of feeling comfortable enough about their surroundings and their community that they expect that their guests will be treated warmly and hospitably. Many more experienced the discomfort of seeing their friends and themselves doubted by the sisters with whom they lived. For the African-American women, these experiences alienate and isolate them from their white sisters and from their African-American friends.

Trust is most acutely undermined when understanding is

⁴⁴⁴Interview with Rita B., p. II-224.

⁴⁴⁵Interview with Odetta B., p. II-228.

⁴⁴⁶Interview with Eileen B., p. II-230.

⁴⁴⁷Interview with Wendy T., p. II-125.

lacking. Some of the women of the study indicate the difficulty they faced in making friends among their white counterparts. Some sisters have overcome these obstacles and have described how their white friends demonstrate concern and understanding of the difficult circumstances for an African-American woman in a predominantly white congregation.

Education

Sixteen (40%) of the participants were encouraged to continue their education. "One of the congregational leaders suggested I begin the process to further my education. I was shocked because I only had temporary vows. When I suggested the graduate program that I wanted, the congregation approved."⁴⁴⁸

Of the remaining participants, fifty percent recounted incidents which made them question the reason why they wanted to study for a Master's degree or question their ability to meet the academic standards. "My intellectual ability was undermined. I have a learning disability which did not hinder me from obtaining my undergraduate degree and entering a professional career. When I asked to take an undergraduate course in theology, my director asked me if this would be too much for me because 'you know, you are slow.' I was denied permission to take the course."⁴⁴⁹ This denial had far reaching effects. Lisa began to question her intellectual

⁴⁴⁸Interview with Rhonda R., p. I-129.

⁴⁴⁹ Interview with Lisa W., p. i--=190.

ability and later, deferred entrance into a Master's program because she wondered if she could meet the academic standards.

The sisters described how they faced repeated delays and denials. "I've been struggling with this for the last five years. I want to study in the field of early childhood education. The leadership keeps asking me why I need a Master's degree. I'd like to develop my skills working with younger children," commented Agnes.⁴⁵⁰ Elizabeth reported that she waited a long time to go back to school. "I was denied my first application to study because the degree was not what the leadership wanted me to get. Now, I've been encouraged to get my Master's in Social Work."⁴⁵¹

These delays, denials and other discouragements undermine the professional standing of African-American women and their ability to gain respect both in the congregation and in their respective professions. It must be noted that organizational attitudes toward academic preparedness are crucial in gaining permission to continue the educational process. Of the 27 different congregations, 23 (85%) are extensively identified with professional excellence and education. Of the remaining group of four, two are contemplative congregations, one is more focused on acquiring only the specific skills needed for a particular task and the other congregation, which exclusively serves the African-American community, believes

⁴⁵⁰Interview with Agnes B. p. I-193.

⁴⁵¹Interview with Elizabeth H., p. I-187.

that the need for workers outweighs the need for professional preparedness. There is a legitimate question about why professionalism is not valued in this predominantly white congregation which serves African-American neighborhoods. This can be perceived as a form of institutional racism.

Language

Sixteen (40%) of the women of the study discussed two different aspects of the use of language. One was their sensitivity to the use of darkness and references to blackness to denote evil, as in "the black abyss," or "the dark night of the soul." Yolanda indicated that, "Language does hurt me. The comments about light and dark. No one understands what I mean. I begin to ask myself what's the matter with me?"⁴⁵² Odetta explained "I'm very offended by the use of language in prayer, for example, 'washed whiter than snow.' I ask myself 'What will the Lord do for me?' We must be more inclusive with language."⁴⁵³ Susan commented, "Many times I heard sisters talking about the 'black cloud over their heads'."⁴⁵⁴ Bertha discussed the events at a recent national meeting. "The theme was light and darkness. For European-Americans, this was fine, but for African-Americans it was a problem. Symbolism has an impact on all our lives. No one could see it when I spoke up about it. This theme would not be a problem if there

⁴⁵²Interview with Yolanda A., p. II-413.

⁴⁵³Interview with Odetta B., p.II-410.

⁴⁵⁴Interview with Susan P., p.II-396.

was some effort at being inclusive in other ways of praying, enjoying music and ritual."⁴⁵⁵ At times, the participants have been told that they are too sensitive about language and that the use of language is not an important issue. This powerful judgement further serves to undermine the self-esteem of the African-American woman. It must be noted that more positive references like "the protection of darkness," or "under cover of darkness," are often avoided. The second area discussed by the respondents was the use of cultural expressions in the presence of their white sisters. Amy observed, "When I entered, there were four African-American postulants. We were comfortable with each other. When we were around the other sisters, there were certain things I didn't say because the white sisters wouldn't understand."⁴⁵⁶ Lisa recalled that, "I was told not use cultural expressions because they were improper and imprudent."⁴⁵⁷ Odetta explained that "In my congregation, I am aware of Eurocentric cultural expressions. Many sisters still feel comfortable saying "you people" or "spook." When I say "cracker," they get upset. Some sisters talk down to African-American sisters and remind us that we should stay in "our place" where ever that is."⁴⁵⁸ Odetta illustrated just how uncomfortable

⁴⁵⁵Interview with Bertha H., p. II-398.

⁴⁵⁶Interview with Amy W., p. II-397.

⁴⁵⁷Interview with Lisa W., p.I-102.

⁴⁵⁸Odetta B., p. II-408.

language can make her feel. "I was at a community meeting and chocolate covered nuts were on the coffee table. So I reached over to them and the sister next to me said, 'Oh, you want the nigger babies?' I said, 'Well, we call them something else.' We can't let this language go by us unchallenged any more."⁴⁵⁹

Agnes indicated that she was always very conscious of her use of language and that when the African-American sisters met together to talk there were many judgements made about them.⁴⁶⁰ Bertha observed that while African-American sisters are criticized about being over-expressive, the white sisters often believe that the African-Americans have not been exposed to proper language.⁴⁶¹

One sister observed that she studied body language. It is not always what is said but how it is said that counts. Rhonda recalls discussing the difference between racism and prejudice with a white sister, "and even in the conversation, just getting a look from her which seemed to indicate to me that I didn't know what I was talking about."⁴⁶²

Evelyn commented, "Very often racism is expressed in the way people speak. The greatest shock I received was when I went to work in the infirmary with the old nuns. I thought

⁴⁵⁹Ibid., p. II-407.

⁴⁶⁰Interview with Agnes B., p.I-94.

⁴⁶¹Interview with Bertha H., p. II-399.

⁴⁶²Interview with Rhonda R., p. I-122.

they were holy, but the language they used and the names and attitudes they demonstrated were evil. This is learned behavior and because they were nuns they decided that they couldn't be racist. In the dining room, I hear words like 'Japs.'⁴⁶³

Often the use of certain cultural expressions requires that the African-American sister explain its meaning to her white counterparts. Hillary indicated that, "Now it's more prevalent, but I still do a great deal of explaining. I'm constantly telling white sisters what I mean."⁴⁶⁴ For Rachel, being careful in communication has led to criticism, "I am careful about my cultural expressions, because I must be sensitive to the white sisters. I do censor my words and gestures. Some sisters have criticized me for being too private."⁴⁶⁵ Lilly commented that she was careful about using cultural expressions because some (white) sisters become offended.⁴⁶⁶ Norma observed that she is careful about how she uses language around the older sisters because they might not understand.⁴⁶⁷ Rhonda explained, "When I use cultural expressions I have to explain them. At times, I don't mind explaining the meaning but other times I get tired. When I

⁴⁶³Interview with Evelyn L., p. II-400.

⁴⁶⁴Interview with Hillary L., p. II-402.

⁴⁶⁵Interview with Rachel C, p. II-411.

⁴⁶⁶Interview with Lilly M., p.II-404.

⁴⁶⁷Interview with Norma D., p. II-406.

come among my own people, oh good, I feel happy, I don't have to worry about explaining what I mean."⁴⁶⁸ Evelyn indicated that she is aware that "When I go home or to the Black Sisters Conference, there is a feeling of freedom, I just relax. You don't realize how apart you are until you go to the conference and see the sea of Black faces. It's just wonderful."⁴⁶⁹ Yvette observed that with some of her white sisters she can be comfortable, but "Some others do not understand. You must hide your culture totally."⁴⁷⁰ The tragedy is that in Yvette's situation, rather than challenge the sisters who do not understand, the African-American member is made to hide her cultural heritage.

Odetta has had to make decisions about her living environment based on how she expresses herself. "I must feel free to express myself. Recently, I moved out of a convent because I was feeling pressure. It was mean spirited and really racial."⁴⁷¹ For Martha, "Communication wasn't hard. I was used to being with European-Americans. It wasn't a strain at all."⁴⁷² Laura, on the other hand, clearly stated that, "I am not careful about cultural expressions. I know it upsets some nuns. I'm just me. This is what the sisters must

⁴⁶⁸Interview with Rhonda R., p. I-129.

⁴⁶⁹Interview with Evelyn L., p. II-401.

⁴⁷⁰Interview with Yvette R., p. II-414.

⁴⁷¹Interview with Odetta B., p. II-409.

⁴⁷²Interview with Martha L., p. II-405.

accept."⁴⁷³

Living Environment

Sixteen (40%) of the participants expressed concern regarding the living environment. The majority (63%) of the women recounted negative experiences and thirty seven percent related positive community experiences. Elizabeth has moved four times in the last ten years. "It is difficult to move so many times. I made myself do it, but I didn't want to. I felt like I was empty. I was tired."⁴⁷⁴

The first two places that Rhonda lived was in a white neighborhood. She began to wonder, "if this is what it is going to be like?"⁴⁷⁵ Christine recalled that in the 1950's a sister in her congregation confided to her that, "No pastor would want to work with you (an African-American). She was telling me what a problem it was to find a place for me to work and live."⁴⁷⁶ Laura recalled that "For the first eight months, I was quiet and then I said, 'It's too white here.' This issue was vital to me."⁴⁷⁷ Nancy's congregation did not welcome the African-American women to the motherhouse during the formation process, but her first mission was to a non African-American neighborhood in a northern farming community.

⁴⁷³Interview with Laura H., p.II-403.

⁴⁷⁴Interview with Elizabeth H., p.I-208.

⁴⁷⁵Interview with Rhonda R., p. I-206.

⁴⁷⁶Interview with Christine W., p.II-427.

⁴⁷⁷Interview with Laura H., p.II-431.

"I looked hard to find an African-American community I could relate to, and I found one about ninety miles away."⁴⁷⁸ Jill and several other sisters recounted stories which indicate the inability of congregational leadership to deal with racism and its consequences. Jill remembered, "For my first assignment, I was supposed to go to one parish. The sisters objected and said that they would not live with me. So the assignment was changed."⁴⁷⁹ Helen recalled, "There was always a problem about where I was going to live. Local houses did not want to accept me in their homes. One group of sisters objected to my joining them and this intolerance was allowed to exist. The message that I got was that I wasn't acceptable."⁴⁸⁰ Laura noted that the general ambience was not welcoming. "Some sisters would not sit in the chapel with me."⁴⁸¹ Eileen observed that "It seems like no one wants to live with the African-American candidates. There is a great deal of mud slinging against African-Americans."⁴⁸² Karen observed that in the house where she lived with four other sisters, the sisters knew the names of members of each others family. "But they never learned the names of my family members."⁴⁸³ Odetta

⁴⁷⁸Interview with Nancy E., p. II-434.

⁴⁷⁹Interview with Jill C., p. II-429.

⁴⁸⁰Interview with Helen C., p. II-422.

⁴⁸¹Interview with Laura H., p. II-426.

⁴⁸²Interview with Eileen B., p. II-658.

⁴⁸³Interview with Karen J., p. II-417.

indicated that recently a group of sisters from her congregation were considering purchasing a house in order to combine several smaller local groups of sisters into one. "Well, they chose to look for a house in the area of the city I would be most uncomfortable in. I want to be able to get out of my car at night without fear. There is tremendous mental stress about living where your aren't wanted."⁴⁸⁴

Today, congregations vary widely regarding living and working environments. In approximately six (22%) of the congregations represented in the study group, sisters are assigned, after some consultation, to live in a particular convent and to perform a particular job. In other congregations, a sister may select a house and a job and apply to be accepted. For African-American sisters who want to live in the inner city, it is very difficult to find colleagues who are willing to work and live in the area. This is a most difficult conflict for African-American women. The women see the opportunity to work in African-American neighborhoods as a ministry which until now has been done by white sisters alone. Odetta indicates that she doesn't want to live in a neighborhood where people don't want her.⁴⁸⁵ Martha noted that "Efforts should be made to match the ministry preferences of African-Americans. I wanted to work in my own (African-

⁴⁸⁴Interview with Odetta B., p. II-435.

⁴⁸⁵Ibid.

American) community and I was sent to all white parishes."⁴⁸⁶ Yolanda recounted an experience of living in an inner city neighborhood with two of her white sisters. "We tried to live in an inner city neighborhood, but there were racial overtones in the house. The white sisters would not walk in the neighborhood, even when we were with them. Eventually, the African-American sisters walked to work in the morning and the white sisters rode in the car. For me, there was a real rejection of each others community. The white sisters moved to another neighborhood."⁴⁸⁷ Nancy noted that in one local convent where she lived, an African-American sister was sent to live in the house. "The white sisters asked me one question: what do we do when the African-American woman gets here?" This question underlines the tremendous lack of knowledge and understanding on behalf of the white sisters. Jane found a very supportive living environment but the congregational leaders did not want her to continue to live there. "I moved to an African-American neighborhood with African-American sisters. We were a presence in the African-American community. My congregational council said this move made them fearful that I would leave. When I made it clear that this living situation was important to my spiritual and physical health, the congregation said I could stay there but they imposed a financial obligation upon me. It was

⁴⁸⁶Interview with Martha L., p. II-424.

⁴⁸⁷Interview with Yolanda A., p. II-425.

difficult, but we managed."⁴⁸⁸ Helen experienced a problem with the landlord. "I was sitting out in front of the house and the landlord came out and asked me what I was doing there. When I told him that I was one of the sisters, he didn't believe me. Later one of the white sisters confirmed that I was a sister. It was so difficult to live in that house after this incident."⁴⁸⁹ Martha faces another kind of problem. Martha recently moved to a new city and found a job in an public school district in a predominantly African-American neighborhood. She is currently living with family members while she looks for a welcoming congregational house to live in. "Recently my family drove me to a large convent of our congregation in the city. We were looking for the convent and my brother in law got out of the car and went to ask for information. The sister who answered the door immediately locked the screen door. She was afraid of an African-American man. I don't know if I want to live in a house like this."⁴⁹⁰

Odetta described a positive community experience. "I was one of the first African-American sisters to live in a convent with white sisters in the deep South. Those nine sisters were willing and open. We kind of grew up together. The sisters received the challenge and we found the solution together.

⁴⁸⁸Interview with Jane L., p. II-428.

⁴⁸⁹Interview with Helen C., p.II-420.

⁴⁹⁰Interview with Martha L., p.II-432.

Religious life must challenge people to a new understanding."⁴⁹¹

Some of the African-American sisters have solved the problem of living environment by choosing to live alone. Marilyn commented, "Now I live in an apartment because I want to live where my friends feel comfortable visiting me. I chose to live in an integrated neighborhood."⁴⁹² Rita has lived alone for six or seven years. "My ministry is in the African-American community," she added.⁴⁹³ Yolanda's search for a welcoming community was fruitless. She explained, "I'm in a hard space now and I ask does the price come too high? I've had to make choices between ministry and living (with sisters) in community. I asked to live with some of our sisters nearby but they refused me. I really want to live among my people. I want to work among the women there."⁴⁹⁴

For the participants of this study, neighborhood was very important. Through the neighborhood the sisters could feel linked to the African-American community. Many of the sisters experienced difficulties in trying to find a welcoming home and often felt isolated in all white neighborhoods. The solution to this problem for some sisters has been to live alone which makes it possible to live in an integrated

⁴⁹¹Interview with Odetta B., p.II-576.

⁴⁹²Interview with Marilyn P., p. II-423.

⁴⁹³Interview with Rita B., p. II-437.

⁴⁹⁴Interview with Yolanda A., p. II-438.

neighborhood and to have more control over the congregational ties which cause them to feel alienated.

Another aspect of the living environment is the interior decoration of the house. In pre-Vatican II days, this was not raised as an issue because sisters did not usually have control of the selection of pictures or artifacts. The use of color was restricted. Photographs, particularly family photographs, were forbidden.

In the post-Vatican II era, sisters began to study their history and the meaning of the congregation. The convent, while still a place of prayer, was also defined as a home. Local community houses were decorated by the sisters who lived in them. In many respects, the houses reflected the tastes and background of the occupants.

Elizabeth comments that in one of her living situations, "Anything (Afrocentric) that we did or got, it was because I did it. It was never "look what we got," but if I saw something and brought it home it was fine. This is so much different from the other communities I lived in."⁴⁹⁵ In most houses, Elizabeth reported that there were no posters or artifacts that reflected her presence in the house.⁴⁹⁶ These houses were decorated in a Eurocentric style and she felt like she didn't live there. Helen reported that unless she purchased the African art, there would be no decorations of

⁴⁹⁵Interview with Elizabeth H., p. I-211.

⁴⁹⁶Ibid., p. I-212.

this type in her house.⁴⁹⁷ Yvette commented that "This year I put a print of a Black Madonna in the community room. Until now, no decorations reflected my heritage and I have lived here for more than five years. Not one sister who lives here said anything to me about the print. One sister visitor admired the print."⁴⁹⁸ Karen remembered, "At Christmas, there was a white baby Jesus in the Creche, so I used kinte cloth to decorate around it. When the (white) sisters invited their families to visit at Christmas, the kinte cloth was removed. There was nothing in the main part of the house to reflect my presence."⁴⁹⁹ In Eileen's convent there have been discussions about redesigning the chapel. Sisters have indicated to me that they do not want to pray to a Black Jesus. I am tired of this foolishness. I've never been considered. Only yesterday, sisters in the house bought kinte cloth for the altar. The two African-American sisters who live in this house were never consulted. We were invisible. It is so debilitating."⁵⁰⁰

Rhonda indicated that, "This house smells white. An African-American house smells differently and sometimes I long for that. The prints and decorations around the house are very Eurocentric with the exception of the one print I hung up

⁴⁹⁷Interview with Helen C., p. II-447.

⁴⁹⁸Interview with Yvette R., p. II-441.

⁴⁹⁹Interview with Karen J., p. II-443.

⁵⁰⁰Interview with Eileen B., p. II-445-446.

in the dining room."⁵⁰¹

The introduction of these new items, Afrocentric fabric and artifacts, can be a great source of contention in the local community life, but African-American women indicate that it is important if they are to feel a part of the congregation and its mission. Wendy commented that "Decorations should be addressed. Everyone should be beautiful and presented by those standards."⁵⁰² Bertha noted that while there are African-American pictures in some of the convents in her congregation, there are no statues.⁵⁰³ Jill, Odetta and Ruth indicated that their homes were decorated with a blend of Afro-centric and Eurocentric artifacts and pictures.⁵⁰⁴

Cultural Differences

In the years prior to Vatican II (1964), most congregations endorsed the idea that everyone left their "old lives" at the door of the novitiate. Ann G. recalls, "The eastern European-Americans had an understanding of many of the traditions which were German in origin. Anyone who didn't share that heritage was at the same disadvantage I was at, as far as heritage went."⁵⁰⁵

⁵⁰¹Interview with Rhonda R., p.I-214.

⁵⁰²Interview with Wendy T., p. II-442.

⁵⁰³Interview with Bertha H., p. II-444.

⁵⁰⁴Interview with Jill C., p. II-448. Interview with Odetta B., p. II-449. Interview with Ruth F., p. II-450.

⁵⁰⁵Interview with Ann G., p. I-150.

Thirty-two (80%) of the participants in the study mentioned the significance of cultural differences in their lives. Many of the women recognized the attempts of their congregations to address cultural sharing. For the most part this sharing took place in individual convents, between individual sisters. Three sisters indicated that during the formation process there were varied cultural experiences.⁵⁰⁶ Nina noted that "At the missioning ceremony, the sisters sang spirituals."⁵⁰⁷ Jane described the members of her class, "Everyone was curious about me and other traditions. It was an interesting mix. Friendships across cultures were encouraged. We have exchanged cultural backgrounds and sometimes it has been difficult."⁵⁰⁸ Christine felt that the way cultural differences were handled influenced her membership in the congregation.⁵⁰⁹

During the 1970's and 1980's, there has been more emphasis on sharing culture. Nora noted that "At the motherhouse we've had celebrations which focused on the African-American presence in the congregation. I've even worn African garb."⁵¹⁰ Bertha found an openness for cultural

⁵⁰⁶Interview with Agnes B., p. I-40.

⁵⁰⁷Interview with Nina T., p.II-98.

⁵⁰⁸Interview with Jane L., p. II-86.

⁵⁰⁹Interview with Christine W., p. II-294.

⁵¹⁰Interview with Nora C., p. II-103.

expressions.⁵¹¹ Laura commented that in her congregation, "There are attempts to be sensitive to African-American music."⁵¹² Evelyn observed that "There was an effort to include other cultures. The ethnic liturgies reflect the commitment of the women in the congregation. We are attempting to address this issue."⁵¹³ Diane explained that "I feel that I can share my culture with my congregation. I share my experiences at work. I bring my culture to my prayer. I use gospel music and feel I share my being me."⁵¹⁴ Helen noted that "The celebration of Kwanzaa was openly received. There is a heightened awareness that African-Americans are present in our congregation."⁵¹⁵ Rachel reported that she is able to share different ways of worship with her sisters.⁵¹⁶ Nina, Amy and Eileen have not felt criticized for their culture.⁵¹⁷

Rhonda related an experience she had during the novitiate. "We had in-service days which were designed to help us during the ministry phase of the novitiate. It was

⁵¹¹Interview with Bertha H., p. II-65.

⁵¹²Interview with Laura H., p. II-118.

⁵¹³Interview with Evelyn L., p.II-261.

⁵¹⁴Interview with Diane B., p.II-70.

⁵¹⁵Interview with Helen C., p.II-79.

⁵¹⁶Interview with Rachel C., p.II-107.

⁵¹⁷Interview with Nina T., p.II-100. Interview with Amy T., p. II-62. Interview with Eileen B., p. II-72.

totally Eurocentric. The other candidates asked me why I wouldn't participate and I told them that this was being forced on me. On one in-service day, a white sister came to talk about Black spirituality!"⁵¹⁸ Yolanda commented that the meetings in her congregation are always Eurocentrically organized. The agendas are set in that style.⁵¹⁹ Laura felt that in the first years of her association with the congregation. "There was a sense that African-Americans did not have a distinctive cultural basis. The expectation of the dominant culture of the congregation is that what ever is done is good for everyone."⁵²⁰ Rita had the same experience "I was told that we (all sisters) are all the same."⁵²¹ Jane found that although she was bi-cultural, her white sisters were not concerned about learning about her culture.⁵²² Marilyn commented that "The white sisters were not sensitive to African-American culture. The sisters thought that they were wonderful if a spiritual was included in the worship service once in a while."⁵²³

Cultural music is often criticized. "I listen to gospel music for enjoyment. I've been told its too loud. In all the

⁵¹⁸Interview with Rhonda R., p.I-93.

⁵¹⁹Interview with Yolanda A., p.II-114.

⁵²⁰Interview with Laura H., p. II-91.

⁵²¹Interview with Rita B., p.II-108.

⁵²²Interview with Jane L., p. II-83.

⁵²³Interview with Marilyn P., p.II-95.

years I've been here, only one sister has ever listened to it with me," Agnes reported.⁵²⁴ Odetta indicated that sisters complain that her music (Gospel music) is too loud. "My answer is, if you allow me to, I can enrich your life."⁵²⁵ Jane commented that "The sisters wondered why I listened to Gospel Music, but the sisters said it was okay to do so."⁵²⁶

Sylvia described an atmosphere of criticism: "I felt some criticism because of my culture. The German-American sisters particularly treated me as if I were inferior."⁵²⁷ Yvette indicates that she often feels criticized and receives disapproving looks, particularly about how she dresses. Amy noted that she felt like an odd ball in bright colors. "I learned to modify my dress."⁵²⁸ Yolanda commented that "Criticism has been leveled at me because of my culture. I've been compared to others and my dance has been criticized."⁵²⁹ Rachel feels criticized for her culture, "Sisters sometimes ask me why I stay."⁵³⁰ Darlene found the criticism very subtle. "I was told that when I acted on behalf of the African-American parish where I worked, I was disloyal to the

⁵²⁴Interview with Agnes B., p.I-151.

⁵²⁵Interview with Odetta B., p.II-105.

⁵²⁶Interview with Jane L., p. II-87.

⁵²⁷Interview with Sylvia S., p.I-97.

⁵²⁸Interview with Amy T., p. II-64.

⁵²⁹Interview with Yolanda A., p. II-111.

⁵³⁰Interview with Rachel C., p. II-106.

sisters I lived with."⁵³¹

Jill indicated that "There wasn't any opportunity to share my culture. It was not always easy sharing books, ideas and values."⁵³² Hillary noted that the sisters in her congregation do not make efforts to learn about the African-American culture. They learn about it only through me."⁵³³ Karen commented that "None of the four sisters I lived with were open to me. I couldn't bring my culture to them. I couldn't share my culture, but I did share my culture with the broader community."⁵³⁴

Elizabeth recalled that her family's life choices were a pivotal issue for the formation team. "My directress did not understand my resistance to discussing my mother's life choices. One just doesn't do this in my culture."⁵³⁵

Agnes related the story of another African-American sister, "This sister was living with two white sisters. There was a lot of emphasis on how much she prayed. Her prayer life was measured by how much time she spent praying with the white sisters. No one took into account that she needed to pray her way once in a while. In the end, the white sisters were considered fine and the African-American sister was considered

⁵³¹Interview with Darlene D., p.II-57.

⁵³²Interview with Jill C., p.II-89-90.

⁵³³Interview with Hillary L., p. II-81.

⁵³⁴Interview with Karen J., p. II-58.

⁵³⁵Interview with Elizabeth H., p. II-126.

the problem. Of the three people, the African-American was the one that left the order."⁵³⁶ Eileen commented that "I have been told that our African-American Mass is too long and too emotional. I feel like because we are expressive, don't put us down. I feel these criticisms personally. It really hurts because I go to the daily Eurocentric liturgies and I never complain."⁵³⁷

The participants in the study indicated that some simple physical and cultural needs are often overlooked. Christine commented that "An example of this blindness was that there was no tub available to bathe in. African-Americans need a tub, but the (white) sisters were unaware of this."⁵³⁸ Odetta indicated that "You must recognize that we socialize differently."⁵³⁹ Gina explained "Our sense of humor is different. For example, I went with the white sisters in my house to a movie, "Do the Right Thing." I laughed with the other African-Americans at many different parts. The white nuns were puzzled. There are things that we experience differently. Another time I attended a wake with a group of white sisters. The sisters wore slacks. This just isn't done in the African-American community. I was shocked."⁵⁴⁰ One

⁵³⁶Interview with Agnes B., p.I-205.

⁵³⁷Interview with Eileen B., p. II-73.

⁵³⁸Interview with Christine W., p.II-67.

⁵³⁹Interview with Odetta B., p. II-104.

⁵⁴⁰Interview with Gina R., p. II-75-77.

problem that Bertha encountered was that everyone was expected to wear the same color beige stockings. There were no allowances for the difference in the color of her skin.⁵⁴¹

The differences in style often become a major stumbling block for African-American women. Agnes recalled that one African-American novice was asked to leave and the reasons were that the novice dressed differently, "She wore sneakers with a dress and this was interpreted as a lack of maturity. She was criticized for asking questions and was told that she lacked relational skills. A lot of what I thought were very petty things were put down as reasons that she wasn't fit."⁵⁴² Yolanda reported that "My clothes have been criticized. I've been criticized for my cultural expressions. I've been told I'm too expressive and it reflect sexuality too much."⁵⁴³ Nina commented that "I was considered too sensitive. If I spoke too much, then African-Americans were too aggressive."⁵⁴⁴

Eileen commented that she often goes to programs held in the house which are about other cultures. "Recently I went to a program about Ireland. I noticed that the white sisters do not go to programs about African-Americans."⁵⁴⁵ Diane raised

⁵⁴¹Interview with Bertha H., p. II-65.

⁵⁴²Interview with Agnes B., p.I-88.

⁵⁴³Interview with Yolanda A., p.II-115.

⁵⁴⁴Interview with Nina T., p. II-99.

⁵⁴⁵Interview with Eileen B.,p. II-120.

an issue about culture at a formation gathering. "The (white) sisters said that I should know that they loved me. I feel like, if you love me, then you must get to know my culture. I found being different is very hard."⁵⁴⁶

Network Support

Twenty-five (62%) participants discussed the need for social supports. The kinds of social supports were in two major areas: social supports in local congregations and social supports among African-American women through local and national organizations, like the National Black Sisters Conference and the Institute for Black Catholic Studies.

Local Congregational Support

The congregational support discussed by 60% of those participants who expressed a need for network support included support from individual sisters, organizational support and congregational willingness to address the issue of racism.

Christine described the encouragement she received from her former sixth grade teacher and a High School teacher. "They were always supportive. The sisters would say, 'hang in there.' I felt the encouragement and support they offered, but I feel strongly that we need organizational support."⁵⁴⁷ The kind of support Tammy received from her white sister friends helped her to feel a part of the larger organization.⁵⁴⁸

⁵⁴⁶Interview with Diane B., p.II-71.

⁵⁴⁷Interview with Christine W., p. II-747.

⁵⁴⁸Interview with Tammy, p. II-746.

Marilyn recalled that her novice mistress intervened on her behalf during her first years as a member of the congregation.⁵⁴⁹ Gina indicated that she has observed that the white sisters in her congregation are more and more sensitive to multicultural issues. Evidence of this sensitivity can be found in the fact that "white sisters even incorporate African-American traditions in prayer services. Some sisters are even acquainted with Gospel music."⁵⁵⁰ Ruth observed that some white sisters in her congregation also address racial issues. "That is a big help."⁵⁵¹ During the formation program, Ruth indicated that her colleagues attended the Afrocentric Masses with her. This helped them to understand a different way of praying and to understand some of the differences Ruth dealt with everyday.⁵⁵²

Wendy described the kind of support she needed, "I need to network and a sense from white sisters that they are coming to me. I need to feel a sense of caring. The majority race individuals need to hear from us."⁵⁵³ However, in Wendy's case this sense of understanding was missing and she left the convent. Susan and Karen described positive individual support systems, but these supports were not enough to

⁵⁴⁹Interview with Marilyn P., p. II-489.

⁵⁵⁰Interview with Gina R., p. II-486-487.

⁵⁵¹Interview with Ruth F., p. II-494.

⁵⁵²Ibid., p. II-481.

⁵⁵³Interview with Wendy T., p. II-478.

overcome the institutional discouragements they experienced.⁵⁵⁴ Both Susan and Karen left the organizations they so willingly joined.

The women described various types of organizational support. The most affirming kind of support that the participants indicated was when they received recognition for their leadership potential. Gina noted that when she was elected a delegate to the policy making body (called chapter) she felt that her leadership qualities were recognized. Nancy recalled the first time her congregation called upon her. "It was in 1965. My congregation sent me to the march on Selma. It meant so much to me to be recognized as an African-American woman religious. After the march, I spoke to many local groups about the civil rights movement. When I returned from that march, I was different. I realized that we must deal with the issue of racism in our congregations and white sisters must do this work."⁵⁵⁵ Two of the participants have been called upon by the formation teams of their congregations to act as consultants for minority concerns. This kind of recognition helped them to feel that there was a willingness to address the concerns and problems regarding the practices within the congregation.⁵⁵⁶

⁵⁵⁴Interview with Karen J., p. II-745. Interview with Susan P., p. II-476.

⁵⁵⁵Interview with Nancy E., p.II-479.

⁵⁵⁶Interview with Evelyn L., p. II-483. Interview with Rita C., p. II-492.

Martha indicated that congregations do not always take advantage of the natural support systems available to the candidates. For example, Martha did not meet the other African-American sister in her congregation for ten years. "If I had met her earlier, I think it would have been easier for me to deal with some issues."⁵⁵⁷

Another sign of support for Gina and Evelyn has been at congregational celebrations. "Celebrations do reflect the African-American membership."⁵⁵⁸ Evelyn observed that in the last few years there has been some wonderful cultural sharing.⁵⁵⁹

Evelyn, Rita and Martha expressed hope that religious congregations are beginning to deal with the problems of racism. Evelyn indicated that "I have a support group and we try to monitor these issues (racism). We try to get others to acknowledge that this behavior must change."⁵⁶⁰ Rita commented that "I will work with others (white sisters) to take on the role of educator on racial issues. At times, I confront racism. People need to know another way of thought."⁵⁶¹ Martha described the importance of educating sisters about the evils of racism. "Social justice must be

⁵⁵⁷Interview with Martha L., p. II-749.

⁵⁵⁸Interview with Gina R., p. II-748.

⁵⁵⁹Interview with Evelyn L., p. II-485.

⁵⁶⁰Interview with Evelyn L., p. II-484.

⁵⁶¹Interview with Rita B., p. II-493.

supported by the sisters."⁵⁶²

Hillary commented that African-American women need support from one another.⁵⁶³ Nancy reported that she had organized a support group in her city. "We need this support group to help us survive."⁵⁶⁴ Darlene indicated that her support group consisted of two African-American sisters from other congregations who lived in her city. "I turned to them for support and for reality testing. The small things were stumbling blocks for all of us. Negative community experiences made me aware that I needed space."⁵⁶⁵ Eileen described a network of support among other African-Americans interested in religious life which was developed by a local clergyman. "The network was very supportive. We felt the Church was open to us."⁵⁶⁶

In the late 1960's, African-American sisters from all across the United States founded the Black Sisters Conference. Attendance at the conference has become an important source of support for many sisters. "When I go to the Black Sisters Conference," Evelyn noted, "there is a feeling of freedom. I just relax. You know, you don't realize how apart you are until you go to the conference and see the sea of Black faces.

⁵⁶²Interview with Martha L., p. II-490.

⁵⁶³Interview with Hillary L., p. II-473.

⁵⁶⁴Interview with Nancy E., p. II-480.

⁵⁶⁵Interview with Darlene D., p. II-477.

⁵⁶⁶Interview with Eileen B., p. II-482.

It is just wonderful."⁵⁶⁷ Odetta explained "The Black Sisters Conference was an opportunity to share experiences. It feels so good to walk into a room of African-American nuns."⁵⁶⁸ Jill met African-American sisters who lived in her area. "We would get together and do things. My formation directress did not know what to do, but at this time she didn't do anything negative. Later, I worked for the Conference and heard many tragic stories about other congregations across the country."⁵⁶⁹ Hillary recalled that "I attended the first conference and heard many stories. Most of my experience was not like the stories I heard. Racism was far more subtle in my congregation. I was able to see it later on. The conference helped me."⁵⁷⁰ Eileen felt great support at the conference. "I've been allowed to make mistakes and have grown from it. I feel like I don't have to prove myself to the sisters involved in the conference."⁵⁷¹ Nora learned a great deal about racism at the conference. "I found out things about my congregation that no one ever told me. After the conference, I was changed."⁵⁷² Yvette recalls that the conference "blew my mind, all the sisters there understood

⁵⁶⁷Interview with Evelyn L., p. II-457.

⁵⁶⁸Interview with Odetta B., p.II-469.

⁵⁶⁹Interview with Jill C., p. II-461-463.

⁵⁷⁰Interview with Hillary L., p. II-741.

⁵⁷¹Interview with Eileen B., p. II-740.

⁵⁷²Interview with Nora C., p. II-743.

what I was feeling."⁵⁷³ Helen commented that her first experience at the conference amazed her. "I had serious conversations with sisters. After that I attended the conferences every year."⁵⁷⁴ Ruth indicated that the Black Sisters Conference was essential because it provided support for sisters who needed to ask difficult questions, like "What are we inviting African-American women to?"⁵⁷⁵

While the experience of attending the conference was overwhelmingly described as a positive one, the perception of the organization among the sisters in local congregations was often negative. Karen commented that her congregation were generally supportive of the conference. "As long as I didn't bring it home and I didn't ask the congregation to do anything concerning racism."⁵⁷⁶ Christine found that one of the sisters in her convent would no longer talk to her after she attended her first conference.⁵⁷⁷ Nora recalled that she also lost a friend because she attended the conference. "I told the people in the parish about the national meeting and the pastor complained to the motherhouse that I was causing a disturbance in the parish. I put the materials I brought back from the conference in a place in the convent where all my

⁵⁷³Interview with Yvette R., p. II-472.

⁵⁷⁴Interview with Helen C., p. II-459.

⁵⁷⁵Interview with Ruth F., p. II-471.

⁵⁷⁶Interview with Karen J., p. II-452.

⁵⁷⁷Interview with Christine W., p. II-453.

sisters could see it and read it. One of the counselors (leaders) told me not to be divisive."⁵⁷⁸ Some of the sisters in Odetta's congregation want to know why there is a need for a Black Sisters Conference.⁵⁷⁹ The white sisters express concern about the African-American sisters "ganging up together." Nancy indicated that the sisters in her congregation were very threatened by the Black Sisters Conference. "I told them it was our attempt to take care of our family business."⁵⁸⁰ Eileen felt that she was discouraged from attending the Conference. "When I was professed the message from the leadership was clear. Good sisters don't attend the Black Sisters Conference. I didn't go to the conference for many years. When I finally went to my first conference, it was so enriching. I saw an African-American style of praying. I've seen sisters ask about the conference, but they (the white sisters) don't want to accept the outcomes and that is very hard to watch."⁵⁸¹ Some participants in the study still experience difficulty obtaining the financial support to attend the conference.

Another national program which provides support for African-American women religious is the Institute for Black Catholics sponsored by Xavier University in New Orleans. It

⁵⁷⁸Interview with Nora C., p. 466, 468.

⁵⁷⁹Interview with Odetta B., p. II-470.

⁵⁸⁰Interview with Nancy E., p. 452.

⁵⁸¹Interview with Eileen B., p. II-455-456.

provides an educational base and helps the participants understand the rich cultural African-American Catholic heritage. For Ruth, the Institute was an essential part of her education.⁵⁸²

Other national groups have addressed the issue of racism in religious congregations and this has been a cause for hope among African-American sisters. Nina comments "I was encouraged this month, at the meeting (the Leadership Conference of Women Religious) it was clear that we can no longer tolerate the lack of education among the sisters. Congregations can no longer remain all white."⁵⁸³

The participants indicated that social support was an important factor in their congregational life. Often when the congregation failed, local and national organizations helped to mitigate the feelings of isolation and alienation. For some sisters, participation in national groups caused even greater conflict when they returned to their predominantly white congregations. However, the social supports available on the national level were so important to the African-American sisters that they were undaunted in their efforts to to remain part of the local and national support groups.

⁵⁸²Interview with Ruth F., p. II-496.

⁵⁸³Interview with Nina T., p. II-491.

Components Of The Experience

The components of the experience of African-American women in predominantly white congregations of women religious reflect their perception of their experience. These components include: alienation and isolation, comparison and scrutiny, betrayal and organizational mistrust, detrimental effects on self-esteem, feeling incidental and "always teaching." These components form the core of the experience. In the next few paragraphs, we will explore these components and their influence on the participants of the study.

Alienation and Isolation

African-American women feel alienated and isolated in their respective congregations. Rhonda indicated that she feels "separated from my people."⁵⁸⁴ Elizabeth describes the issue more poignantly, "If I don't change to meet them, there is very little that they will do to meet me, Now I am accepted because I have changed. As long as I did everything their way, I was okay. When I began to say no, then I had an attitude."⁵⁸⁵ When Rhonda began to voice her opinion on a congregational celebration, she was told that she had a "chip on her shoulder." Susan described her experience, "I kept feeling like I was the different one. They (the white sisters) had no idea that they wiped out my energy trying to deal with the differences. Sometimes the sisters said 'we are

⁵⁸⁴Interview with Rhonda R., p.I-91.

⁵⁸⁵Interview with Elizabeth H., p. I-222.

all the same.' We are not all the same. This statement denies my blackness."⁵⁸⁶ Yolanda related a recent incident in which the principal of the school where she is a teacher complained to her and the African-American secretary that the parents (who are African-American) of the school children were mostly ignorant and that the Haitians brought only disease to the United States. "She doesn't regard me with respect. I worry about my anger. I don't want to be an angry person."⁵⁸⁷ For Wendy, "The off chance remarks were just stupid. Some sisters commented that 'I didn't think that you could tan.' This is just ignorance. It's scary too. What else don't they understand?" Diane indicates that she has reacted very strongly to sisters' ignorance. "Recently, we were watching a television newscast. A sister commented that the African-American weatherman who was wearing a hat looked like a pimp. I was offended and said, 'Tell me, what does a pimp look like?' African-American women are never sure of when this kind of off chance remark will change a perfectly warm setting into a hostile environment. Helen commented that sisters do not respect other cultures. "The sisters use expressions like 'you people.' and sometimes say, 'Helen, you're different.'"⁵⁸⁸ This remark separates the African-American woman from her family, friends and her culture. Until the late 1960's, some

⁵⁸⁶Interview with Susan P., p. II-776.

⁵⁸⁷Interview with Yolanda A., p. II-6.

⁵⁸⁸Interview with Helen C., p. II-80.

of the congregations held 'Minstrel Shows,' in which white sisters used make-up to appear black. Laura reported, "Once the President of the College asked me if the minstrel shows were offensive to me. I responded that if you need to ask the question, then you already know the answer."⁵⁸⁹ Eileen described what happens when she is the chairperson of the meeting of all the sisters who live in the her house, called the house meeting. "When sisters see that I have the house meeting chairmanship, some say, 'Eileen has the meeting. We are going to have the 'Black stuff' tonight.' It makes me feel so alone."⁵⁹⁰ Ruth noted that, "Often we (African-American women) live a double life, one in the African-American culture, and one in the white community."⁵⁹¹

Other sisters, like Agnes, just give up trying to make changes. For Agnes, "the emotional consequences have been unbearable at times. It makes you fearful and alone."⁵⁹² Yvette described the emotional consequences of these experiences, "I get angry, but I'm told it is wrong to express anger. So now I think twice before I say anything. I used to be very outgoing and now I am very shy."⁵⁹³ Odetta reported on how she deals with anger. "Now when I get angry I try not

⁵⁸⁹Interview with Laura H., p.II-93.

⁵⁹⁰Interview with Eileen B., p. II-119.

⁵⁹¹Interview with Ruth F., p. II-4.

⁵⁹²Interview with Agnes B., p.I-253.

⁵⁹³Interview with Yvette R., p. II-7.

to talk. I will deal with the problem, but later, in a way that produces a solution and not just angry feelings."⁵⁹⁴ Marilyn commented that "Sometimes, I am isolated in an unconsciously hostile environment. For example, African-American women in my congregation were not invited to participate in the study groups for our policy making sessions (called chapter)."⁵⁹⁵ Carol indicated that "There is no reverence or respect for different spiritualities. I felt alienated and isolated."⁵⁹⁶ Eileen felt very isolated during the formation (postulancy and novitiate) period. "There were no African-Americans around the motherhouse. The neighborhood and the staff were all white."⁵⁹⁷ One way that Yolanda has decided to deal with the problem of isolation is to "just let some things go. While I believe we need to be more honest, it hasn't always worked that way. Sisters are very careful to be correct. This can be very isolating."⁵⁹⁸ Susan felt that "When we talked, it was me down there and the (white) sisters up there. Every positive comment I made became a negative one. I realize now that I just was not a good girl."⁵⁹⁹ Odetta noted that she did not feel alone because she had good

⁵⁹⁴Interview with Odetta B., p. II-3.

⁵⁹⁵Interview with Marilyn P., p. II-391.

⁵⁹⁶Interview with Carol R., p. II-388.

⁵⁹⁷Interview with Eileen B., p. II-389.

⁵⁹⁸Interview with Yolanda A., p. II-393-395.

⁵⁹⁹Interview with Susan P., p. II-1.

directors who often asked her about her feelings.⁶⁰⁰

Scrutiny and Comparison

African-American sisters described the feelings of being constantly doubted and questioned. The questions came from people outside religious life as well as from within the congregation. European-American sisters do not encounter questions of validity in the way that the African-American women do. Rhonda described a visit to George Mason University: "When they saw me they (the white students) asked if I were a sister, like that was impossible."⁶⁰¹ Other sisters related the same kind of questioning when they answered the doorbell of their homes. Often the callers would ask to see a sister, as if an African-American woman could not possibly be a sister.

The women feel questioned in many ways by their congregations. Elizabeth noted that when she spoke with her formation director, "What I find is sometimes that what I say to her doesn't connect with what she hears. Sometimes I have to go back and explain to her what I am saying. She has difficulty understanding me."⁶⁰² Ruth observed that "African-Americans differ from whites in how we communicate or speak, the way we analyze things and how we feel about things."⁶⁰³

⁶⁰⁰Interview with Odetta B., p. II-392.

⁶⁰¹Interview with Rhonda R., p.I-105.

⁶⁰²Interview with Elizabeth H., p. I-124.

⁶⁰³Interview with Ruth F., p. II-4.

The African-American women expressed a frustration not with the lack of understanding, but more with the unwillingness to learn about these differences. For Elizabeth, the differences were often misinterpreted. "When I want to be quiet, this behavior is interpreted as an attitude."⁶⁰⁴

For Rhonda, the pain was evident in her voice as she related the most recent incident, "I was picking up an older sister at the motherhouse (the central administration building of the congregation.) A sister from the motherhouse approached me and asked what I was waiting for. I explained that I was on my way the infirmary and she asked to see my pass. I indicated that sisters do not need passes and she remarked, "Are you a sister? What community?' I answered and told her, this one."⁶⁰⁵

In addition, African-American women who enter congregations where there are other African-American members face the problem of comparisons. Rita reported "When another African-American woman entered our congregation, we were looked at as the same. Some sisters could not tell us apart."⁶⁰⁶ Susan described how the white sisters in her congregation couldn't remember the name of the other African-American sister in the congregation when they were talking with her. "They (the white sisters) would refer to her (the

⁶⁰⁴Interview with Elizabeth H., p. I-122.

⁶⁰⁵Interview with Rhonda R., p. I-137.

⁶⁰⁶Interview with Rita B., p. II-52.

other African-American sister) as 'the other one with you, the one with the braids.'"⁶⁰⁷ Bertha indicated that "we should not compare African-American sisters anymore then we should compare white sisters."⁶⁰⁸ Tammy noted that an obstacle she sees "comes from comparisons. We must take people with their talents and their feelings."⁶⁰⁹ Yolanda explained that some sisters "say to me, 'I've talked with other African-Americans and they don't feel the way you do. This kind of comparison negates my feelings."⁶¹⁰ Yvette described an experience she encountered during the recent summer visit to the motherhouse. There were several African-American sisters visiting the motherhouse at the same time, "so we sat together for lunch and dinner. Later one of the white sisters commented that we were always together. Why should I explain? It seems to me when the Irish and Italian sisters sit together, they do not have to explain."⁶¹¹

Feeling Incidental

The isolation African-American women feel is intensified by the lack of respect for them and for their heritage which make them feel incidental and unimportant. Karen reported that when "we began writing the history of the congregation, I

⁶⁰⁷Interview with Susan P., p. II-237.

⁶⁰⁸Interview with Bertha H., p. II-50.

⁶⁰⁹Interview with Tammy, p. II-53.

⁶¹⁰Interview with Yolanda A., p. II-54.

⁶¹¹Interview with Yvette R., p. II-117.

wanted to write about the foundress. The foundress had African-American roots so I felt that as an African-American I could represent her heritage and her views. The white sisters told me I was different. They didn't utilize resources."⁶¹² Elizabeth noted that in a recent printed report, the congregation referred to its members as all white. "While they (the leadership) said it was an oversight, that is even more hurtful. It just means that after ten years, I am not important enough to consider."⁶¹³ Rhonda observed that throughout her preparation for full membership in the congregation, no programs or training were planned with her in mind. No one had ever addressed her cultural or spiritual needs."⁶¹⁴ Martha recalled that she never met the other African-American sister member of her congregation for ten years. The congregation never realized the importance of the support that the women could be to one another.⁶¹⁵ Darlene described the feelings of not being accepted or appreciated. "One incident was most telling. The superior (director) of the house rented a Shirley Temple movie featuring the Steppin Fetchit character. When I protested that this was an insult to my culture, she told me that she was using the video as a vehicle to learn about African-American culture. She accused

⁶¹²Interview with Karen J., p. II-236.

⁶¹³Interview with Elizabeth H., p. I-103-104.

⁶¹⁴Interview with Rhonda R., p. I-114.

⁶¹⁵Interview with Martha L., p. II-464.

me of trying to interfere with her learning process."⁶¹⁶ Nancy noted that in a house of twelve people, "When I was sick no one missed me at meals. It hurts that gifted people, sensitive to others needs, cannot see the problem."⁶¹⁷ Nora indicated that when she is ignored in the local parish, "I feel like I have been deserted by the Church."⁶¹⁸ Hillary observed that recently "we had to elect one sister to go as a companion to meet with the Superior General in Rome. I was not elected because the sisters didn't see the importance of sending the African-American member from the congregation. It is discounting."⁶¹⁹ Nancy remembered that in 1979, "I attended a national meeting of sisters, I reminded the (white) sisters that no speaker represented my interests. There was total silence. They totally ignored me."⁶²⁰

Rhonda recalled an incident which occurred the morning she came home from a congregational retreat. There were about thirty sisters on retreat and at the concluding ceremony, Rhonda and several other white sisters pronounced their temporary vows. "The convent doorbell rang and I answered it. A nun who was on retreat with me was at the door. She looked at me and asked me if I was the cook and if any sisters were

⁶¹⁶Interview with Darlene D., p. II-235.

⁶¹⁷Interview with Nancy E., p. II-245.

⁶¹⁸Interview with Nora C., p. II-247.

⁶¹⁹Interview with Hillary L., p. II-241.

⁶²⁰Interview with Nancy E., p. II-244.

home." ⁶²¹Eileen reported that recently the sisters in her house bought African kinte cloth for altar vestments and did not consult with the two African-American sisters in the house. "We were invisible."⁶²² Gina indicated that the leadership in her congregation never consulted about formation issues with the African-American sister who works with formation teams from around the country. Instead the leadership went to an outside group, "A prophet is not welcome in his own land."⁶²³ Marilyn remembered that as a young sister she was placed on a congregational committee. "I organized fourteen workshops but, was considered too young to chair the committee when the leader resigned. Some one else was appointed the chairperson and she was given all the credit."⁶²⁴ The real sadness Jill noted "is the way Marilyn is discounted."⁶²⁵ Odetta observed that "Our congregational magazine only shows white folks. Even in the pictures at the chapter meetings, three African-American sisters were delegates to the chapter, but you didn't see pictures of them anywhere."⁶²⁶

Helen related an incident which happened when she and

⁶²¹Interview with Rhonda R., p. I-139.

⁶²²Interview with Eileen B., p. II-238.

⁶²³Interview with Gina R., p. II-239.

⁶²⁴Interview with Marilyn P., p. II-243.

⁶²⁵Interview with Jill C., p. II-242.

⁶²⁶Interview with Odetta B., p. II-248.

another African-American sister returned to the house of formation late one evening. "We realized that we didn't have the key to the convent front door with us. So we knocked at the door and called out 'It's us. Please let us in.' The (white) sisters in the house called the police. Afterwards, the sisters were embarrassed."⁶²⁷ Yolanda commented that when she challenged some situations as racist, "I was told I was blowing the situation out of proportion. It made my comments and feelings invalid. Finally, I realized that they (the white sisters) just don't get it."⁶²⁸

Individual Betrayal and Organizational Mistrust

The consequences of the incidents are that African-American women feel betrayed. Elizabeth said, "When I said certain things, they would come back to haunt me."⁶²⁹ She described the emotional consequences of these incidents as anger, alienation, isolation and betrayal. Rhonda observed, "You must understand that you are an African-American in community and see that not in naivete but in reality. I know other women trust each other. Sadly, I don't trust all of my sisters. It makes me angry and lonely. I feel betrayed. I am the one who prays their way every day, but if I want a cultural experience I must find it elsewhere."⁶³⁰ Darlene

⁶²⁷Interview with Helen C., p. II-240.

⁶²⁸Interview with Yolanda A., p. II-250.

⁶²⁹Interview with Elizabeth H., p. I-210.

⁶³⁰Interview with Rhonda R., p. I-144.

keenly felt the lack of support of her friend. "I felt very strongly about the witness value of the habit. It meant a great deal to me. I asked my friend to join me by wearing her habit as a sign of witness on the day I pronounced my first vows. She refused and I felt very sad."⁶³¹ Laura remembered that as a young sister, she was involved in the presentation of the chapter deliberations. (The chapter is a policy making meeting held at regular intervals by congregations.) "I received sixteen or seventeen nasty letters; all but two of the letters were unsigned. I didn't want the congregation to protect me. It is good to know where people stand, but it is hard to trust people who won't sign their names."⁶³² Rachel noted that "Policy makers have little inkling of the difficulties faced by minority women. Usually they (the white sisters) will say that 'they must listen to both sides.' The problem is that the investigation misses the heart of the issue of racism and then, they say to the others 'Don't worry, Sister is troubled.'"⁶³³

An incident Helen related underscores the conflicts regarding trust faced by African-American sisters. "At one of my first meetings in the congregation, a sister said to me, 'Good morning, cotton-pick.' I said, 'I beg your pardon.' I wanted to slap her. One sister I lived with asked me what

⁶³¹Interview with Darlene D., p. II-782.

⁶³²Interview with Laura H., p. II-793.

⁶³³Interview with Rachel C., p. II-837.

happened because she saw my reaction. When I told her, she turned red. My friend apologized for the offensive remark, but the sister who made the remark was never challenged."⁶³⁴ Nancy remembered a time when she was asked to take part in a play about St. Nicholas and the Imp. "One sister who was watching the play said, 'Who's the little Nigger?'"⁶³⁵ Hillary commented that she "just wants my white sisters to listen before they make a judgement. It is evident that we think differently."⁶³⁶ Marilyn noted that her sisters do not know how to deal with assertiveness. "When African-American women are assertive, they are labelled as aggressive."⁶³⁷ Rachel found herself in a real dilemma, "The sisters said to me, 'if we say anything that is racist, please tell us.' When I shared my experiences with the sisters at a workshop, they said I made up the stories and that I didn't live in reality. It is hard to trust what they (the white sisters) say."⁶³⁸ Helen described the environment of her congregation, "There isn't grave hostility, but its uncomfortable. It's easier to deal with Somalia, then to take a stand on the attack against Rodney King."⁶³⁹ Yolanda found that she had difficulty

⁶³⁴Interview with Helen C., p. II-849.

⁶³⁵Interview with Nancy E., p.II-855.

⁶³⁶Interview with Hillary L., p. II-850.

⁶³⁷Interview with Marilyn P., p. II-851.

⁶³⁸Interview with Rachel C., p. II-249;852.

⁶³⁹Interview with Helen C., p. II-848.

communicating with white sisters. "I see so many racist things. The majority of the sisters share the same culture and tradition and don't see the same issues."⁶⁴⁰ Yvette was recently in the sewing room of her local convent home when one of the white sisters brought a guest to the room. "She began to describe how messy the sewing room was, but when she saw me there, sister changed her tune. How am I supposed to trust this woman now? I see her everyday."⁶⁴¹ Diane was hopeful although she indicated that "I don't always trust white women. I try to be understanding about the historical and experiential lack of education that the white sisters have about my culture. It is really domination."⁶⁴²

African-American women, like their white counterparts, enter religious life trusting in the religious organization. "When I entered the convent, the sisters assured me that they did not have a problem with racism and I believed them. I know I learned the hard way, they do have a problem. I can see a lot of practices colored by racism. But because they are nuns, they won't admit it." Agnes observed.⁶⁴³ Marilyn commented that "I felt like the congregation lied to me. They (the white sisters) did not want to deal with me."⁶⁴⁴

⁶⁴⁰Interview with Yolanda A., p. II-857.

⁶⁴¹Interview with Yvette R., p. II-854.

⁶⁴²Interview with Diane B., p. II-847.

⁶⁴³Interview with Agnes B., p. I-108.

⁶⁴⁴Interview with Marilyn P., p. II-827.

Most of the religious organizations in this study did not build or engender trust in the respondents. Karen noted that "When I was leaving the congregation, the president said to me, 'It is our great loss.' However, the congregation never provided me with what I needed. I felt stifled."⁶⁴⁵ Rita had the unique experience of being missioned to a neighborhood that had been torn apart by racial strife. "I knew I was being used. I was missioned to a neighborhood parish that had reportedly ousted an African-American family six months earlier. I was not consulted and this was a most difficult assignment."⁶⁴⁶ Darlene noted that when "I wrote to the President (of the congregation) and told her about my difficulties, she offered to send me somewhere else. I realized that this would not solve the problem and that I didn't have the strength to spend on this issue. It seems to me that the congregation wanted me to go where I was sent and do whatever I was told. At best, it was negative praise."⁶⁴⁷ Susan described her feelings of mourning when she was told to reapply to the congregation in two years. "After spending two years as a postulant, I was told to reapply in two years. I was struck by the fact that the entire administration would be out of office in two years. I felt like I was caught in a

⁶⁴⁵Interview with Karen J., p. II-775;785.

⁶⁴⁶Interview with Rita B., p.II-840.

⁶⁴⁷Interview with Darlene D., p. II-779-780.

power struggle."⁶⁴⁸ Wendy commented that she was struck by the lack of warmth and closeness in her congregation. "It made it difficult to trust the organization. It seemed to me that the elderly sisters were not well treated."⁶⁴⁹ Jill became involved with a parents' group at the high school where she taught. When the funding for the school was threatened, she helped to organize several protests and activities aimed at preventing the closure of this largely African-American school. At one point, she was summoned by the president of her congregation and, "I was told by the President, to stop working with African-Americans and go to a white suburban parish to teach or leave the congregation. When I protested and said that I believed that I was called to religious life, the President agreed with me that she believed that I did have a vocation. However, 'if you continue to work with African-Americans, you won't be a sister with us.' For me, it was a death experience."⁶⁵⁰ Jill's dramatic story typifies the feelings of abandonment and betrayal described by the African-American women as they speak about their experiences in the predominantly white congregations of women religious. Jane's experience changed her life. "When I was ready to make final vows, one sister who lived in my house went to the congregational leadership and told them that I did not live

⁶⁴⁸Interview with Susan P., p. II-787.

⁶⁴⁹Interview with Wendy T., p. II-789.

⁶⁵⁰Interview with Jill C., p. II-823;824;836.

according to the congregational rules. The leadership was ready to recommend that I should be denied from making final vows. A friend of mine called me and told me what was going on at the meetings. I went to see each person in congregational leadership personally and discussed the issue with them. After a struggle, I was allowed to make final vows, but I was very distrustful of the process. I was very angry and went into a deep depression."⁶⁵¹ In a less dramatic way, but just as difficult, Yvette related an incident about attending a professional conference. "I planned to go to a national conference on African-American spirituality. One of the elected leaders of the congregation called me and indicated that she did not know about the conference, so I had to send her a flyer and explain why I was interested in attending it. African-American sisters seem to get the run around even though you ask in a way that says 'Do you think I can do this?'"⁶⁵² Thelma reported that she found out that the results of her psychological tests were shared with other members of the congregation in addition to the persons she had authorized. "I stopped considering this congregation, because I knew I could never trust them again."⁶⁵³

When the organization tolerates attitudes that are racist

⁶⁵¹Interview with Jane L., p. II-819.

⁶⁵²Interview with Yvette R., p. II-846.

⁶⁵³Interview with Thelma E., p. II-844.

and does nothing, then the organization has tacitly acquiesced to racism. Carol commented that when she indicated that she needed a different community experience, "The President told me that I was creative and inspiring and that she would not move me. I felt disrespected by her and the congregation."⁶⁵⁴ Karen observed "I was never accepted as an equal. There was a great deal of racism and classism. I didn't have the 'right' background. They (the white sisters) treated me as if I was too young. At the time I was fifty years old."⁶⁵⁵ Carol described her congregation and said that "The congregation does not respect women today. They (the white sisters) continue to pick and analyze everything. They don't understand that the candidates are adults."⁶⁵⁶ Marilyn commented that "I am aware that there is a power struggle between African-American and white nuns. African-American women often don't understand when they ask for support and get the response 'Why don't you leave?' It is difficult to deal with this kind of racism. It is hard to be an effective 'good member' of the congregation."⁶⁵⁷ Laura simply asks "Are we ever going to evangelize and assimilate others to allow African-Americans to share the

⁶⁵⁴Interview with Carol R., p. II-774.

⁶⁵⁵Interview with Karen J., p. II-786.

⁶⁵⁶Interview with Carol R., p. II-777.

⁶⁵⁷Interview with Marilyn P., p. II-791.

power?"⁶⁵⁸ Evelyn observed that the institutional obstacle she has experienced was not being welcomed. "Many African-American women are very shy in the white world. The woman must know that she is wanted."⁶⁵⁹ Helen recalled "There was always a problem about where I was going to live. Local houses did not want to accept me in their homes. One community house did not allow me to live with them. This intolerance was allowed to exist and remained unhindered. The message I got was that I wasn't important. Generally I do not trust the congregation to meet my needs."⁶⁶⁰ Christine commented that "I've been marginalized. I got the feeling that they (the white sisters) were not so sure about me. It seemed to come from the administrative level. There was no understanding of the differences. There is no sharing of power."⁶⁶¹ Eileen noted that "I have a problem with tokenism. There is one African-American sister who gets assigned to every board because the leadership indicates that they are comfortable with her. This should not be tolerated. We need to accept everyone."⁶⁶² Gwen remembered the racism in her congregation and how her simple needs, like obtaining a pair of stockings, were never

⁶⁵⁸Interview with Laura H., p. II-790.

⁶⁵⁹Interview with Evelyn L., p. II-390.

⁶⁶⁰Interview with Helen C., p. II-794; 812.

⁶⁶¹Interview with Christine W., p. II-800-801.

⁶⁶²Interview with Eileen B., p. II-806.

met.⁶⁶³

African-American members of predominantly white congregations of women religious often have to deal with stereotypes. Bertha noted "Some congregations believe African-American sisters cannot do certain things because they are too emotional. The (African-American) women are singled out about sexuality and treated with suspicion."⁶⁶⁴ In addition to the questions regarding the ability to live a celibate life, African-American sisters face an interrogation after they meet with each other. Yolanda noted that "The (white) sisters are threatened when the African-American sisters get together."⁶⁶⁵ Eileen commented, "If white folks are together, it's all right, but when African-Americans get together, it's trouble."⁶⁶⁶ Nina further amplifies these stereotypic beliefs: "The idea that African-Americans are not Catholics and therefore we must confine them to that frame of reference. Another misconception is that all African-Americans are poor. We must have equity. In good faith, we enter religious organizations and we should not be put on the periphery. For me, this is a justice issue."⁶⁶⁷ Christine remembered, "The congregation expected that because I was

⁶⁶³Interview with Gwen H., p. II-810.

⁶⁶⁴Interview with Bertha H., p. II-797.

⁶⁶⁵Interview with Yolanda A., p. II-845.

⁶⁶⁶Interview with Eileen B., p. II-807.

⁶⁶⁷Interview with Nina T., p. II-829.

African-American I could sing. You know, the 'they got rhythm' stereotype."⁶⁶⁸ Jane related an set of incidents which happened over the course of several years. "One sister, every time she saw me, she would ask, 'Is that a permanent?' I would tell her that my hair was naturally this way. She kept asking me this question every time we met. Finally, I lied and said, 'Yes, it is a permanent.' and only then did she stop asking the question."⁶⁶⁹ Darlene described her experience: "It was clear to me that the (white) sisters had an idea of what I should be. I never felt free to articulate the African-American woman I am. I felt dominated."⁶⁷⁰

Effects on Self-Esteem

The incidents enforce the perception that African-American women are not valued members of their respective congregations. Ann described her feelings, "When I couldn't keep up with the others, I decided I had to leave the order."⁶⁷¹ Hillary transferred from one religious congregation to another. "When I arrived here, I had to start all over. I want to count all the years I have been a member of religious life, but the sisters here say that I can only count the years that I have been present in this congregation.

⁶⁶⁸Interview with Christine W., p. II-66.

⁶⁶⁹Interview with Jane L., p. II-85.

⁶⁷⁰Interview with Darlene D., p. II-783.

⁶⁷¹Interview with Ann G., p. I-262.

This is very discounting of my life experiences."⁶⁷² Agnes commented that, "In many ways my congregation let me know that I have full membership responsibilities but that I am not a valued member."⁶⁷³

The consequences of these incidents and feelings are that African-American women feel betrayed and in some respects trust in themselves is questioned and weakened. Lisa commented, "I was so often told that I was immature, oversensitive and a crybaby that I was beginning to have doubts about my abilities."⁶⁷⁴ Agnes noted, "I spent a lot of time putting myself down. It has really affected my self-esteem."⁶⁷⁵ Yvette observed "I've learned not to say much at house meetings because what I say is discounted. For example, we had a discussion about the telephone bill, and I made a suggestion about how to account for the long distance charges. The sisters in my house told me we didn't need to do anything about it. At the very next meeting, the issue was raised again and a (white) sister made the same suggestion I made the month before. This time the sisters said 'What a good idea, why didn't we think of that before?' It really affects my self-esteem. Only white people can have ideas."⁶⁷⁶ Norma,

⁶⁷²Interview with Hillary L., p. II-813.

⁶⁷³Interview with Agnes B., p. I-204;241.

⁶⁷⁴Interview with Lisa W., p. p. I-100;246.

⁶⁷⁵Interview with Agnes B., p. I-256.

⁶⁷⁶Interview with Yvette R., p. II-736.

who tried to enter a predominantly white congregation once before, noted "In my first congregation, I doubted myself a lot. Just recently, I spoke with a sister from my present congregation and she indicated that I was secretive. I told her to stay out of my business. I realize that my reaction was based on my previous bad experience. For me, the effects of the damaging experiences are far reaching."⁶⁷⁷ Nancy philosophically observed, "My soul sits back and wonders how I made it through. Often I was not supported by those whom I expected would understand my situation."⁶⁷⁸ Marilyn commented "Whenever I have been a source of critical thought, I felt exploited. I have found that when my congregation failed, God provided."⁶⁷⁹ Odetta remarked that "the one thing I hate at a meeting is to have a (white) sister explain to the others what I just commented on. I've watched this happen several times."⁶⁸⁰ Lilly indicated that she has been criticized for not having enough self confidence. In fact, a statement of this kind is true irony because criticizing someone for a lack of self confidence certainly does not engender the development of greater self esteem in her life! Christine remembered, "In the beginning, I pressed my hair. I tried to be just like the white sisters. Some of my (white)

⁶⁷⁷Interview with Norma D., p. II-728-729.

⁶⁷⁸Interview with Nancy E., p. II-724.

⁶⁷⁹Interview with Marilyn P., p. II-721.

⁶⁸⁰Interview with Odetta B., p. II-575.

sisters told me that I was 'good chocolate.'"⁶⁸¹ Carol noted that "I had no trouble with religious life, but I was aware that I didn't eat, dress, walk, have phone calls or visitors like the rest of them (the white sisters.) I realized I was in trouble at Christmas time, when I had to ask everyone in the house if I could go work at a local charity during the school vacation. I wasn't sure of anything. I couldn't take it any more."⁶⁸² Darlene described looking in the mirror one day, "Everything was my fault. One day I looked in the mirror and said, 'Who am I?' I was never so unsure of myself before. I knew I had to leave to survive."⁶⁸³ Karen explained, "I realized very early that I had to love who I was. I was treated like I was a door stop. I couldn't visit other sisters' homes. I couldn't go to a wake or funeral. I was told I was oversensitive. There was no understanding of my emotionality."⁶⁸⁴ Hillary observed that she is often pointed out as the only one. "I feel on display."⁶⁸⁵

Rita remembered, "In the beginning, (white) sisters were very patronizing. They didn't know how to deal with me. They didn't know about my culture. I felt forced into a particular

⁶⁸¹Interview with Christine W., p. II-66.

⁶⁸²Interview with Carol R., p. 682;684.

⁶⁸³Interview with Darlene D., p. II-687-688.

⁶⁸⁴Interview with Karen J., p. II-693-694.

⁶⁸⁵Interview with Hillary L., p. II-714.

role."⁶⁸⁶ Ruth reported "One young sister asked me 'why do you talk about your culture all the time?' and I reminded her that it was because no one else understood what I was feeling."⁶⁸⁷ Nina explained that she also had to explain to a fellow sister why she spoke about her culture during the chapter meetings.⁶⁸⁸ Rachel limited her friendships in the congregation and faced the emotional consequences of this decision. "The emotional consequences of few friendships in the congregation are very strained relationships with my sisters. You get the feeling that you are an outsider."⁶⁸⁹

There was a dual difficulty for Yolanda. "I've had many incidents that made me feel doubtful about my self. I came from an inner city home. I feel threatened by the education of many of our sisters. Standards were less for African-Americans than for whites even in parochial schools. When I went to college, I was not prepared. It was a struggle. I can't talk to the sisters about this because I cannot tell them that they failed us. This is a systemic road block to developing leadership."⁶⁹⁰ Nora remembered a difficult incident which happened on her way to a teachers' conference. "One of the teachers in the school volunteered to take another

⁶⁸⁶Interview with Rita C., p. II-109.

⁶⁸⁷Interview with Ruth F., p. II-110.

⁶⁸⁸Interview with Nina T., p. II-97.

⁶⁸⁹Interview with Rachel C., p. II-730.

⁶⁹⁰Interview with Yolanda A., p. II-734.

(white) sister and I to the conference site. We began discussion how it used to be during the segregation of buses. I told a story about how an 'colored' person tried to sit down next to a white person and the white person moved to another seat. We all laughed. That evening, the superior of the house came to me and said that the other sister who travelled with me was offended about my conduct. She wanted me to apologize for telling the story. I refused to apologize. It was difficult and I had to be tough."⁶⁹¹

Christine said the biggest obstacle for her was inadequate supports for self-esteem. "When I addressed issues in the house, two (white) sisters would say, 'How dare you say anything!' I felt threatened every time I opened my mouth. It was clear that some sisters favored light skinned people over me."⁶⁹² Gina commented on a recent difficulty she and another African-American member of her congregation faced. "The two of us went to the formation team and tried to intervene on behalf of an African-American sister who is still in the formation process. We were not heard. This incident made me wonder about myself and about my effectiveness in the congregation."⁶⁹³ Laura indicated that there "were lots of incidents which made me feel doubtful about myself. When I served on congregational committees and when I was with my

⁶⁹¹Interview with Nora C., p. II-727.

⁶⁹²Interview with Christine W., p. II-701.

⁶⁹³Interview with Gina R., p. II-709.

family I was constantly questioning myself."⁶⁹⁴ Gwen remembered that "to survive I became just like them (the white sisters.) I was a walking rule book. I was always made to feel like I was not as good as the European-American sisters. There was a real disdain for African-American people. What hurt the most was that I wanted the same thing, religious life. I entered a predominantly white congregation and to this day I regret it."⁶⁹⁵ Eileen commented, "I feel like the congregation has never affirmed me as a person. I feel like I am always proving myself."⁶⁹⁶ Christine noted that "My congregation never told me I was worth anything to them. Many incidents made me feel doubtful about myself. There were always innuendos."⁶⁹⁷ Martha reported that she was criticized for looking for special treatment because she asked and was sent to the National Black Sisters Conference.⁶⁹⁸

Ruth observed that "I am very conscious of when an issue comes up and my white sisters fall silent. They (the white sisters) pick the 'imaginary lint' off their jackets. It is like I make them feel uncomfortable."⁶⁹⁹ Eileen recalled that at a recent house meeting the subject of racist attitudes was

⁶⁹⁴Interview with Laura H., p. II-718.

⁶⁹⁵Interview with Gwen H., p. II-710-711.

⁶⁹⁶Interview with Eileen B., p. II-740.

⁶⁹⁷Interview with Christine W., p. II-702.

⁶⁹⁸Interview with Martha L., p. II-722.

⁶⁹⁹Interview with Ruth F., p. II-5.

on the agenda. "When we came to this agenda item, there was total silence. No one could think of anything to say. It hurts me because our congregation has been in operation a very long time. The women who are members are good women and yet they are still closed to discussing racism and the attitudes which keep me from feeling a part of them."⁷⁰⁰ Evelyn noted that most (white) sisters dislike the term racism. They think that the way that they behave is nice. It is important to confront attitudes. The hurts must not be dismissed, they must be addressed."⁷⁰¹ Nora commented that "the (white) sisters have told me that I am oversensitive. They warned me not to be angry or bitter. When I am impassioned about racism, the (white) sisters' say 'don't get angry.'"⁷⁰²

Always Teaching

The participants of the study described the feeling of "always teaching." Often the sisters felt exhausted from the demands of trying to explain their culture to their white sisters. In addition to all of the other difficulties faced by African-American women, this constant demand saps the strength and exhausts the energy of already overburdened individuals. Susan observed that "among the sisters in the local convent house, there was no appreciation that I was teaching and

⁷⁰⁰Interview with Eileen B., p. II-74.

⁷⁰¹Interview with Evelyn L., p. II-706.

⁷⁰²Interview with Nora C., p. II-726.

working the whole time."⁷⁰³ Karen noticed that "I really got tired of teaching white folks. I felt like the eternal teacher."⁷⁰⁴ Nina currently lives in an apartment by herself because "it is easier than constantly working."⁷⁰⁵ Yolanda explains "the most exhausting experience is explaining all the time."⁷⁰⁶

Congregations often depend upon the minority members to address the issue of racism. African-American women see this as a minefield. No matter where you step, you will be blown up. Rhonda recalled that at a meeting, when ever the topic of racism is discussed, the conversation is directed to her. In another incident, Rhonda and her African-American friend, Lenore, were sent to attend a conference on racism. Rhonda asked why she was selected, since she is the one who lives with the problem everyday. "When we returned to our respective congregations, we were supposed to facilitate groups on the topic. I declined, but Lenore couldn't. There was a defense for every item she brought up. She was questioned and maligned and finally she left the order."⁷⁰⁷ African-American women can help congregations deal with racism, but they did not cause the problem and are not the

⁷⁰³Interview with Susan P., p.II-788.

⁷⁰⁴Interview with Karen J., p. II-452.

⁷⁰⁵Interview with Nina T., p. II-563.

⁷⁰⁶Interview with Yolanda A., p. 394.

⁷⁰⁷Interview with Rhonda R., p. I-144.

total solution to addressing the racist practices and attitudes in predominantly white congregations of women religious. Without adequate supports, like family, friends, professional societies, self-help groups, other African-American women religious and their resources, the candidates and members become alienated from the organization and from the sisters.

Summary

In this section, the factors that influence the experience of African-American women in predominantly white congregations of women religious are described in the words of the participants. The areas of family, food, living environment, educational opportunity, network support and friends are explored.

The components of the experience including alienation and isolation, the sense of individual and organizational mistrust, comparison and scrutiny, feeling incidental and the effects on self-esteem are considered. The components represent the perceptions of the experience by the African-American participants in the study who were or are members of predominantly white congregations of women religious.

Taken together these factors and components help to define and describe the issues which have and continue to cause these courageous women so much pain in their association with their respective organizations.

"HEAR THE TEMPO SO COMPELLING"

Analysis and Application

Introduction

The interviews with the Vocation Directors, as representative of the institutional perspective, and the African-American women offers a great deal of information for consideration. Much of the analysis can be confirmed in the literature on the need for social supports and networks. The trends enumerated can help institutions, congregations and programs for African-American women in planning for the future. Clearly, racism is the core issue in all the predominantly white organizations as indicated by 95% (37 of 40) of the women in the study and by the three Vocation Directors. The incidents were recalled in detail without difficulty. Some of the reason for this clear recollection is the sense of betrayal that the incident symbolized to the victim. The finding that racism is a core issue is confirmed in the survey done by the National Office of Black Catholics cited earlier, in which 89% of the African-American Catholic Church membership indicated that racism was a primary issue.

One of the most disturbing findings is that incidents of racism are currently happening; this is not an experience of the past. Indeed, many of the incidents recorded were recounted from the last five to ten years. These incidents are pervasive in nature, that is, they are not limited to one congregation or type, but rather represent a common thread

among all the participants. The experiences of racism are not limited to the group of women who left religious profession, they are a part of the lives of almost all the women interviewed. In fact, these negative incidents seem to be a daily occurrence in the lives of African-American women religious. Many of the participants were passionate about the mental and emotional violence which victimized African-American women. The participants were often anxious and guarded as they recalled the painful incidents.

In some instances, the only way to cope with difficulties has been to focus on something else. Avoidance coping is also cited in the literature as used by African-American graduate students in order to relieve stress. For the sisters and former sisters who have found this way of coping, the daily conflicts of living are onerous indeed. In some cases, the participants denied that there were any difficulties because "good sisters don't criticize."

Even in congregations where other African-Americans were members, the obstacles were still evident. This reflects the observation by Cyprian Davis that institutional racism exists in the Church and in society.

Regardless of the problems caused by racism, the African-American women expressed a fundamental desire to continue to struggle for understanding and generally were positive regarding the experience of religious life. The sense of pride and desire to continue to work on the issues of cultural

sharing and racism were also evident. In short, they stayed and were willing to work for change. The African-American women participants were generally comfortable in the white world. They were protective of their congregations and wanted the information to be used so that other African-American women would be welcome in predominantly white congregations. For these women, encouragement by congregational leadership and ties with other African-American clergy were very important to their survival. The significance of African-American religious sister mentors is indicated by the overwhelming support of African-American sisters of the National Black Sisters Conference.

Study Trends

Membership Process

Making Career Choices

African-American women describe the development of their career choice in much the same way that their white counterparts do. That is, they are attracted to consider religious life because of a person who becomes a role model or mentor, and they have a desire to join in community life and serve others. Approximately 35% of the participants reported that they used white role models. The difference in the experience of the selection of the congregations is the discouragement the women experience because their letters went unanswered. Seventy-five percent of the participants describe the experience of the lack of responsiveness to inquiries.

The Vocation Directors interviewed indicated that, if someone demonstrates an interest, that person will receive a response. This is a very passive stance and is not working among women of color who may not know, as Karen did not, that there are African-American sisters and that congregations welcome their membership.

We Are All The Same

The core issue indicated by Elizabeth is the understanding that the congregations generally are not prepared to welcome a new cultural experience. The notion that everyone is basically the same and can be treated the same is the operative policy of most of the congregations. In fact, it seems as if there is not the realization that this notion may need to be examined. This is particularly evident in the remarks of one of the Vocation Directors who said that what was appropriate in one's culture is not appropriate here. In essence, the institutional stance is, be like us, be grateful that we let you in, and change. This is precisely the description of "mutuality" as described by the Vocation Directors. The idea that it is good not to see color denies the experience and culture of the women of color and, sadly, is expressed as an aim of one of the Vocation Directors. In many ways, the approach to racial integration is being attempted in much the same way that congregations included other ethnic groups. This inclusion was and still is fraught with great difficulties for the newly included members.

Delays

Almost half of the study participants experienced a delay in gaining full membership in their respective congregations. The reasons for the delays were often based on the judgement of the maturity or experience of the candidate. Mona, a Vocation Director, described the process as going by her gut, "sometimes you just know." There was a demonstrable lack of understanding of cultural nuances, although it was acknowledged that cultural differences, for example family patterns, relationships to family members and communication, were important.

In at least two different settings, participants recalled that white candidates were treated and judged differently. Elizabeth discussed the experience of seeking entrance to a congregation for ten years. She watched as her white peers were permitted to enter and, as these same women left the congregation, she commented that she still didn't even get her chance. The idea that African-Americans are not educable was expressed in the early writings of the 19th century in this country. Its central attitude is operative today in the experience of Lisa, who was told she was slow, Laura who was sent for an IQ test, and Norma who was told that she was not intelligent enough to enter the congregation. This attitudinal obstacle taints the selection and formation process of congregations of women religious to this day.

The delays were not only experienced in the pre-admission

process but all the way to the full membership process. Delay seems to be the primary tool used in discouraging membership. African-American women experienced delays focused on interpersonal relationships and congregational relationships. To the African-American women, the delays mean that in the eyes of the predominantly white congregation they have not met the standard; they are not good enough. The relationships are very subjective. As Rhonda and Helen related, the reason for delaying the acceptance for vows was that the "congregation does not know you." After almost ten years of association, this is a most perplexing and subjective statement. Essentially, it is an admission of the failure of a formation program, but the victim is blamed. It is a realization that there are some important differences, but that they have not and will not be addressed.

The Vocation Directors seem unsure of what to do to change the situation. There were no plans to address the issue of racism. One Director indicated that the issues would be addressed when someone of color requests membership in the congregation. Another Director indicated that she didn't like being attacked on the issue and the candidate should understand that if there is a problem it comes from unconscious bias. All the Directors acknowledged the need for education, but did not want to be blamed for unwelcoming experiences. One Director encouraged candidates to volunteer time in a social service setting which provided services to

African-American women. None of the Directors even mentioned the importance of providing a multicultural setting where all candidates might meet as equals.

Psychological Testing

Of the group of women who were required to undergo psychological testing prior to admission to the candidate programs, 87% were sent to white psychologists. There was general agreement among the women that this was an uncomfortable experience. The women questioned the cultural sensitivity of the testers. At the very least, there was no recognition on the part of the congregations that the cultural and racial background of the tester could be an issue. In at least two instances, the expressed desire for a more culturally congruent test setting was denied. Once again, the observations of the Vocation Directors reflect a failure to think in another way. One Director expressed the desire to try a new psychologist, but did not know if there was an African-American Catholic psychologist. The presumption was that African-Americans are neither educated nor Catholics. In truth, the outreach would have required one telephone call to the local office for Black Catholics.

While it is certainly true that professional psychologists are aware of the need to be culturally sensitive and it can be argued that a professional individual does not need to undergo every experience to understand its implications, this posture is certainly contrary to the

perspective which allow that, when seeking professional assistance, an individual may consider personal comfort as an ingredient in that choice. Many women today, for example, will seek the professional services of a woman physician rather than her male counterpart. While educational standards and licensing are the same for both groups, there is a sense among some women that it is easier to talk about certain issues with another woman. The majority of congregations in this study were not able to make the translation from the feminist choice to the cultural choice.

Spiritual Directors

When the choice of Spiritual Directors was discussed with the Vocation personnel, there were no African-Americans who were considered for this position. One Vocation Director indicated that, if she put a list together, she would be sure that it was a list of women, not necessarily with an African-American among the names. Once again, there was a sense that there are no resources in the African-American community. However, these resources are also a telephone call away, for example, the National Office of Black Catholics, the Institute for Black Catholic Studies, and the Nia House project. Perhaps, the most distressing part of the discussion was the sense that the need for this kind of support was not important.

Judging Readiness

The readiness of a candidate is a very subjective

judgement. It is based upon the perception of maturity and commitment to purpose. Maturity in many ways is tied to culture. Family relationships and individuality are part of the decision. The lack of understanding of a different constellation of family was indicated by the participants as an important issue. For Elizabeth, the Vocation Director's focus on her mother's choices was a real stumbling block to her entrance in the congregation. The criteria articulated by the Vocation Directors includes a sustained capacity for growth, service, availability, a personal knowledge of yourself, willingness to pray, offer service and enter into community.

Candidacy

The study covered two periods of religious training, one characterized by a more traditional or monastic experience and the other characterized by fewer numbers and less structure. All candidates faced the difficulties of adjustment to this different way of living. In the pre-Vatican II era, leaving behind family, heritage and affiliations as a common leveler. However, African-American women faced an additional obstacle, which was racism. For some it was as clear as the statement reported by Christine, "It's too bad you are colored." Or it was evident in the actions Sylvia recalled when she was told that colored people cannot count. Gina understood it to mean that African-American women cannot do what white women can. For others, it was a denial of differences, the 'you're just

the same as us,' attitude. There is a sense that African-Americans do not have a distinctive acceptable cultural style, therefore what is good for one is good for all. This attitude eliminated the need to learn about the culture of the candidate and created an environment where any change was considered 'special treatment' or giving into special interests and should be avoided. One of the trends of this study seems to point to a new manifestation of racism which postulates that we are all the same, therefore one can deny any differences exist. It is particularly evidenced in the remarks of the institutional representatives, the Vocation Directors, when they indicate that the candidates should become "like us," should understand the magnitude of change and not make any demands and that it is a positive attribute not to see differences.

Increased Scrutiny

In the post Vatican II era, the pre-membership and membership programs underwent change. Some changes were due to economic and social circumstances, for example fewer women entered religious life, therefore the traditional formation house was no longer viable. In some cases, a 'formation team' approach, in which congregational members had other jobs, replaced the Director of Postulants and the Director of Novices and their staffs.

With diminishing numbers came the experience of increased scrutiny for all candidates. Gail indicated that with fewer

candidates everyone puts them under a microscope and has an opinion about what and how the candidates are doing. However, African-American women also felt difficulties of being isolated and being the only one. In this circumstance, their need for association with other African-Americans was questioned. Congregations seemed fearful of the informal groups developed among African-American women, as Lisa indicated. The Vocation Directors were fearful that these networks would interfere with the membership process in the congregation. In some cases, the candidates were isolated from other African-American members of the same congregation. African-American women reported that they felt misjudged because there was so much ignorance about their culture and background. Gwen and others recounted that differences in communication styles were judged as deficiencies. In Gwen's story, her method of deflecting the criticisms was to become the 'class clown.' Once she was considered as not serious (and not a threat), her needs, including medical, were not met because she was 'making it up.' Taken to the extreme, Gwen suffered serious medical complications because of the racism of the Mistress of Novices. Today's attitude expressed by the Vocation Directors was more subtle, but not less lethal, as Mona indicated 'ignoring differences is just thoughtlessness,' a failure to think in another way.

Gwen's story is unique. Much more common are the experiences of isolation and alienation. The participants

were assigned to locations where African-Americans did not live or work. Decorations and ambience were foreign. Nothing was done to make the environment more welcoming. It must be noted that a few of the sisters reported individual incidents of cultural sensitivity.

The Question Challenge

The participants reported that their questions were often misconstrued and misinterpreted. They were judged as aggressive and angry. Passivity and submission were rewarded. While it is understandable that an organization rewards those who follow the rules and often labels questioners as deviants, the African-American women in predominantly white congregations of women religious were often labeled as attitude problems, as indicated by Elizabeth. The racially charged nature of these confrontations profoundly affected the behavior of Elizabeth and several other participants of the study. Susan and Helen describe the misunderstandings as leading to a feeling of personal isolation. Carol felt so unsure of her judgement that she discussed a decision to volunteer her time with a program over the semester break with all the sisters in her house. When she did this, she became aware of just how deeply she was affected by the hostile environment.

It must be noted, however, that regardless of the direct or indirect racially biased comments, these women continue to seek entrance to predominantly white congregations of women

religious.

Positive Experiences

A small group of 7% (3 of 40) reported a very different experience. These women indicated that the issue of racism was handled directly and that they felt that their culture was accepted by the congregation. It is interesting that one incident happened in the pre-Vatican II era and one after the Council, indicating that these issues could be addressed at any time if the congregation owned the problem. How the issue of inclusion was addressed, of course, was markedly different. In the pre-Vatican II era, the Superior of the house handled the problem. In the post Vatican II period, Diane recounted the leadership of the congregation acknowledged the need to address racism before the applicants entered. The President of the congregation worked with the young women and highlighted the addition of a new cultural experience to the congregation. The women felt supported and welcomed. This response was unique. As indicated in the literature review, African-American college students, studied by Allen, described feelings of alienation and academic anxiety. These feelings were greatly reduced when the university was committed to provide supportive services. In the course of the interviews, both Norma and Diane explained how their respective congregations embraced and welcomed them. For them, individual racist incidents, while disturbing, were less meaningful and had a smaller impact on them because they

perceived their organizations as supportive.

Other respondents noted the importance of acknowledging cultural differences as the beginning of a process to address more tolerance and understanding. The Vocation Directors expressed a need for more education for sisters on cultural differences and the need for congregational leadership to be committed to developing a more inclusive environment. However, there were no plans to start the process or to begin a planning process.

Attitudes from the Past

In the post Vatican II era, the participants described an earlier basic attitude, 'we are all the same.' There was no understanding of a different world view, indeed there was no acceptance that the differences existed. With this attitude the members of congregations saw no need to learn about another culture or to learn about racism. For the most part, the participants reflected this attitude from their respective congregations.

In one congregation, efforts were made to provide for the 'special needs' of the African-American woman. It was clear to her that she was to be grateful because the congregation was doing so much for her. To her great disappointment, however, she discovered that no one else wanted to learn about or share her culture. And so this 'good deed' of the congregation became another reason for isolation and resentment by her white peers and another obstacle for her to

overcome.

The older sisters were described as more ready to make changes. There can be several reasons for this, but it is a generalization. Some older sisters see the need to continue the congregation and wish to include anyone who share that vision. Others feel they no longer need to worry about the political realities of congregational life and therefore feel free to risk and make changes. It must be noted that there are also many older sisters who are tied to the way things used to be and do not want to see changes. Evelyn commented that she was disappointed during her visits to the congregational infirmary because of the behavior of the older sisters.

Two familiar themes recur throughout the analysis of the factors and components in the experience of the participants. These themes are: the attitude that 'you are just the same,' and the use of control. These attitudes are closely linked to the oppression of one group from another, called racism. As Jackman and Crane noted there is a clear indication of a real ignorance of African-American culture which leads to negative images and stereotypes.

"Confess You've Heard Me Crying"

Cultural Differences

Of the factors that influence the experience of African-American women, the recognition of cultural differences and the incidents related by the participants underlying the lack

of understanding on the part of the predominantly white congregations of women religious that cultural differences do exist. They are a part of our experience and they must be addressed. Eighty percent of the participants were aware of how their lives were affected by cultural differences.

While some sisters described occasions when they were able to share the richness of the African-American culture, other participants found that their cultural heritage was ignored and they felt criticized for being different. Jill was profoundly disappointed when she recalled that she couldn't share the ideas, values, or literature she cherished with her colleagues because they were unwilling to learn about her culture. Other participants related how cultural differences in prayer and music were criticized and even discouraged. These women continue to pray with their sisters in the congregation, but when they want someone to pray with them in a different way it is considered a problem.

During one particular visit, I attended a Mass and prayers with the study participant. The experience was totally a European-American one. As I was leaving the house, the African-American sister whispered to me that when it is her turn to prepare the liturgy she sometimes included Gospel music. Clearly, there was not true integration of cultures for this local convent community. For the African-American sister, the pain of the experience was evident.

It can be argued that from the understanding of a culture

flow the environment which welcomes everyone, and challenges others to live in tolerance. The participants' stories do not reflect this kind of environment. Among the Vocation Directors, while there was a recognition of the need for more education, there was a real resistance to any immersion experiences, like the Institute for Black Catholic Studies. Including African-American advisors on formation teams was considered threatening. In general, if African-American sisters came to the National Formation Conference, then the message was considered as non threatening, but seeking out other venues to learn about different cultural experiences was out of the question. The major obstacle seems to be the admission of the problem of racism and the willingness to act to change attitudes and processes.

Negative Community Experiences

Sixty three percent of the forty African-American women recalled negative community experiences. While it is true that every living member of a religious congregation probably has at least one story of an unhappy community life experience, the experiences related by the African-American participants are all focused on race. Christine was warned by a fellow sister that no pastor would want her assigned to his parish. Nancy was not permitted to visit her mother house for ten years because it was in the white part of town. Jill was moved from her first assignment because the sisters did not want to live with an African-American woman. Laura reported

that the sisters would not sit next to her in chapel. It is clear that upsetting relations played an important role in the lives of the participants. For Jane, the upsetting circumstance led her to a deep depression. Other participants described withdrawal and isolation as a response to upsetting events. In the literature, it is indicated that negative social interactions have more potent effects than positive ones. The effects of negative social interactions include: withdrawal, isolation, alienation and lowered self-esteem. Each of these factors is evident in the analysis of the components of the experience of African-American women in predominantly white congregations of women religious. For these women these attitudes were not new, but the most offensive part of the experience was that these attitudes went unchallenged.

Living Environment

Yolanda and Odetta both discussed the problems faced by African-American women in search of a comfortable living environment. Yolanda attempted to live interculturally, but failed because the issue of racism was not addressed. Odetta found that her need to live in an integrated neighborhood was not understood by sisters who were discussing the purchase of a house. The sisters failed to see that Odetta was not just like them.

Rita, who lives in a predominantly African-American neighborhood, opted to live alone rather than move to a

congregational house in a predominantly white neighborhood because her ministry is in the African-American community. Other African-American women have found that living alone is a solution to the problem of finding a welcoming place to live. Nationally, this phenomenon is not unique for all congregations. There is a greater incidence of a sister living alone because of fewer numbers in the congregations and more dispersed ministries. However, generally for the white sisters the decision to live alone is not dictated by the rejection of a culture but rather by the ministry or job which the individual sister has selected. Housing policy is a serious issue which must be addressed by congregations of women religious.

Education

Another policy-oriented issue is that of further education. Fifty percent (n=40) of the participants described difficulties in gaining permission to pursue further education. These difficulties seem to stem from the idea that African-American women are incapable of academic excellence, as in the most recent case with Lisa who was told she was slow. Thirty years earlier, a sister described how she was sent to take IQ tests to see if she were educable. These negative stereotypes are still part of the fabric of our society. In congregations of women religious, a sister must apply for permission to engage in academic study. In many congregations, this can be a frustrating experience because a

sister must justify the reasons for further study. More often, sisters are deferred from study for a year or two until funds are available. However, the problems described by the African-American women are more focused on questions of intellectual capability than on fiscal capability. Jill indicated that when she asked to continue her studies, she was told that she was asking for something that she would not have aspired to if she hadn't entered religious life. Active congregations of women religious in the United States often regard professional preparation and academic excellence as important to their mission. In order to gain respect and leadership responsibilities in the congregation, a sister must demonstrate professional competence. Academic excellence is greatly admired. In the past when non-English speaking women entered some American congregations, education was used as a means of control. The non-English speaking members were assigned to domestic duties as the sewing room, the kitchen or the laundry. Today, it seems that education is used as a means of control for women of color as well.

Use of Language

Among the factors described by the participants, the use of language is one that requires both sensitivity and understanding. It is interesting to note in the last twenty years, congregations of women religious have increasingly become aware of the lack of feminine references in prayer. For example, in the Nicene Creed of the Roman Catholic Mass,

the prayer refers to "for us men and our salvation." These groups have not translated that (feminine) sensitivity to a sensitivity regarding references to color. In the past, it was argued that references to dark and light were Biblical and not meant as racial. However, the reference to the beauty of darkness in the Song of Songs is not often found in the daily prayer of the European-American congregations. Participants of the study expressed a desire for more openness and tolerance in the language of prayer.

Several participants of the study indicated that they were encouraged to hide their culture by eliminating cultural expressions from their speech. Others were told that African-Americans don't know how to speak. In the presence of this hostility, the participants noted that they became quiet and even shy. Their quiet behavior was interpreted as an 'attitude.' One participant indicated that she was criticized for being too sensitive, and if she spoke, she was too aggressive.

Expressions which demean others, like "Spook" or "Nigger," are not the norm in congregations, but they are used and they are a source of intense pain for African-American women. The pain comes from the use of the expression but also from the fact that the African-American woman is not respected or accepted by the community.

Counting the Silver

The stories related by the participants regarding the

treatment of family and friends seem to focus on control and isolation. Karen's story in which the silver was counted after her family visited is perhaps most disturbing because it indicates a basic distrust of all people of color. In these stories, cultural differences are again ignored; the attitude that all family relationships are the same seems to be operative. The new more relaxed standards of including the family in the initial steps of membership have been helpful to African-American candidates, but the definition of family is one that must be understood from a cultural perspective. Participants feel that they have been criticized because of family differences. Rook indicated that negative social interactions, in his study, have more potent effects on well-being than positive social interactions. In these situations where intolerant remarks go unchallenged, the African-American women are understandably anxious about how their families will be treated.

Network Support

The most positive experiences described by the African-American women were focused on network support. Sixty-two percent of the women discussed the need for social supports, both locally and nationally. Of the group of participants, 60% indicated that local congregational support was important to them. They cited instances when their white colleagues were instrumental in addressing an issue of concern to them. Others indicated the importance of recognition by the

leadership of the congregation as an element of support. African-American sisters felt supported when the congregational celebrations reflected their membership in the group through music, dance or in the liturgy.

Another set of positive experiences for the participants is the association with other African-American sisters. The importance of this experience is often misunderstood by the members of the predominantly white congregations. However, African-American sisters find great sustenance and support at the National Black Sisters Conference. The participants of the study discussed the importance of the conference to them and remained connected to the national organization, even though they were discouraged by their congregations both verbally and through lack of financial support. African-American sisters indicated that they experienced a disruption of friendships with white sisters because of their membership in the national organization. The leadership of predominantly white congregations seem fearful of the outcome of the association of African-American sisters from other congregations. In fact, the Vocation Directors expressed concern that access to such a network might interfere with and disrupt the community life of an African-American sister. This concern was not expressed for professional organizations or associations which the white sisters join, and in this case seems to be a means of control for the African-American sister.

The experience of positive support at the Institute of Black Catholic Studies at Xavier University was also cited by the participants. This experience has opened its participants to the richness of the Black Catholic tradition which has been hidden from them for so long. Granting permission to study at the Institute and providing financial support for the studies is one way congregations can address the needs of the African-American women. Another way is for formation team personnel to attend the Institute. The participation in the Institute will assist them in gaining an understanding of the African-American experience. From the interviews with the Vocation Directors, there were no plans at this time to engage in this kind of exchange.

"Admit You've Seen My Tears"

The components of the experience of life in the predominantly white congregations of women religious reflect the perceptions of the African-American women about the attitudes and values lived by their sisters. These perceptions reiterate the attitude that 'you are just like us,' which denies and ignores the issue of race and disrespects the experience of the African-American sister and the difficulties of control and power.

Alienation

Elizabeth articulates this feeling of alienation when she explains that as long as she was willing to change herself everything was fine, but when she said no, then she was told

that she had an attitude. Elizabeth was blamed for acknowledging the differences. For her and other women of color, this experience often leads to anger at oneself and at others. It led Lisa to become dependent and passive. Christine reported that she pressed her hair so that it was straight and just like her white sisters. The sisters' response was that she was 'good chocolate.' The white sisters were comfortable when Christine and Elizabeth acted just like the predominant group, but when these women began to understand that differences were not bad or good, but could be acknowledged, then there was a problem. Their colleagues were uncomfortable, and they blamed Christine and Elizabeth for their discomfort. Alienation and lack of support undermine the effectiveness of these African-American sisters in their respective congregations.

In one congregation, when several African-American women left religious life, the leadership indicated that the women who left had a problem and not the congregation. There was no examination of what the congregation could have done to provide support for the women of color. Allen's study of college students and its findings on a supportive environment offers important considerations for designing a positive response to this institutional problem.

Questioning Validity

White sisters are generally not questioned about their validity as nuns. The sisters, for the most part, do not

appreciate the difficulties faced by African-American women religious in a white culture. Helen described a visit to an emergency room, where she was questioned about where she got her medical insurance card before she was treated. Her colleagues were surprised because their expectation was that a sister would be treated with deference and great respect and not questioned or scrutinized. Added to this kind of disrespect are the questions faced by African-American women religious by their own congregations. Rhonda recalled an incident in her congregation where she has been a vowed member for over ten years, when she was asked by one of the other members if she belonged there.

It might be argued that, in a large congregation of women religious, it is possible that one sister may not know the name of every sister in the congregation. However, given the few numbers of women entering religious life in the last ten years, it seems strange that a sister at the central administration building would not know a 'young sister,' particularly, if she were the only African-American in her congregation.

Control

Elizabeth found that quiet behavior was judged as hostility. This judgement was a method of control and it kept her from sharing herself with her sisters. In her interview, she poignantly described how much she wanted to be a trusted friend to her white sisters and how disappointed she was that

this never happened. In the end, living in community with ten or twelve sisters, she felt abandoned. Rita described that when she finally spoke out regarding membership and racism, she was cautioned by her sisters about her anger. In both instances, the core message is deflected because the problem is considered individual and therefore not material to be addressed by the group at large.

Feeling Incidental

Another perception of African-American women regarding their experience in predominantly white congregations of women religious have to do with the feeling of being incidental, i.e. the issues and contributions are not important enough to notice. Several sisters discussed the congregational celebrations in which there is no reflection of the presence of a different culture. The Vocation Directors indicated that this was a problem of thoughtlessness and not malicious. Therefore, the women should understand this and not be upset by it. In effect, the African-American women get the message that they should be happy to be let in, and that the congregation had done enough already and that they should willingly submit to this abuse.

Recently in the planning sessions for the entrance of an African-American woman candidate to a predominantly white congregation, the vice president of the congregation indicated that it really wasn't important to address the cultural issue now, there were other times it could be included. With the

support from others, this candidate was able to invite a Gospel Choir to the ceremony, so that they could take part and her culture could be represented in this small way. The Choir was not invited to sing in the congregational chapel at the ceremony. Instead, they sang later at the reception. It never occurred to the formation team that inviting the choir to be the entertainment at the reception was also an insult. In discussions with the formation team about the problems which occurred in the planning and follow up sessions, it was clear that the team felt that they had done a fine job, and that the candidate and her supporters were just blowing the whole thing out of proportion. In fact, the formation team believed that they had more than accommodated the new candidate. Underlying this denial is the attitude that this African-American woman is 'just like us' so why is there so much difficulty about the plans?

Failing to Keep Promises

When Rachel followed through on the charge to tell the sisters in her congregation what was difficult for her, she was told that she fabricated her experiences, that she didn't live in the real world. Confronted with real behavioral examples, her sisters could only deny that they ever happened or worse, if they happened, Rachel was the one that was wrong. This is no longer a learning experience; it became an exercise for blame. Clearly, Rachel's sisters missed the point.

Marilyn clearly feels that she was lied to about the

congregation's desire to confront racism. For Marilyn and others, it is time to let the white sisters, who have the problem, acknowledge it and deal with racism. Gwen realized that the racism so prevalent in her congregation made her feel that she was never as good as her white sisters, even though she wanted the same ideals and goals. Ruth described that when an issue related to African-Americans is introduced, she watches her white sisters look for the "imaginary lint" on their jackets. The sisters are uncomfortable facing the issue and addressing solutions. It is much easier to continue to behave as if we are all the same. These examples describe an organizational mistrust which is supported by the Wellman study indicating that African-Americans perceive whites as failing to keep promises.

Social Comparison Theory

Social comparison theory suggests some important considerations in developing a program to use social support and networking to reduce stress in the environment. The theory is important because it can be a guide in assisting predominantly white congregations of women religious in planning for more welcoming multicultural settings.

Described as a limitation, the first guideline indicates that stress will be reduced if the stressor is one that is socially acceptable and does not result in feelings of guilt or shame. As indicated by the institutional representatives, discussions on racism are often misconstrued as personal

attacks on individual sisters. In order to be effective, the predominantly white congregation will need to frame the problem of racism as a societal one, and move the discussion from 'good nuns aren't racist.' If an open environment can be achieved, perhaps by opening the discussion regarding past ethnic integration, then sisters will be ready to take the next step in identifying ways to help reduce the obstacles to multicultural living. In the study, Diane recounted how the president of the congregation spoke openly about the problems of the past and the problems that African-American Catholics continue to endure. She didn't promise that there would not be any problems, but she did promise to work on them. Diane felt welcomed by this woman and her congregation. Yvette and Rachel had a very different experience. When Rachel explained to her sisters what some of the difficulties were, she was rejected. The sisters felt attacked and in the end, Rachel was the one who suffered. Yvette recognizes that she cannot discuss the issues with her sisters because of the strong reactions of the sisters and therefore she has changed her behavior. She indicated that once she was outgoing and now she is shy.

These experiences are further illustrated in the second guideline for social comparison theory: stress is reduced if the discussion of the stressor will not be detrimental to ones relationship with the comparison other. For Rachel and Yvette this is not the case. They found that by trying to bring

attention to obstacles, the stress in their lives increased. Now they are unwilling to continue this effort. Diane, however, indicated that she was able to respond to an offensive remark, and did not feel overwhelmed by the response. She felt her contribution was recognized.

In the third guideline, social comparison theory suggests that stress will be reduced if the support is provided by people who are perceived as providers of accurate information. In the institutional setting, task forces and reports on the problems of racism in religious congregations have been discounted and doubted. Marilyn felt deceived because the congregation did not want to deal with the issues. Her contribution and her work on the task force were never recognized. In an earlier example, regarding the entrance ceremony for an African-American woman candidate, the entire episode and the problems in planning were discounted by the institutional representatives which significantly contributed to a heightened sense of alienation for the candidate and her support system.

Several African-American sisters recounted the difficulties they encountered in gaining access to the Black Sisters Conference. This support system, which they perceive as important, is doubted and even diminished by their respective congregations. What should be a source of support for the sisters becomes an additional stress in their lives.

Finally, stress will be reduced if the support group

communicates a relatively calm reaction to the potential stressor. Diane recalled how frank and open her discussion was with the president of her congregation. The president treated the issues as if they were not insurmountable and was ready to provide the leadership to make changes. This calm reaction helped Diane feel welcomed. Other sisters described experiences which indicated that they should recognize what a tremendous, cataclysmic difference changing an approach or a meal or ceremony had occurred and how grateful the sisters should be. This attitude only serves to heighten stress and makes it more difficult to deal with the real issues of the behaviors which communicate racism.

Throughout the examples in the study, it is evident that stress was not reduced for many of the participants, but exacerbated because the stressors were not considered acceptable topics of conversation. Discussions regarding racial incidents often led to a severing of relationships with white sisters. The organization did not communicate calmly about the topic of racism. It is clear that institutions must engage in strategies for conflict resolution to affect change in this area which can help to defuse the defensive and potentially volatile environments in the predominantly white congregations.

Personal Reflections

The process of this ethnographic study has been exhilarating. With each interview, I was able to gain

insights for the development of the study. Perhaps, the most difficult part of the process was listening to and dealing with the painful stories which were related with trust and candor. I will always remember them because those stories symbolize for me what remains to be done. Some of the stories astounded me. I was pleased to learn about the efforts of other congregations to address the issue of racism. The understanding that the issue raised by the participants are not isolated events, but rather daily occurrences was a sobering one indeed. For me, this experience deepened my understanding of the depth of the societal presence of racism and the existence of racism in our lives and institutions.

It seems to me that the greatest obstacle which must be faced by congregations is the admission that good people, even nuns and professionals, can have racist attitudes and behave in a racially discriminatory way. The defensive stance is a major obstacle to change. In religious institutions, the method of deflecting the problem behavior has been to individualize it and avoid taking the blame for providing the environment which allows racism to exist unchallenged. This is done by explaining that a sister is troubled and humanly flawed, but that we should forgive her. Helen experienced this response when she was insulted by one of the sisters she encountered on the way to the chapel.

Another way large institutions delay the changes that need to be addressed is to make a statement and consider the

problem solved. It is one thing to acknowledge the evil inherent in racism, but it is quite another to work at changing attitudes and behaviors which prevent the establishment of a welcoming multicultural environment.

As I began this study, I had several ideas about the religious congregations. From some very early interviews, it seemed that smaller congregations would be able to adapt and make policy changes with more ease. I thought I would find more flexibility and the ability to deal with racism in a more direct manner in these congregations. However, as my study progressed, it was clear that size was not a major factor, but the willingness to deal with the issue of racism.

One of the participants indicated that older, more mature women would be able to deal with the difficulties more easily. As my interviews progressed, it became clear that the older women were able to articulate the difficulties in a more focused manner. These women were no more or less successful in gaining membership than any other group. For some of them, the women stayed longer than a less mature woman might; for others, the recognition of what was ahead was enough to push them to a decision to leave.

In the beginning, I thought that the congregations with more than one African-American sister might be more welcoming to other African-Americans. This was certainly not borne out in the interviews. Across the board, whether there was one member or thirty members, congregations had obstacles to

membership for African-American women. These obstacles prevented an integration and assimilation of a multicultural lifestyle which would be welcoming to all members.

I am deeply grateful to the participants of this study. Each of them has enriched my life and made it possible for me to enter into an experience I could only glimpse at before.

Throughout the history of social welfare in the United States congregations of women religious are cited for beginning an important work for the disenfranchised. The earliest evidence is found in New Orleans with the Ursuline Sisters who began their work in offering services to the poor. Women religious have often been in leadership roles in the social, educational and health fields in the United States. Today, congregations of women religious can chose to accept a new challenge to be leaders in the society in embracing a truly integrated lifestyle by developing an environment in which intolerance is not acceptable and cultural sensitivity is fostered. This study is an effort to demonstrate the ways in which congregations can address racism in their midst and develop a more welcoming environment.

Applications of the Findings

Beyond the very parochial application to the congregations of women religious in the United States, this study offers evidence of some important trends which can be considered in designing more welcoming environments in many of the predominantly white institutions in our society.

Racism is present in every societal system in the United States. The daily newspaper offers examples with each edition about the intolerance for racial differences in some of our government offices, corporations, educational institutions and social service agencies. There is a tendency to 'blame the victim' and cover up the injustice by making it someone else's problem. In these predominantly white settings, the common denominator is that the power and policy decisions are driven by well-meaning but misguided intentions which fail to acknowledge the existence of racism in their midst. This denial is a major obstacle to developing a more multicultural setting for consumers and providers alike.

In the 1960's, Affirmative Action programs were designed to assist minority workers in gaining access to the policy and managerial roles in the predominantly white corporations, governmental institutions, and public universities. Today, these programs are under attack, not because they have accomplished their aim so well that there is no longer a need for them, but rather because of what is called 'reverse

discrimination.' As this study and a review of the literature indicates, incidents of racial discrimination continue to happen each day. These incidents result in the alienation and isolation of a large segment of our American society. Alienation and isolation prevent people of color from entering, gaining acceptance and recognition, and developing appropriate styles of membership in our American institutions. Clearly, affirmative action is needed to assist institutions in the development of welcoming multicultural settings.

During the last thirty years, there have been many efforts to develop a more multicultural base in the workforce and in the service settings. In some cases, when organizations employed a more passive role in outreach and recruitment of new staff, they would report that 'no persons of color were interested' or that 'no qualified person of color was found.' These explanations cover serious policy issues of outreach and recruitment which must be explored.

Some organizations and corporations have participated in workshops to sensitize employees to the racial and ethnic differences in our society. It is an effort to recognize that new consumer groups can be attracted by becoming more 'user friendly.' As part of the requirements of Equal Opportunity legislation, institutions regularly report on the composition of the workforce of their institutions. Human Service organizations, in particular, have been sensitized to the need for more multicultural and more culturally aware workforce.

Social work literature has contributed to the exploration of practice applications in multicultural settings. Use of social support and empowerment based applications have demonstrated positive outcomes. These reports highlight the significance of understanding cultural differences and using the strengths to engender the development of a welcoming environment. It is evident that organizations would also benefit from the applications as well as the client. It is encouraging to note that new texts for student social workers generally address the issues of cultural sensitivity and its importance in the development of the helping relationship.

From this study and the studies in predominantly white university settings, it is important to understand that even in the most professional and well meaning organization, racism exists. Individuals and organizations have a responsibility to work on this issue and provide a more welcoming environment for all participants. The trends in the study can help inform predominantly white organizations serving African-American clients about the importance of outreach for new workers, creating supportive environments for workers and use of resources. Most importantly, it can help in the understanding of the issues faced by clients as they enter these 'alien' institutions in search of assistance for real needs. This section is an attempt to explore the possible applications of the study. It is not exhaustive in nature, but two areas will be considered, the organizational issues and the service

issues.

Organizational Issues

It is important for organizations to construct an umbrella environment which will encourage all the participants to maximize their effectiveness. This kind of environment is not easy to construct, but will produce dramatic differences in the development of worker effectiveness and efficiency. At the present time, Human Service organizations are undergoing major staff 'downsizing' resulting in dramatic service cuts which can create not only a circumstance for staff burnout but also a demoralizing atmosphere in the service arena. In a sense, like the religious institutions which faced downsizing because women were not entering their ranks and added pressures for service from schools and other church affiliated organizations, human service organizations are on the same precipice today. This can be a time of great creativity and, if used effectively, organizations can take this opportunity to reexamine the programs and policies which keep them from more effectively operating in a multicultural environment. The first step and, perhaps, the most serious step must be the willingness to acknowledge that racism exists in our society in the function of the organization and in the workforce. Then the work of looking at the obstacles and trying to overcome them can begin.

The compelling reasons for this are evident in the literature, particularly the work of Brenner, et. al., which

suggests that negative incidents have an impact on well-being and Pagel, et. al. which indicates that upsetting relationships play an important role in the social support system. Clearly, this qualitative study has further documented these findings.

Among the areas which can be reviewed outreach, recruitment and interviewing of potential employees, support and promotion policies of employees, and the composition of the policy making boards are just few. The current study focused on the areas of outreach, recruitment and membership and provide some insights for other organizations and institutions.

Outreach, Recruitment and Interviewing

The area of outreach and recruitment for service agencies is one that is crucial for its survival. From the outset, the need to attract a staff that will perform in a culturally sensitive manner is very important. Agencies are often limited by budget considerations in this process. This study suggests that passive recruitment, that is, announcements in the traditional manner may not be as effective in the African-American community as they are in attracting white candidates. If an agency is interested in attracting a staff that is more multicultural in composition, it needs to leave the traditional mode of recruitment and seek out other venues to advertise and market the organization.

The interview process is another area which needs to be

examined. The commitment of the organization to cultural sensitivity and the work to eliminate racism needs to be included in this setting. It may be important to consider a team approach in this strategy, which includes African-American employees or consultants. The participants of the study strongly felt discomfort during an interview with a white psychologist. If we consider this trend, perhaps the individual who was a 'great candidate on paper,' may be a better candidate in a more culturally congruent setting.

Membership

When an candidate becomes a member of an organization the period of orientation can be a difficult one. Often, the organization uses this probationary period to assess the new staff member. Organizations, as this study indicates, need to review the criteria used in making judgements regarding a new member's performance. The criteria should be known and achievable for all candidates before the judgements are made. In addition, in the literature review, the work of Okun, et.al. suggests that teacher support was critical in boosting the effect for positive events and buffering negative effects. It seems to indicate that the development of a mentor program for new workers can assist in integrating them into the organization successfully.

Policies regarding emergency leave, i.e. time to attend the funeral of a family member, may need some review. The definition of 'family' is an important point as indicated by

the trends in this study and the work of Wilson and Tolson in which the social support networks of African-American families is extended to include neighborhood, church and community. In this study, there is an emphasis on participation in family occasions such as funerals, birthdays and the like.

Using available resources can be helpful in developing a more multicultural environment. De Four and Hirsh indicated the significance of an African-American faculty mentor for African-American students in a predominantly white university setting. In their findings, the researchers suggested that African-American graduate students were less likely to drop out of school in a predominantly white setting when African-American faculty members acted as mentors. The participants of this study confirmed these findings through their very positive response on the need for network support, particularly the National Black Sisters Conference. It suggests that for African-American social workers in predominantly white social service agencies ties to the National Black Social Work Coalition is of major importance. Organizations, therefore, should encourage their workers to join these groups and to share the agenda's and concerns with the broader agency. In addition, these groups can be a resource for predominantly white agencies as they address the policy issues which act as obstacles to integration in the agency.

One of the most critical areas cited by the participants

in this study was not so much that racism exists, but that it was tolerated and ignored by the leadership of the congregations. Organizations also need to address this issue. Intolerant remarks made at staff meetings or characterizations of clients because of their racial or ethnic heritage cannot be excused. Staff members need to be encouraged to address these issues in a way that will affect change and not create dissention. The role of leadership is critical in developing an open multicultural atmosphere.

In-service education on different cultural experiences can be very useful in social service settings. Proctor and Davis indicate that "white people know very little about the social realities of non-white cultures."⁷⁰⁸ The participants of the current study indicated that a major obstacle for them was cultural difference. In addition, the current study suggests that African-American women in predominantly white settings, like religious congregations, feel the pressure of always teaching. This is a consideration for organizations which are concerned about worker burnout. It points to the necessity for an organized program to explore and educate about cultural differences, not only for organizational benefit but also for the benefit of the clients. Such a program could include an opportunity to sample the foods of a particular cultural group. As the current study suggests,

⁷⁰⁸Enola Proctor and Larry Davis, "The Challenge of Racial Difference: Skills for Clinical Practice," Social Work, May 1994, p. 315.

exposure to different aspects of the culture can assist in overcoming the obstacles which create alienation and isolation.

Acknowledging Contributions

The participants of the study indicated that it seemed as if they were incidental to the organization and that their contributions were not important. While it is true that positive affirmation is important for all members of an organization, the need to develop ways in which the contributions of minority staff members in predominantly white organizations is an important consideration for review. Annual reports and evaluations should reflect the positive contributions of the members of the organization. Staff meetings should include recognition of contributions as well.

Organizations need to be sensitive to the questions asked by the staff. If the questions are discounted, or considered suspiciously, then important service changes can be overlooked. The participants of this study confirmed that their questions and suggestions were ignored or treated with suspicion and, therefore, they withdrew from the group discussions. Managerial and supervisory staff need to assess the participation in the organizational staff meeting and develop a strategy which encourages, rather than discourages, participation. If the organization can communicate a calm reaction to change, or a willingness to try something different, then staff members will be able to respond

creatively.

This study suggests that the area of promotion is one which organizations need to review. The participants experienced delays in acceptance to religious congregations because of differences in communication and relationships. Organizations need to review the criteria for advancement to allow for different styles of communication and the development of different relational styles. The promotion of an individual recognizes his or her contribution to the organization. Organizations, like religious institutions, use promotion as a means of control.

Finally, an area which needs further exploration, and which this study suggests is important is how the staff is perceived by the clients. Do clients treat minority staff differently than white staff? While we cannot control the reactions of clients, organizations can support staff by positive introductions and by treating staff as competent.

Community Input

In the development of policy statements, human service organizations have worked to reflect the views of a broad spectrum of the community through the use of Boards of Directors and Advisory Boards. This study confirms the need to develop the mechanisms through which different cultural experiences can be considered and different world views can be represented. Recently, a senior citizen housing project located in an African-American community which was taking

applications for apartments announced at a Board of Directors meeting that no African-Americans had applied for housing. One board member asked about the marketing strategy and suggested that a marketing consultant from the African-American community be contacted. The Board did not act on the suggestion and segregation remains a issue for this government funded project. The Board does not represent the community and there is no current mechanism for this to happen. These incidents continue to happen in our social service agencies.

Service Issues

The trends of this study suggest several areas to be considered in the realm of service to African-American consumers. Among the areas for review are developing knowledge about the reality of the service recipient, the environmental messages and the use of social supports.

Cultural Awareness

Among other writers, Proctor and Davis note that white social workers know little about the reality of non-white cultures. Further, the writers indicate that clients should not bear the burden of educating the practitioners.⁷⁰⁹ This view was also expressed by the participants of the current study. These trends suggest that predominantly white organizations and social workers in the service agencies share the responsibility to learn about the cultures of the people who use the services of the agency. The consumer does not

⁷⁰⁹Ibid., p.321.

have the responsibility of educator.

Family Systems

The development of this knowledge will assist workers in addressing family system differences, as noted in the literature review by Wilson and Tolson who found an extended definition of family and Hofferth who reported on the differences in kin network participation in white and African-American families. These findings were also confirmed by the participants of this study who felt that they had a different sense or definition of family than their white counterparts. In addition, the expectation and role of the family support network is one which must be considered. The participants of the study described the sense of responsibility as "if your family can't count on you, who can?" Social service agencies must be aware of this important familial obligation in the lives of their clients. In the African-American family the responsibility to care for a Godmother, a Great Aunt, niece or nephew is as important as taking care of a member of the immediate family who needs help. The findings of Steward and Vaux found that African-American students on a predominantly white mid-Western campus reported greater closeness to family members than their white counterparts. Jung and Khalsa found that perceived family support was related to lower depression rates among African-American students. This trend can help in designing the kind of support in a helping relationship as well as an understanding of the kinds of demands felt by

clients in fulfilling their familial roles.

The review of literature reports that African-American students on a college campus, as indicated by Jung and Khalsa, used avoidance coping as a means of solving problems more often than did their white counterparts. In the current study, African-American women religious described this kind of coping. For example, Yvette indicated that she just doesn't offer ideas at house meetings because she ideas were ignored. Marilyn indicated that she 'walked around the craziness,' and focused on what was important to her. Social workers must understand that this is a strategy that has worked in the past for their clients and must be able to use the strengths of the client in developing appropriate solutions. This knowledge can play an important role in the designing of strategies, for example, in organizing a community response to service cuts.

Environmental Messages

Several participants discussed the effects of living in a racially hostile environment. One participant said she felt like a psychic transplant. Social service agencies need to assess what the office environment is really like, i.e. are there pictures and reading material of interest to the client? In addition, it is important to understand the effects hostile environments have on individuals. Participants of this study described how their confidence and independence were undermined in the hostile situation. Social workers need to be aware of what makes clients seem dependent and passive.

Faced with hostility, the participants reported that they withdrew and isolated themselves from others. They began to mistrust individuals and the institution. The alienation from the organizational system was also confirmed in the literature review. Social workers must be aware of the how the agency is perceived by the client in developing a helping relationship. The primary reasons for the mistrust of predominantly white institutions is that they are perceived as not keeping promises. Agencies in the African-American community must be aware of this perception and carefully plan and offer services that do what they promise to do. Social workers can assist clients in understanding what the agency can do by clearly developing a 'contract' with the client that outlines the services and resources available. It is also important to understand how the 'reputation' of the agency impacts on the worker's effectiveness. Clients should receive information regarding the effectiveness of the agency and its workers.

As noted in the study on church affiliation, differences in the level of expressiveness in religious ceremonies exist in the white and African-American liturgy. The participants of the study noted how plain and detached the liturgy of the predominantly white congregations seemed to them. This suggests that for social workers there may be considerations in how African-American clients are engaged in the therapeutic process and what kinds of therapeutic strategies may be more effective with them than with their white counterparts.

Ignoring and denying the differences do not serve the client or the agency.

Social Support Networks

This study strongly suggests the importance in the use and development of social support networks. In particular, the trends indicate that for African-Americans it is important that the network include family members beyond the immediate family. Social workers and social service agencies need to understand that the development and link to other social support resources can go a long way in helping the client reach the goals he or she sets.

In Allen's study of African-American students on a predominantly white southern campus, the report indicates that the outcomes of the students are the result of a combination of personal and institutional forces. Clearly, the success of the work in social service agencies is predicated on the same basis - personal and institutional forces. The current study indicates that a careful review of the obstacles present in our institutional and organizational lives can greatly influence the direction and creation of a tolerant multicultural organization.

Summary

In this section the analysis of the factors and components which are part of the obstacles experienced by African-American women religious were reviewed. These trends were linked with the previous studies and suggestions for the

future were considered.

The current study offers some analogs for predominantly white organizations and social service agencies in our multicultural society. Organizational and service issues were considered.

Bibliography

- Agar, Michael H. Speaking of Ethnography. Newbury Park:Sage, 1991.
- Allen, W.R. "Black Family Research in the United States," Journal of Comparative Family Study, V. 9, 1978, pp. 167-190.
- Allen, W.R. "Correlates of Black Student Adjustment, Achievement and Aspirations at a Predominantly White Southern University," in G.E. Thomas ed. Black Students in Higher Education. Westport,Conn:Greenwood, 1981.
- Alloway, Ruth and Babbington,Paul. "The Buffer Theory of Social Support," Psychological Medicine, 1987, pp.91-108.
- Alt, Jennifer Mary. "Rerooting Religious Life in South Africa," Review for Religious, July/August 1992, p. 520.
- Aneshensel, C. and Stone, J.D. "Stress and Depression Test of the Buffering Theory," Archives of General Psychiatry, 1982, pp.1392-1396.
- Angelou, Maya. "Equality," I Shall Not Be Moved. New York:Random House, 1990.
- Baer,Hans. "Black Mainstream Churches: Emancipatory or Accommodative Responses to Racism and Social Stratification in America," Review for Religious Research, Dec. 1988, pp.162-176.
- Baird, Anita. "Culture and Vocations: The Black Candidate," Newsviews of the National Sisters Vocation Conference, Summer, 1987,pp.8-9.
- Ball,R.E. "Family and Friends: A Supportive Network for Low Income American Black Families," Journal of Comparative Family Studies, 1983, pp. 51-65.
- Barol, Bill. "The Work Goes On: All Souls Makes a Traumatic Change," Newsweek, March 7,1988, p. 31.
- Barrera, Manuel. "Distinctions Between Social Support Concepts, Measures, and Models," American Journal of Community Psychology, 1986, pp.413-445.
- Barrera, Manuel. "Social Support Interventions and the Third Law of Ecology," American Journal of Community Psychology, 1991, p. 85.

- Barrera, M., Sandler, I., and Ramsey, T. "Preliminary Development of a Scale of Social Support: Studies on College Students," American Journal of Community Psychology, 1981, pp. 435-447.
- Beasley, Barbara, RGS, Gallahue, Patricia, SND, Russell, Rosemary, CPPS, Taylor, Marie DePorres, SNJM, Velez, Marie Louisa, CCVI, "Racism Awareness," Leadership Conference of Women Religious, 1988. Unpublished.
- Bechtle, Regina. "What Meaning Do We Give to the Date?" New Catholic World, 1988, p.47-50.
- Birkel, Richard, and Reppucci, N. Dickson. "Social Networks, Information Seeking and Utilization of Services," American Journal of Community Psychology, 1983, pp. 185-205.
- "Black Catholics Express Their Concerns Over Racism," Jet, Dec. 1986, p.39.
- Blackwell, J.E. Mainstreaming Outsiders. Bayside: General Hall, 1981.
- Bonacich, Philip. "Communication Dilemmas in Social Networks: An Experimental Study," American Sociological Review, 1990, pp.448-460.
- Bowers, Clint, and Gesten, Ellis. "Social Support as a Buffer of Anxiety: An Experimental Analogue," American Journal of Community Psychology, 1986, pp. 447-451.
- Bowman, Thea. "Forged by History," Horizons, Fall 1989, Vol.15 No.1, p.8.
- Brenner, Gail, Norvell, Nancy and Limacher, Marian. "Supportive and Problematic Social Interactions: a Social Network Analysis," American Journal of Community Psychology, 1981, p.831.
- Brown, Elias Barkley. "Womanist Consciousness: Maggie Lena Walker and the Independent Order of Saint Luke." Signs, Spring 1989, p.610.
- Brownell, Arlene and Shumaker, Sally. "Social Support: An Introduction to a Complex Phenomenon," Journal of Social Issues, V. 40, #4, pp.1-9.
- Burda, Philip, Vaux, Alan, and Schill, Thomas. "Social Support Resources Variations Across Sex and Sex Role," Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 1984, pp.119-126.
- Burns, Charles D. "Vocations in a Church that Transcends Race," Origins, 1988, pp. 588-591.

- Butler, Sally. Minutes of the January 23, 1991 meeting of the Operations Committee, unpublished.
- Butler, Sally. Chronology of the Minority Vocations Committee, unpublished, 1990.
- Carpenter, Dolores. "Black Women in Religious Institutions," Journal of Religious Thought, Winter-Spring 1989-1990, pp.7-27.
- Carter, Martin, SA. "Where is the Black Church on Racism?" Ecumenical Trends, 1987, pp. 177-180.
- Carter, Martin, SA. "An African-American Perspective on the Unity of the Church," Midstream, Oct. 1989, pp.356-368.
- Carter, Robert. "Racial Identity Attitudes and Psychological Functioning," Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development, 1991, pp.105-113.
- "Catholic Bishops OK Plan to Recruit, Retain Blacks," Jet, Nov. 27, 1989, p.24.
- Cobb, S. "Social Support as a Moderator of Life Stress," Psychosomatic Medicine, 1976, pp.300-314.
- Cohen, Carl, Teresi, Jean, and Holmes, Douglas. "Assessment of Stress-Buffering Effects of Social Networks on Psychological Symptoms in an Inner City Elderly Population." American Journal of Community Psychology, 1986, p.75.
- Cohen, Sheldon and McKay, Garth. "Social Support, Stress and the Buffering Hypothesis," in A. Baum, J.E. Singer and S. E. Taylor, eds. Handbook of Psychology and Health, V. 4, New Jersey: Erlbaum Press, 1984.
- Connell, Cathleen and D'Augelli, Anthony. "Social Support and Human Development: Issues in Theory, Research and Practice," Journal of Community Health, Summer 1988, pp.104-115.
- Copeland, M. Shawn. "Sister M. Shawn Copeland: Black and Catholic-VII," America, 1980, p.103.
- Cronkite, R and Moos, Rudolf. "The Role of Pre-disposing and Moderating Factors in the Stress-illness Relationship," Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 1984, pp.373-393.
- Cross, Patricia, and Astin, Helen. "Factors Affecting Black Students' Persistence in College," in G.E. Thomas, ed. Black Students in Higher Education, Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1981.

- D'Arcy, Mary G. "The Challenge of Cultural Diversity," Horizons, Fall, 1989, p.7.
- Davis, Cyprian. "Characteristics of Black Spirituality," Origins, June 1987, pp.43-45.
- Davis, Cyprian. "Brothers and Sisters To Us: The Never Ending Story," America, March 1990, pp.319-320.
- Davis, Cyprian. The History of Black Catholics in the United States, New York:Crossroad Publ. Co., 1993.
- "D.C. Bishop Notes: Church Should Continue Dual Fight Against Racism," Jet, Feb. 1981, p.41.
- Dean, A and Lin, N. "The Stress-buffering Role of Social Support," Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease, 1977, pp.403-417.
- Deedy, John. "You've Come a Long Way, Sister," U.S. Catholic, 1983, p.165.
- DeFour, Darlene and Hirsch, Barton. "The Adaptation of Black Graduate Students: A Social Networks Approach," American Journal of Community Psychology, 1990, p.487.
- Dempsey, Margaret, RSM. Minutes of the Board of Trustees of Nia House, June 14, 1992, unpublished.
- Depner, Charles, Wethington, Elaine and Dayton, Berit Ingersoll. "Social Support: Methodological Issues in Design and Measurement," Journal of Social Issues, 1984, pp.37-54.
- DeRogatis, L., Lipman, R., Rickels, K., Uhlenhuth, E. and Covi, L. "The Hopkins Symptoms Checklist: A Self Report Symptoms Inventory," Behavioral Science, 1974, pp.1-15.
- Dick, Jack. "Religious Women in the United States," National Catholic Reporter, April 25, 1985, p.40.
- Dillhunt, M. Elaine, OSB. "Needed: More Black Women in Religious Life," Sisters Today, 1988, pp.91-94.
- Dillhunt, M. Elaine, OSB. "What do Black Catholics Want From the Rest of the Church?," St. Anthony Messenger, 1988, pp.14-19.
- Dohrenwend, S. M. "Social Stress and Community Psychology," American Journal of Community Psychology, 1978, p.1.
- Dunkel-Schetter, C., Folkman, C., Lazarus, R. "Correlates of Social Support Receipt," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1987, pp.71-80.

- Eiskovits, Rivka. "Socialization Beyond Convent Gates," Religious Education, 1983, pp.62-75.
- Evans, Kathy and Herr, Edwin. "The Influence of Racism and Sexism in the Career Development of African American Women," Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development, 1991, pp.130-135.
- "Exploring Roots of Racial Prejudice," Science News, Oct. 17, 1981, p.248.
- Faschinghauer, T.R. "A 166 Item Written Short Form of the Group MMPI: The Family," Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 1974, pp.645-656.
- Fetterman, David. Ethnography: Step by Step. Newbury Park: Sage, 1989.
- Fichter, Joseph. "Vanishing Church Professionals," New Catholic World, Jan.-Feb. 1988, pp. 23-28.
- Fiore, Joan, Coppel, David, Becker, Joseph, and Cox, Gary. "Social Support as a Multifaceted Concept: Examination of Important Dimensions for Adjustment," American Journal of Community Psychology, 1986, p.93.
- Fiore, Joan, Becker, Joseph, and Coppel, David. "Social Network Interactions: A Buffer or Stress." American Journal of Community Psychology, 1983, pp.423-439.
- Fiorenza, Joseph. "Racism, Fear and Reconciliation," America, May 1989, pp. 444-446.
- Folkman, Susan, Lazarus, R.S., Dunkel-Schetter, C., DeLongis, A., and Gruen, R. "Dynamics of a Stressful Encounter," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1986, pp. 992-1003.
- Forster, Pat. "Cross Cultural Formation: Culture Does Make a Difference," Review for Religious, 1985, pp.506ff.
- Fox, Thomas, ed. "And the Church is Not Immune," National Catholic Reporter, Nov. 18, 1988, p.12.
- Frame, Randall. "Race and Church: A Progress Report," Christianity Today, March 1988, p.17.
- Freedman, Philip, Gotti, Margaret, and Holtz, Gregory. "In Support of Direct Teaching to Counter Ethnic Stereotypes," Phi Delta Kappan, Feb. 1981, p.456.
- Friedkin, Noah. "Social Networks in Structural Equation Models," Social Psychology Quarterly, Dec. 1990, pp.316-328.

- Gewen, Barry. "Cracks in the Melting Pot," The New Leader, Nov. 1983, p.16.
- Ginsberg, Leon. "The Changing Nature of the American Family: Implications for Black Family Life," Journal of Multicultural Social Work, V.1 No.1, 1991, p.82.
- Gitterman, Alex. "Building Mutual Support in Groups," Social Work In Groups, 1989, p.6.
- Goetz, Judith Preissle, and LaCompte, Margaret Dunne. Ethnography and Qualitative Design in Educational Research. New York: Academic Press, 1984.
- Golding, Jacqueline and Baezconde-Garbanati, Lourdes. "Ethnicity, Culture and Social Resources," American Journal of Community Psychology, June 1990, pp.445-465.
- Gottlieb, B.H. "The Nature of Social Support," Social Support Strategies. Newbury Park: Sage, 1983.
- Gordon, Mary. "Black Religious Orders Gather, Ask "Special Needs" Be Recognized." National Catholic Reporter, Aug.28,1981, p.1.
- Gray, Howard. "The Possible Good in Fewer Religious Vocations," New Catholic World, Jan.-Feb. 1988, p.60.
- Grimes, Nikki. "Friends Across the Color Line," Essence Magazine, July 1986, p.128.
- Gutierrez, L. M. "Working with Women of Color: An Empowerment Perspective." Social Work, Mar.1990, pp.149-153.
- Gwaltney, John L. "The Heirs of Disaster," Natural History, Mar. 1981, p.12.
- Hale, J. Black Children: Their Roots, Culture, and Learning Styles. Provo, Utah:Brigham Young University Press, 1982.
- Hall, Alan, and Wellman Barry. "Social Networks and Social Support," in S.Cohen and S.L. Syme eds. Social Support and Health. New York:Academic Press, 1985.
- Hebblethwaite, Peter. "Rome Vocation Synod: Meeting Outlines '80's "Vocation Approach," National Catholic Reporter, May 22,1981, p.7.
- Hebblethwaite, Peter, "Vatican Racism Document Fingers Injustices," National Catholic Reporter, Feb.24,1989, pp.9-10.

- Hirsch, Barton. "Natural Support Systems and Coping with Major Life Changes," American Journal of Community Psychology, April 1980, p.159ff.
- Hirsch, Barton. "Coping and Adaptation in High Risk Populations: Toward an Integrative Model," Schizophrenia Bulletin, 1981, pp.164-172.
- Hirsch, Barton, and Rapkin, Bruce. "Social Networks and Adult Social Identities: Profile and Correlates of Support and Rejection," American Journal of Community Psychology, 1986, p.395.
- Hirsch, Barton, and Rapkin, Bruce. "Multiple Roles, Social Networks, and Women's Well-Being," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1986, pp.1237-1247.
- Hofferth, S.L. "Kin Networks, Race and Family Structure," Journal of Marriage and the Family, 1984, pp.791-806.
- Holahan, Charles and Moos, Rudolf. "Personal and Contextual Determinants of Coping Strategies," Journal of Personality and Social Behavior, 1987, pp.947-955.
- Holahan, Charles and Moos, Rudolf. "Life Stressors, Personal and Social Resources and Depression: A Four Year Structural Model," Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 1991, p.31.
- House, James and Kahn, Robert, McLeod, James and Williams, David. "Measures and Concepts of Social Support," in Cohen and Syme, eds. Social Support and Health. New York: Academic Press, 1985.
- Hunt, George, ed. "Vocations and the Big Picture," America, June 14, 1986, pp.482-483.
- Hunt, George, ed. "Towards a More Fraternal Society." America, March 11, 1989, pp.211-212.
- Hunt, Larry and Hunt, Janet. "Black Catholicism and Occupational Status in Northern Cities," Social Science Quarterly, 1978, pp.657-670.
- Iacobucci, Dawn. "Derivation of Subgroups from Dyadic Interactions," Psychological Bulletin, Jan. 1990, p.114.
- Inkles, Alex. "The American Character," Center Magazine, Jan-Feb. 1984, p.41.
- Jackman, Mary and Crane, Marie. "Some of My Best Friends are Black...": Interracial Friendship and Whites' Racial Attitudes," Public Opinion Quarterly, Winter 1986, pp.459-486.

- Jung, John and Khalsa, Hari Krishan. "The Relationship of Daily Hassles, Social Support and Coping to Depression in Black and White Students," The Journal of General Psychology, Oct. 1989, pp.407-418.
- Katz, Lillian. "Interracial Awareness and Acceptance," Parents Magazine, July 1981, p.94.
- Kenkelen, Bill. "Beautiful Message, Little Action," National Catholic Reporter, Feb. 15, 1980, p.48.
- Kenkelen, Bill. "Black Catholics Extend Equality Fight," National Catholic Reporter, Feb. 15, 1980, pp. 4-6.
- Killian, Lewis M. "Black Power and White Reactions: The Revitalization of Race-thinking in the United States," The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, March 1981, p.42.
- King, Martin Luther. "Kings Letter from the Birmingham Jail Still Needs Whites to Answer," Jet, Jan. 20, 1986, p.31.
- Karenga, Maulana. "Nguzo Saba: The Seven Principles," OMB Observer, March 1992, p.6.
- Lagarde, Sister Roland, SBS. "Reflections on the National Black Catholic Congress," Sisters Today, March 1988, pp.409-410.
- Leo, John. "Therapy for Ethnics," Time, March 15, 1982, p.42.
- Lindblad-Goldberg, Marion and Dukes, Joyce Lynn. "Social Support in Black Low Income, Single Parent Families," American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, V.55. 1985, pp.42-58.
- Magnet, Myron. "Can Your Kid Become President?" Fortune, June 5, 1988, p.271.
- Martineau, W. H. "Informal Social Ties Among Urban Black Americans," Journal of Black Studies, 1977, pp.83-104.
- McCallister, Lynn, and Fischer, Claude. "A Procedure for Surveying Personal Networks," Sociological Methods and Research, 1978, pp. 131-148.
- McClory, Robert J. "Plight of Aging Nuns may Herald Larger U.S. Crisis," National Catholic Reporter, Apr. 3, 1987, p.7.
- McFarlane, A.H., Neale, K.A., Norman, G.R., Roy, R.G., and Steiner, D.L., "Methodological Issues in Developing a Scale to Measure Social Support," Schizophrenia Bulletin, 1981, pp.90-100.

- McFarlane, A.H., Norman, G.R., Streiner, D.L. and Roy, R.G. "The Process of Social Stress," Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 1983, pp.160-173.
- Miller, Ricky S., and Lefcourt, Herbert M. "Social Intimacy: An Important Moderator of Stressful Life Events," American Journal of Community Psychology, 1983, pp.127-139.
- Moen, Phyllis, Dempster-McClain, Donna and Williams, Robin. "Social Integration and Longevity: An Event History Analysis of Women's Roles and Resilience," American Sociological Review, 1989, pp. 635-647.
- Moore, Gwen. "Structural Determinants of Men's and Women's Personal Networks," American Sociological Review, Oct. 1990, pp.726-736.
- Moore, Patricia. "Sisters Focus to Project Their Image," National Catholic Reporter, Feb. 17, 1984, p.8.
- Moos, Rudolf, and Billings, Andrew G. "Conceptualizing and Measuring Resources and Processes," in Goldberger and Breznitz eds. Handbook of Stress: Theoretical and Clinical Aspects. New York:Free Press, 1982.
- Neighbors, Harold. "Professional Help Use Among Black Americans," American Journal of Community Psychology, Oct. 1984, pp.551-566.
- Neighbors, H.W. and Jackson, J.S. "The Use of Informal and Formal Help: Four Patterns of Illness Behavior in the Black Community," American Journal of Community Psychology, Dec. 1984, pp.629-644.
- Nitz, M. Jeanette. "Bartolome de Las Casas, A Cross Thread Dominican." Dominican Ashram, 1893, p.58.
- Nwangwu, M. Gerard. "Women Religious and the African Synod," Review for Religious, July/August 1992, p.510.
- "Of Children, Murders, and Racism," (editorial) Christianity Today, April 24, 1981, p.15.
- O'Hare, Joseph. "Unity, Yes; Uniformity, No," America, Feb. 7, 1981, p.94.
- Okun, Morris, Sandler, Irwin, and Bauman, David. "Buffer and Booster Effects as Event Support Transactions," American Journal of Community Psychology, June 1988, p.435.

- Oritt, E., Stephen, Paul, and Behrman, J. "The Perceived Support Network Inventory," American Journal of Community Psychology, 1985, p.565.
- Ostling, Richard N. "Black Catholics vs. the Church; Disputes in Two Cities Dramatize a Widening Rift," Time, July 10, 1989, p.57.
- Pagel, Mark, Erdly, William, and Becker, Joseph. "Social Networks," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1987, pp.793-804.
- Patton, Michael Quinn. Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods. Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1990.
- Pergament, Kenneth, Silverman, William, Johnson, Steven, Echemendia, Ruben, and Snyder, Susan. "The Psychosocial Climate of Religious Congregations," American Journal of Community Psychology, 1983, pp.351-381.
- Perkins, David and Levine, Muray. The Principles of Community Psychology. New York: Oxford Press, 1987.
- Perl, Harold and Trickett, Edison. "Social Network Formation: Personal and Environmental Determinants," American Journal of Community Psychology, April 1988, p.207.
- Pollner, Melvin. "Divine Relations, Social Relations, and Well-Being," The Journal of Health and Social Behavior, March 1989, pp. 92-105.
- Preston, William. "A More Perfect Union: The Silence of the Church," America, March 1990, pp.315-316.
- Procidano, Mary, and Heller, Kenneth. "Measures of Perceived Social Support from Friends and from Family," American Journal of Community Psychology, Feb. 1983, pp.1-24.
- Proctor, Enola, and Davis, Larry. "The Challenge of Racial Difference: Skills for Clinical Practice." Social Work, 1994, pp. 315-321.
- Rapkin, Bruce and Stein, Catherine. "Defining Personal Networks: The Effect of Delineation Instructions on Network Structure and Stability," American Journal of Community Psychology, April, 1989, p.259.
- Raub, Werner and Weesei, Jeroen. "Reputation and Efficiency in Social Interactions: An Example of Network Effects," The American Journal of Sociology, 1990, pp.626-654.

- Robinson, Robert L. "Robert L. Robinson: Black and Catholic," America, March 29, 1980, pp.257-259.
- Rohner, M. Ingeborg, OSF. "Answering the Call of Christ," Review For Religious, July/August 1985, p.487.
- Rook, Karen S. "The Negative Side of Social Interaction: Impact on Psychological Well-being," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1984, pp.1097-1108.
- Rosen, Leora, and Moghadadam, Linda. "Can Social Supports Be Engineered? An Example from the Army's Unit Manning System," Journal of Applied Social Psychology, Nov. 1989, p.1292.
- Rowe, Cyprian. "Brother Cyprian Rowe: Black and Catholic," America, March 29, 1980, pp.262-264.
- Sarason, B., Shearin, E., Pierce, G., and Sarason, I. "Interrelationships of Social Support Measures," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1987, pp.813-832.
- Sarason, J.G., Levine, H.M., Bosham, R.B., and Sarason, B.R. "Assessing Social Support," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1983, pp.127-139.
- Sherman, Sarah Marie. "Fewer Vocations: Crisis or Challenge," New Catholic World, Jan.-Feb. 1989, pp. 29-35.
- Shinn, M. Lehmann, S. and Wong, N. "Social Interaction and Social Support," Journal of Social Issues, 1984, pp.55-76.
- Shumaker, Sally and Brownell, Arlene. "Toward a Theory of Social Support: Closing Conceptual Gaps," Journal of Social Issues, 1984, pp.11-36.
- Sisters of St. Dominic of Amityville. "Executive Board Notes," Feb. 11, 1992, unpublished.
- Sleeper, Jim. "The Resegregation of America: Promise and the Underclass," Commonweal, 1987, p.619.
- Smith, Karen. "Test Your Racism Quotient," U.S. Catholic, March 1984, p.32.
- Smith, Vern. "Seeing Through Black Eyes," Newsweek, Mar. 7, 1988, p.26.
- Sokolovsky, J. and Cohen, Carl. "Toward a Resolution of Methodological Dilemmas in Network Mapping," Schizophrenia Bulletin, 1981, pp.109-116.

- Steward, D, and Vaux, A. "Social Support Resources, Behavior and Perceptions Among Black and White College Students," Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development, 1986, pp.65-72.
- Stokes, Joseph. "Predicting Satisfaction with Support from Social Network Structure," American Journal of Community Psychology 1983, pp.141-152.
- Tardy, Charles. "Social Support Measurement," American Journal of Community Psychology, 1985, p.187.
- Taylor, R.J. "Structural Determinants of Religious Participation Among Black Americans," Review of Religious Research, 1988, pp.114-125.
- Taylor, R.J. and Chatters, L.M. "Church Members as a Source of Informal Social Support," Review of Religious Research, 1988, pp.193-203.
- Thoits, Peggy. "Conceptual, Methodological and Theoretical Problems in the Study of Social Supports as a Buffer Against Life Stress," Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 1982, pp.145-159.
- Thoits, Peggy. "Social Supports as a Coping Assistance," Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 1986, pp.416-423.
- Thompson, Francesca OSF. "Sister Francesca Thompson, OSF.: Black and Catholic," America, March 1980, p.260.
- Tickamyer, Ann and Blee, Kathleen M. "The Racial Convergence Thesis in Women's Intergenerational Occupational Mobility," Social Science Quarterly, Dec. 1990, p.711.
- Turner, Renee. "The First Woman Episcopal Bishop: Elevation of Christian Social Activist Barbara C. Harris Causes a Religious Stir," Ebony, May 1989, p.40.
- Tracey, E.M., and Whittaker, J.K. "The Social Network Map: Assessing Social Support in Clinical Practice," Families in Society, Oct.1990, pp.461-470.
- Uehara, Edwina. "Dual Exchange Theory, Social Networks and Informal Social Support," The American Journal of Sociology, Nov. 1990, pp.521-527.
- Unsworth, Tim. "How Five Ethnic Parishes Celebrate a Tailor Made Faith," U.S. Catholic, Dec. 1988, p.23-30.

- Vaux, Alan and Harrison, Deborah. "Support Network Characteristics Associated with Support Satisfaction and Perceived Support," American Journal of Community Psychology, V. 13, 1985, p.245.
- Vaux, Alan. "Let's Hang Up and Try Again: Lessons Learned From a Social Support Intervention," American Journal of Community Psychology, 1991, p.85.
- Vaux, Alan, Phillips, Jeffrey, Holly, Lori, Thompson, Brian, Williams, Diedre, and Stewart, Doreen. "The Social Support Appraisals (SS-A) Scale: Studies in Reliability and Validity," American Journal of Community Psychology, 1986, p.195.
- Weind, Teresita. "Racism: Will We Ever Overcome?" U.S. Catholic, March 1983, pp.24-29.
- Wellman, Barry and Wortley, Scott. "Different Strokes from Different Folks: Community Ties and Social Support," The American Journal of Sociology, Nov. 1990, pp.558-588.
- Wellman, Barry. "The Community Question," The American Journal of Sociology, 1979, pp.1201-1231.
- Wellman, Barry. "Networks as Personal Communities," in Wellman and Berkowitz, eds. Social Structures: A Network Approach. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.
- Wethington, E. and Kessler, R.C. "Perceived Support, Received Support and Adjustment to Stressful Life Events," Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 1986, pp. 78-89.
- Wilcox, Brian. "Social Support and Psychological Adjustment: A Test of the Buffering Hypothesis," American Journal of Community Psychology, Aug. 1981, pp.371-386.
- Williams, Audrey. "Research on Black Women College Administrators: Descriptive and Interview Data," Sex Roles: A Journal of Research, July 1989, p. 99ff.
- Williamson, Chilton. "Ethnic Conflicts Abroad: Clues to America's Future," National Review, April 1989, p.48.
- Wills, Thomas Ashby. "Supportive Functions of Interpersonal Relationships," in Cohen and Syme, eds. Social Support and Health. New York: Academic Press, 1985.
- Wilmore, G. "The New Need for Intergroup Coalition," The Christian Century, Feb. 17, 1982, pp.170-174.

Wilson, Melvin, and Tolson, Timothy. "Familial Support in the Black Community," Journal of Clinical Child Psychology, Dec. 1990, pp.347-358.

Wilson, Reginald. "Women of Color in Academic Administration," Sex Roles: Journal of Research, July 1989, pp.85-98.

Windsor, Pat. "LCWR Tackles Racism in Communities, Society," National Catholic Reporter, Sept.9, 1988, p.20.

Woodward, Kenneth. "Reckoning with a Racist World," Newsweek, Feb. 20, 1989, p.50.