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# PORTRAITS OF FOUR AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN WHO EARNED DOCTORAL DEGREES FROM A PREDOMINATELY WHITE INSTITUTION

Sherry M. Coleman Hunter

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DePaul University  
College of Education

PORTRAITS OF FOUR AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN WHO EARNED  
DOCTORAL DEGREES FROM A PREDOMINATELY WHITE INSTITUTION

A Dissertation in Education  
with a Concentration in Educational Leadership

by

Sherry M. Coleman Hunter

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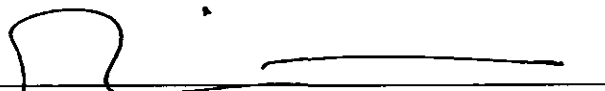
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

June 2014

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## **Abstract**

Within the African-American (AA) community, higher education is one of the ultimate gifts that could lead to success and a bright future. This qualitative study explored the experiences of four AA women who earned doctoral degrees in educational leadership from a predominately White institution (PWI). The research questions guiding this study were framed to learn the following:

1. the experiences of AA women who obtained doctorates at a PWI,
2. the factors the four interviewees perceived as contributing to the successful completion of their doctorate,
3. the elements that facilitated their degree progression,
4. the factors that inhibited their degree progression.

Critical race theory (CRT) and Black feminist theory (BFT) provided the conceptual framework for exploring and analyzing the experiences of the four AA women.

The data was collected using a qualitative methodology that consisted of open-ended, semi-structured questions and face-to-face interviews with the four AA women. Four emergent themes were derived from this study: 1. peer support, 2. institutional culture, 3. isolation, and 4. racism. Peer-support and favor from professors were factors that facilitated the four women's degree progress, while the institutional culture, isolation, and racism were factors that inhibited the degree progress for two of the four AA women in this study. By detailing the counter-stories of AA women's experience in higher education, I learned how some of the women were in pain and remained silent when they needed support while they earned their doctorates because of racism.

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## **Dedications**

My dissertation is dedicated to the two loves of my life, my two beautiful and fierce daughters, Genesis Marie, and Geniya Marie. These two angels from above have encouraged me with their laughter, love, and smiles. It is my hope and prayer that when they read “Mommy Doctor’s” dissertation, they will be encouraged to walk in the path of their mother, earn their doctoral degrees, and become servant leaders in the world.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Black women in higher education are isolated, underutilized and often demoralized. They note the efforts made to provide equal opportunities for [B]lack men and [W]hite women in higher education, while they somehow are left behind in the work of both the Black and feminist movement. (Carroll, 1982, p. 115)

The quote above describes the overall experiences of two of the four interviewees' perception while they attended a predominately White institution (PWI) and earned their doctoral degrees. Three out of the four participants described some experiences at their respective universities as being isolated. While being somewhat polarized, they were still able to overcome this challenge and others, and graduate with their doctoral degrees. I will elaborate on the topic of isolation in Chapter Four.

Moreover, this dissertation explored the experiences of African-American (AA)<sup>1</sup> women in higher education. I examined the factors that the four AA participants perceived contributed to the successful completion of their doctorates. I sought to understand their perceptions of the elements that made persistence difficult. For the qualitative study, I interviewed four AA women who earned doctorates from a PWI and discovered what support they had in the doctoral program that led them to complete their degrees. As an AA education doctoral student, I come to the study with an insider's perspective. Gildersleeve, Croom, and Vasquez (2011) argue PWIs can be dehumanizing for students of color. The authors argue that peer support allows AA students to affirm

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<sup>1</sup> The terms African-Americans and Blacks will be used interchangeably in this study.

one another and form support groups while confronting these experiences. With this being said, I explored the nuances that four AA women experienced in a doctoral program at a PWI and found out if they received support from one another and others.

Within the AA community, higher education has been touted as one of the ultimate gifts, which can only lead to success and a bright future (Coker, 2003; bell hooks, 1993). Historically, African-Americans viewed education as a method to excel and obtain better opportunities and better paying jobs (Zamani, 2004). Even though African-Americans value higher education and enter it, many do not graduate. Cleveland (2004) postulates that AA graduate students face myriad issues while pursuing graduate degrees, such as isolation, hurdles, and unfavorable environments. There are various reasons why AA students do not graduate. They range from the lack of financial aid to a dearth of academic support. Colleges and universities have struggled to retain AA graduate students and to help them graduate (Coker, 2003).

Some scholars suggest that the reason for the retention difficulties is that AA graduate students experience emotional disconnections between campus environments and their personal lived experiences (Brown, 1997; Coker, 2003; Watt, 2006). While some colleges and universities have created and implemented an array of programs and services, the AA students' disconnection is still prevalent, especially at PWIs. Researchers have confirmed that institutions of higher learning still remain largely unsupportive of AA students, specifically AA female college students (Coker, 2003). Williams and Evans-Winters (2005) argue that the ways in which AA students are supported must change on college campuses. Regardless of the lack of support, AA students' enrollment in college has increased by 80% over the last two decades.

According to Fleming (1984), more AA women are enrolled in colleges and universities than ever before, and approximately 80% of these female students attend PWIs. The women who attend PWIs experience more emotional and social stress than their counterparts who attend historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Thus, one of the issues raised is how AA women should navigate the academic terrain at PWIs and graduate, despite the reality of emotional and social stressors. The topic of navigating the academic terrain will be discussed further in Chapter Four.

I am interested in this topic because I am an AA woman who had to navigate the educational system in order to succeed in college and graduate school. My college and graduate school life shaped my lens for this study. In graduate school, I had to find support systems at a PWi. Moreover, I am from a single parent household and my mother did not attend college. I am also the first one among my three siblings to attend and graduate college. In the formative years of my education, I attended schools and universities where the majority of the students and teachers were AA.

However, for my doctoral studies, I chose to attend a PWi. I wanted to be a more well-rounded individual and gain more opportunities and interactions with other people other than AA students and professors. While I attended a PWi, not only was I able to attend school with a diverse student body, I was also confronted with racism, isolation, and a lack of support. Within my home, the population was comprised of only African-Americans. Since the world is composed of other ethnicities besides AA, I knew I wanted the experience of working with other ethnicities. Therefore, I made sure I was able to go to school and work at companies with other people besides AA.

Next, I will discuss my position and how my position connects with my study.

## **My Position**

When I attended the doctoral program, in addition to experiencing cultural shock, I was involved in subtle racial situations where I second-guessed myself as an AA woman and an AA student at a prestigious PWI. One example occurred with a White professor on Jetson University's (JU) campus. After some of the students, mostly White, raved about the assistance and positive feedback from this professor; I decided to schedule a meeting with him to find out if there was a possibility for him to be on my dissertation committee. The professor agreed to meet with me to discuss my dissertation project. During our meeting, the professor vehemently told me that based upon my work experience I was not ready to partake in the commitment and rigor of a doctoral program. He urged me to think of another less intense topic that would not be so hard for me. This professor did not know anything about my work experience or the recognitions I had received in higher education as an administrator and community leader prior to coming to JU. I was appalled, discouraged, and hurt by the professor's comments. I did not know what to do.

Moreover, he abruptly concluded our meeting and told me to come to the copier with him, so he could copy some documents he thought would be helpful to me. I accompanied him to the copier in the next office suite. After he made the copies, he rushed back to his office and I did not go with him. I was not told or asked to go back to the office with him. I assumed that he forgot to bring some papers from the office. My assumption was not correct. I waited in the hallway for him for approximately ten minutes. After waiting for some time, I decided to call him and he said he did not recall that we met. I felt invisible, isolated, and hurt, not only for being left in the hallway, but



also having a sense that I did not matter.

A second example I encountered was in a class. I was one of the three AA students in the class. Before the class started, a few White students, two AA students, and I coalesced and got acquainted. One of the White students turned to me and asked me how I got to Jetson. I was surprised and replied that I drove to school. After being embarrassed by the question, the same White student said, “No, I mean, how did you get to be a student at Jetson?” I replied, “I applied and underwent the same application process you did.” The White student was shocked and flabbergasted to know that I was accepted into JU on my own merit and credentials not because of Affirmative Action. This experience is called a microaggression. According to Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, and Esquillen, (2007), “microaggressions are commonplace verbal or behavioral indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults” (p. 278). For the majority of the time I was in the doctoral program, I suppressed my feelings and was constantly in pain because I felt as though my feelings were not valid and important, especially since the majority of my peers and professors were White.

I thought the White professors and students were superior to me because I had been taught that as a child. I was taught early that I should not question White people because they will always be right. My upbringing stems from my mother, who was raised in the south in 1950 where she was also taught not to question White people for the same reason: they would always be right. However, through my academic journey, learning about critical race theory and other research regarding race and race factors, I now know that I should not suppress my hunches. My feelings and thoughts are real and valid, and

have contributed to my overall experience as a doctoral student at a PWI. I will discuss more about my experiences later, in chapters four and five.

Besides my initial experience with racism in the doctoral program, I brought my experiences as a first-generation college student to my work at Jetson. When I started undergraduate college, I was inundated with the formality of the experience: completing financial aid forms and deciding what college to attend, which classes to take, and what academic major to choose. It was quite a frustrating process for me. However, with time, diligence and support systems such as mentors, faculty members, peers, church, family, and advisors, I was able to find female and male professors and college administrators who helped me navigate the educational system to persist and graduate from college with both a bachelor's and a master's degree. These successful individuals assisted me in navigating the college process. Specifically, the AA women who helped me were first-generation college students and their stories were similar to mine.

They, too, had the experience of navigating the college system and being first-generation students in their families. I was relieved and had a better outlook on my life because I had role models who helped steer me in the right direction and offered various kinds of support when I needed it. According to London (1989) and Levine and Nidiffer (1996), first-generation students are defined as students who are the first members of their families to attend college. First-generation students are also defined as those from families where neither parent attained any education beyond high school. The National Center of Education Statistics reported in 2005 that 43.3% of all college students were first-generation students. Of the 43.4% of all first-generation students, 9% are AA.

Additionally, in undergraduate college, I connected with AA professors who took

me under their wings and encouraged me to be successful and dream bigger dreams regardless of the unpleasant experiences I encountered with White people. From the AA professors' guidance and words of wisdom, I knew that the negativity I experienced was not my reality and discouragement was not part of my destiny. It was not as if my mother did not care about my college experience or my future. However, my mother did not know anything about the higher education system that could have helped me since she only had a high school education. It is within the context of my review of the literature and my personal experiences that I interviewed four AA women doctoral students and examined their experiences at a PWI.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this dissertation was to explore how AA women earned doctorates from PWIs. I also discussed the factors that facilitated and those that inhibited their degree progression. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2012), 65.2% of all AA with conferred doctoral degrees were AA women. Only 7.4% of all doctoral degrees are awarded to AA women. As part of the examination, the study focused on the role that various formal or informal support systems have played in the AA women's academic experiences while attending a PWI. I examined whether AA women who earned doctorates at PWIs have challenges. Additionally, I wanted to determine if these former doctoral students perceived formal support systems or the lack thereof as contributing to or hindering to their degree completion.

### **Problem Statement**

There is a lack of resources and support for AA students in graduate higher

education. Specifically, some AA female graduate students have difficulties navigating the academic terrain and graduating. According to Gildersleeve, Croom, and Vasquez (2011), the culture of doctoral programs can isolate African-Americans and make them feel unwelcome. Historically, African-Americans viewed education as a vehicle to excel and obtain better opportunities and better paying jobs (Zamani, 2004). There is limited research on support for AA women who earn doctoral degrees from PWIs (Hinderlie & Kenny, 2002). According to Schwartz, Bower, et al. (2003), retention, institutional culture, and a lack of financial aid are some of the problems AA women doctoral students confront at PWIs.

Doctoral education can be dehumanizing for Black doctoral students (Gay, 2004; Nettles, 1990; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Black students must encounter a socialization process that has the potential to push them out of doctoral education. According to Gildersleeve et al. (2011), some students of color encounter racial subtleties in doctoral programs, such as microaggressions. In an effort to navigate and endure the unwelcoming and isolated environments at PWIs, Matias (2012) contends in order to survive the repressed White violence, students of color are merely “playing along” to become “masters of deflection” (p. 151). Students of color become masters of deflection so they can maintain a sense of “safety in [these] violence circumstances” (p. 151). The emotional cost is exemplified through tears and pain.

### **Research Questions**

The research question that guided this study: What was the experience of AA women who obtained doctoral degrees at a PWI? Along with this research question, the

following sub-questions were also examined:

1. What factors do the four interviewees perceive as contributing to the successful completion of their doctorate?
2. What elements facilitated their degree progress?
3. What elements inhibited their degree progress?

### **Significance of Study**

The increasing number of AA women enrolled in higher education is simultaneously inspiring and discouraging. The number of AA women who are graduating from colleges and graduate and professional schools is constantly increasing. For example between 1976 and 2005, the number of AA women entering undergraduate colleges and universities increased from 512,000 to 1,257,000 (NCES, 2008). From 1976 to 2005, AA women enrolled in graduate schools increased from 46,500 to 166,400, a 257.89% increase during that same 29-year span. The number of AA women enrolled in professional schools (e.g., medical and law schools) rose from 3,900 in 1976 to 16,200 in 2005 (NCES). Moreover, in NCES's fall 2007, it was reported that a total of 37,862 African-Americans earned full professor positions (NCES, 2009). These increases represent a major influx of AA women to higher education.

According to the NCES, between 2009 and 2010, there were a total of 275,197 males who earned master's degrees. Of the 275,197 males, 170,203 (61%) were White, 46,399 (17%) were non-resident and alien, 22,120 (8%) were Black, 19,535 (7%) were Asian and Pacific Islanders, 15,525 (6%) were Hispanic,, and 1,415 (1%) were American Indian and Alaska Native. Conversely, there were a total of 417, 828 females who earned

master's degrees. Of the 417,828 females, 274,835 (66%) were White, 54,338 (13%) were Black, 34,933 (8%) were non-resident and alien, 28,010 (6.5%) were Hispanic, 23,167 (5.5%) were Asian and Pacific Islanders, 2,545 (1%) were American Indian and Alaskan Native. Moreover, on the doctorate level, there were 76,605 males who earned doctoral degrees. Of the 76,605 males, 50,705 (66%) were White, 10,977 (14.5%) were non-resident and alien, 7,230 (9%) were Asian and Pacific Islanders, 3,641 (4.7%) were Hispanic, 3,622 (4.7%) were Black, 430 (.56%) were American Indian and Alaska Native. In addition, there were a total of 81,953 females who earned doctorates. Of the 81,953 females, 53,721 (66%) were White, 9,395 (11.5%) were Asian and Pacific Islanders, 7,076 (8.5%) females were non-resident and alien, 6,795 (8%) were Black, 4,444 (5.5%) were Hispanic, and the remaining 522 (.63%) were American Indian and Alaska Native. The following four tables illustrate the percentages of males and females who earned master's graduates, as well as males and females who earned doctoral degrees according to the National Center for Education Statistics 2009-2010.

Table 1: Males Graduating with a Master's Degree, 2009-2010

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Number of Graduates</b>	<b>Percentages</b>
White	170,203	61%
Non-resident and Alien	46,399	17%
Black	22,120	8%
Asian/Pacific Islanders	19,535	7%
Hispanic	15,525	6%
American Indian and Alaskan Native	1,415	1%
Total	275,197	

Table 2: Females Graduating with a Master's Degree, 2009-2010

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Number of Graduates</b>	<b>Percentages</b>
White	274,835	66%
Black	54,338	13%
Non-resident and Alien	34,933	8%
Hispanic	28,010	6.5%
Asian/Pacific Islanders	23,167	5.5%
American Indian and Alaskan Native	2,545	1%
Total	417,828	

Table 3: Males Graduating with a Doctoral Degree, 2009-2010

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Number of Graduates</b>	<b>Percentages</b>
White	50,705	66%
Non-resident and Alien	10,977	14.5%
Asian/Pacific Islanders	7,230	9%
Hispanic	3,641	4.7%
Black	3,622	4.7%
American Indian and Alaskan Native	430	0.56%
Total	76,605	

Table 4: Females Graduating with a Doctoral Degree, 2009-2010

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Number of Graduates</b>	<b>Percentages</b>
White	53,721	66%
Asian/Pacific Islanders	9,395	11.5%
Non-resident & Alien	7,076	8.5%
Black	6,795	8%
Hispanic	4,444	5.5%
American Indian & Alaskan Native	522	0.63%
Total	81,953	



While the significant increases of AA women are inspirational and impressive, many of the AA students need social support for college success at both undergraduate and graduate levels, AA female students in particular (Hinderlie & Kenny, 2002; Willie, 2003). Specifically, in the study, Nettles (1990) debated “improving their inferior undergraduate preparation and providing more teaching and research assistantships in order to reduce their reliance upon personal resources to support their graduate education can aide to help them succeed in doctoral programs” (p. 516). Role models are a major influence on the number of Black women who attend doctoral programs.

According to Hall and Post-Krammer (1987), “African Americans tend to select occupations in which they have had contact with a successful role model” (p. 293). Issues of isolation have been reported to cause AA students to leave doctoral programs (Jackson, 2004). In addition to being isolated, many women believe they were ignored in academic settings because of their gender and race. Between 2008 and 2009, a total of 103,142 AA women earned bachelor’s degrees (NCES, 2012) as compared to their AA male counterparts, who earned a total of 53,473 bachelor’s degrees (NCES, 2012). Having social support systems is important to AA women, in particular, who are studying at PWIs. Moreover, Matias (2012) argues that people of color experience pain at PWIs, and it is part of the humanization process. She further postulates that the pain transforms how pain is understood. Hooks (1995) elaborates on the humanization process by arguing that people of color must “begin to collectively name and confront this suffering in ways that are constructively healing” (p. 144).

In addition, in examining their lived experiences, I listened to the AA women’s voices and their counterstories in this study and found out how they navigated the

academic terrain at a PWI. The study also identified and expressed the concerns that the participants confronted at a PWI as doctoral students. Moreover, most of the existing body of literature discusses the challenges that AA women encounter at institutions of higher education (IHE). This study is different because I incorporated my own counter-story and my four AA women participants, which is part of the critical race theory framework. Hence, this framework relates to being AA women who attended a PWI.

There is a body of research on support systems for AA undergraduate students that identifies important social and academic intervention variables that contribute to retention and graduation for AA undergraduates. In the absence of AA role models among staff and faculty members at IHEs, research has indicated that AA undergraduate students depend on other sources of social support (Willie, 2003). Some examples of other support systems include family (Hinderlie & Kenny, 2002; Barnett, 2004) and the Black community (Brown, 2008). However, there is little existing research about AA women's support systems in doctoral programs at PWIs.

### **Historical Overview of Women's Education**

Before the twentieth century, women in the United States did not have the right to vote. The education of women was not a priority. Other challenges occurred with girls having a equal access to education and public funds. At the end of the twentieth century, it was evident that women and girls' education was a worldwide issue that needed to be addressed (Slaughter-Defoe, Addae, & Bell, 2002). Moreover, during the colonial period, many schools were closed to girls who wanted to learn; the home was considered the learning place for young women. The home served as the girls' classroom and was where

these young women were taught practical domestic skills for their expected role as wife and mother (Owens & Love, 2003). Education became a tool that reinforced the dominant society's race, class hierarchy, and gender roles, since equal educational opportunity was not offered for children, youth, and adults of all races and ethnicities (Owens & Love, 2003).

Historically at PWIs, many AA female students experience racism in the form of microaggressions and racial invisibility (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Doane and Bonilla-Silva (2003) argue that in order to understand the complexities students of color are facing, society needs to dismantle the systems of White privilege and how it is manifested in everyday life. The Brown decision of 1954 (347 U.S. 483) created opportunities for racial equity, but gender inequities for girls and women continued. Toward the last third of the twentieth century, education for women changed toward the guarantee of equality with the passage of new federal legislation. While the debates for educational equality are not violent today, the challenges are just as intense for many AA (Ellis, 2001).

In 1972, the U.S. Department of Education enacted Title IX protects people from discrimination based on sex in education programs or activities that receive federal financial assistance. Title IX also states no person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance. Since this amendment was instituted, it has benefitted millions of women who attend or have attended colleges and universities. Specifically, women are now in sports, employment, and education fields. It has been over forty years since the enactment of Title IX and now

women are able to receive financial assistance for college and are allowed to serve as coaches on athletic teams in colleges and universities (NCES, 1996). Besides federal legislation, which created opportunities for educational equality for women, there were parallel activities in social movements that benefitted women, specifically, various advocacy actions carried out by women themselves.

For example following the 1896 Supreme Court ruling on *Plessy v. Ferguson* (163 U.S. 537, 1896), which upheld the principle of separate but equal education and accommodations for Whites and African-American people, social action to pursue equity and justice continued. For AA women, the Civil Rights Movement was a continuation of their fight to promote equal opportunities. Rosa Parks refused to get up from a seat on a bus for a White person in Alabama. Parks was one of many AA women who had important roles in demonstrations, boycotts, acts of civil obedience, voting registration drives, and education of adults and children. (Crawford, Rouse, Woods, & Pierce, 1990). Additionally, AA women in the South formed the backbone of the Civil Rights Movement. They represented the social and moral conscience of the community. Not only were AA women instrumental with civil rights, they also played vital roles in the educational system.

Rosa Parks was one of the AA women trailblazers who laid the foundation for civil rights and education for the AA community. Fannie Lou Hamer was another AA woman who participated and led in the fight for civil rights in the political schema. While working for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and helping found the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, she worked with the poor and businesses, and helped establish childcare centers for low-income residents. Hamer also created the Head

Start program in her hometown of Montgomery County, Mississippi, and sued for desegregation of schools in the '70s (Nelson, 2003). These women are two examples of the powerful and active AA women who led the fight for education and civil rights for African-Americans (Hamer, Marable, & Mullings, 2000).

In the next section, I will expound on the historical overview of AA women's education.

### **Historical Overview of African-American Women's Education**

Broadly speaking, women's advocacy efforts are described as the Women's Movement, which affected all women in the United States. Before this broad-scaled Women's Movement during the '60s, there were many AA women who were instrumental in creating organizations tailored to their specific needs, such as the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW). Mary McLeod Bethune founded the NCNW in 1935. The goal of NCNW was to represent the national and international concerns of AA women. It also gave AA women the opportunity to achieve their goals for human rights and social justice through united and constructive action ([www.ncnw.org](http://www.ncnw.org)). While the women's movement was successful and made a huge impact on women's rights, there were still areas, such as education, that needed to be addressed. There were major accomplishments made as a result of the women's movement. Two important achievements were the creation of women's studies courses in adult and higher education and women receiving equal pay in the workforce (Thompson, 2011).

The Black feminist movement started in the 1970s. According to Collins (1991), "all Black women feminism centers around specifically the lived experiences of Black

women (p. 35).” Within the context of the Black feminist movement, several of the Black women identified themselves as being *womanists* as a way to incorporate their needs. In the 1990s, while there was an increase in AA students’ enrollment in PWIs, AA women were still underrepresented in the overall population of college students (Stiff-Williams, 2007). Today, while there are enrollment decreases in AA undergraduate female students at PWIs, there are prevalent issues that are similar for AA graduate students. According to Schwartz, Bower, Rice, and Washington (2003), retention, institutional culture, and lack of financial aid are some of the problems AA students are confronted with at PWIs.

### **Historical Overview of African-American Rights**

Historically, African-Americans have fought hard to obtain equal rights, from the right to vote to the right to access education. As evident in the landmark case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, in 1954 and the 1965 Higher Education Act, African-Americans have sought fair and equal education. *Brown v. Board of Education*, which was a consolidation of different cases involving similar legal issues, constituted the U.S. Supreme Court’s pronouncement that racially segregated schools provided unfit learning environments for AA children (347 U.S. 483).

According to Willie (2003), it was estimated that a total of 2,500 AA students graduated from White and Black colleges by the twentieth century. During the second part of the twentieth century, AA students migrated from rural to urban areas. AA students begin to enroll in PWIs in the 1960s. There has been much research on the experience of AA college students since the 1960s. This period was a significant turning point in the history of the United States, as the country tried to address and resolve

several social problems and through the war on poverty.

In 1964, former US President Lyndon B. Johnson declared war on poverty and made poverty a national concern by creating programs, such as Head Start and Medicaid. The war on poverty also led to passing the Economic Opportunity Act (Zarefsky, 1986). The Economic Opportunity Act is a piece of legislation to administer the application of federal funds that targeted poverty (Zarefsky, 1986). Further, one of the societal problems was the education of AA college students (Allen, 1992). By 1968, 80% of AA students graduated with bachelor's degrees from historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs).

By 1970, most public universities admitted AA undergraduate students on a regular basis even though they remained underrepresented in the national population (Willie, 2003). In the 1980s, PWIs experienced major decreases in grant funding and financial aid, and the financial shortage had a tremendous impact on the education and future of AA undergraduate students (Willie, 2003).

In the next section, presents the literature review for the research questions.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Necesitamos teorías [we need theories] that will rewrite history using race, class, gender, and ethnicity as categories of analysis, theories that cross borders, that blur boundaries—new kinds of theories with new theory methods. . . . We are articulating new positions in the “in between,” Borderland worlds of ethnic communities and academies . . . social issues such as race, class, and sexual difference are intertwined with narrative and poetic elements of a text, elements in which theory is embedded. In our mestizaje theories we create new categories for those of us left out or pushed out of existing ones (Anzaldúa, 1990, p. xxv-xxvi).

In Anzaldúa’s 1990 excerpt above she denotes how history and theories need to be written in an effort to include race, class, gender, and sexual differences to improve society. People of color’s voices were omitted from history and in society. Historically, the voices of African-American women in educational systems, specifically in graduate schools, have been silenced and unimportant. Based on Anzaldúa’s argument above, it is imperative to capture the voices of people of color so that their experiences can become part of mainstream society. In this section, I will discuss the factors that contribute to AA women in graduate school.

There are many factors that contribute to the success of AA women in graduate school. From mentoring to social support, these factors have allowed women to persevere, go to college, and graduate from colleges and universities. In this research study, I discussed other factors, various forms of social support and elements that lead to the overall success in college for AA female students. Moreover, the historical perspective of AA girls and women, as it relates to their education, is discussed. I



discussed the implications of this dissertation paper for AA women who attend PWIs as doctoral students and the need to conduct further research on the topic.

### **AA Students at PWIs**

Since the 1970s, many AA students have attended colleges and universities. Existing research confirms that many AA students are confronted with isolation, loneliness, insensitivity, and discrimination in colleges and universities (Johnson-Bailey, Valentine, Cervero, & Bowles, 2008). Gloria, Kurpius, Hamilton, and Wilson (1999) and Gusa (2010) argue that AA students view predominantly White institutions they attend as being more negative than White peers. Gusa expounds on these issues and further argued that chilly climates at PWIs affect the development and learning of students of color, as well as their connection to the institution. Solorzano and Delgado (2000) argue that students of color experience microaggressions at PWIs. The microaggressions are subtle remarks and insults that are told to people of color.

Gusa further contends that the hostile and chilly climates at PWIs are what she classifies as White institutional presence (WIP). The WIP construct has four characteristics: monoculturalism, White blindness, White ascendancy, and White estrangement. Monoculturalism is the understanding that there is only one scholarly viewpoint and that is White culture. White blindness is an attribute that protects White privilege and White identity. White ascendancy refers to the mindset and behaviors that emerge from White mainstream authority. This attribute stems from power and domination that historically comes from Whiteness. White estrangement is when Whites socially and physically isolate and distance themselves from people of color. As a

remedy, Gusa (2010) suggests that higher education institutions should implement diversity training and multicultural education courses, which would allow White students and educators to learn how to eradicate the WIP constructs. Moreover, Bonilla-Silva and Embrick (2006) dispute Blacks receive an inferior education compared to their White counterparts. Bonilla-Silva and Embrick (2006) argue that, “[W]hites, as a social collectivity, have developed a new, powerful, and effective racial ideology to account for the contemporary racial complexities, which is color-blind racism” (pp. 21-22). Based on Gusa, Bonilla-Silva, and Embrick’s arguments, it is evident attention needs to be given to remedy the various types of racism AA students receive while pursuing their college education and how AA students are perceived in the mainstream society.

Furthermore, AA students encounter high levels of overt racism at PWIs. Gloria, Kurpius, Hamilton, and Wilson (1999) debated that the culture of the academic institution, efficacy beliefs and social support are directly related to how and if AA students persist at PWIs. Moreover, Smith (2004) discusses *racial battle fatigue* as a person of color’s reaction to the troubled conditions that occur from dealing with racism on a daily basis. Racial battle fatigue is the mental, physical, and emotional response to racial microaggression: subtle, unconscious, layered, and spoken and unspoken insults directed at people of color based on race and other characteristics that cause unnecessary stress on Blacks and benefits White people (Smith, 2004).

According to the existing research, the prevalent tension and stress are major reasons why AA students do not succeed at PWIs. Smith (2004) further argued that having social support networks of academic mentors and friends would likely decrease AA students’ being uncomfortable in PWIs. Frequent informal and formal contact and

interaction with faculty and staff are critical to AA students' persistence and academic integration on White college campuses. Unfortunately, there is no research that has studied the relationships between the environmental comfort and climate of institutions and self-efficacy of students. In my study, I examined the environmental discomfort, isolation, and unwelcoming institutional culture, specifically for AA women in doctoral programs at a PWI.

Kuh and Whitt (1988) defined campus culture as a persistent pattern of norms, values, practices, beliefs, and assumptions that shaped the behavior of individuals and groups in a college or university and provided a frame of reference within which to interpret the meaning of events and actions on and off the campus. In their study, which was conducted at a large, predominately White, Southwestern state university, while 98% of the students are White, only 2% of the undergraduate students were African-American. The majority of the students in the study were female. This small sample of students does not represent the overall number of AA students who attend PWIs. More research needs to be conducted and a larger sample needs to be examined. The issue of race is extremely salient in this study. Another equally important discussion relates to the specific experience of AA women in higher education, which follows in the next section.

### **AA Women in Higher Education**

“African-American women may be confronted with challenges negotiating the college experience as a member of two de-valued groups and that negativity impacts their self-perception” (Watt, 2006, pp. 329-330). To cope with this situation, Collins (1998) claims that AA women have an *outside-within* or a *both/and* identity. Collins reports that “all

share some sense of a dual (or plural) identity developed through engagement with positioning within some kind of community, as well as being excluded from a community” (p. 5). Collins uses the term to also describe “the location of people who no longer belong to any one group,” as well as “social locations or border spaces occupied by groups of unequal power” (p. 5). In essence, Collins implies that AA women have had experiences that would be similar yet also different from their Black male and White female counterparts.

However, Watts (2006) found that womanist identity attitudes appeared to strongly influence how AA college women perceive their environment. This finding could indicate that race is a more salient identity for this population (Watts, 2006). As an AA doctoral student, I encountered some situations at my institution. I found it difficult to navigate the academic terrain at my PWI. For example, when I approached some of the White professors to seek guidance for class projects and assignments, I got the feeling that the White professors did not truly understand me as an AA woman. These experiences left me feeling misunderstood and left out of the academic space at my PWI.

While my study used Black feminist theory and critical race theory, I also used and discussed womanist. According to Parks, Carter, and Gushue (1996), *womanist identity attitudes* refers to “women achieve a more positive gender identity by abandoning societal stereotypes regarding womanhood and by adopting their own internal definitions of womanhood” (p. 631). Moreover, some research has concluded that at some PWIs, AA female college students encounter social isolation, cultural incongruity, racism, and adjustment issues (Fleming, 1984; Sedlacek, 1999; Constantine & Watt, 2002). Gloria, Kurpius, Hamilton, and Wilson (1999) posited that cultural

congruity was a good predictor of AA students' decision to remain in college.

Constantine and Watt (2002) conducted a study that examined cultural congruity, womanist identity attitudes, and life satisfaction of 165 AA women who attended HBCUs and PWIs. According to Gloria et al. (2001), cultural congruity is “the degree of value similarity with the university system” (p. 547). Cultural congruity is the fit between students' personal values and the values of the environment in which they function. In Constantine and Watt's (2002) findings, AA students at HBCUs reported higher levels of life satisfaction and cultural congruity than their White counterparts who attended PWIs. The findings from this study suggest that culture and environment are pertinent factors to understanding how AA students view colleges and universities.

Constantine and Watts also assert that, historically, AA female college students were less engaged socially than their male counterparts. According to Howard-Hamilton (2004), AA women tend to struggle academically and developmentally in colleges and universities, especially at PWIs. These challenges negatively impact their emotional and physical health. Of the two studies above that discuss AA women's challenges at PWIs, it is evident that the first study needs clarity as to how emotional and physical health have a direct correlation to women's academic studies. Although graduation and enrollment rates of AA women have increased, little attention has been given to what motivates AA women to earn a degree or achieve academic success at PWIs (Thomas, et al., 2009).

### **Support for AA College Students**

Most students need some form of support in college. Some students may require academic assistance, while other students may need social support (Tinto, 1999). Social

support is comprised of what he classified as college integration and support from friends and family (Tinto, 1993). Fleming (1984) argues that academic environments provide little or no support for AA students. Because social and personal isolation and lack of belonging seem to be central issues for many AA females' and males' satisfaction and success in PWIs, university administrators and professors should consider addressing these issues through appropriate plans and programs.

According to Sedlacek (1999), who writes about Black studies, "Blacks need a supportive group that can give them advice, counsel, and orientation to sustain them as they confront the larger often hostile systems they must negotiate" (p. 542). Social support can also affect students' academic persistence. The issues for AA students may be exacerbated when PWIs do not acknowledge that AA students need more support in order to graduate at their institutions. Colleges and universities have instituted programs and services that help AA students get acclimated to the college campuses. Even with the influx of programs and services, some AA students are still lagging behind and not receiving academic and social support needed to graduate.

There is some research that confirms that campus cultures at PWIs can be problematic for AA students because the cultures can be interpreted as unimportant, devaluating and excluding AA students (Museus, 2008). In order for AA students to feel a sense of belonging at PWIs, the environment must "validate, cultivate, and sustain the strengths and contributions of people of color" (O'Donnell & Green-Merritt, 1997, p. 15). According to Willie (2003) and Reddick (2006), the extent to which students feel connections and bonds with the environment, as well as established support and relationships with friends, determines the basis of success. Crisp and Cruz (2009) contend

that student success consists of social integration, grades, retention, and adjustment to college.

This kind of support includes mentoring, advising, and tutoring. Social support also includes the relationships between college friends and faculty members. Currently, there are many support programs, assistance, and services for college students. Some examples of the kinds of services and programs are academic advising, student government, student activities, and student clubs. According to Hirt, Amelink, et al. (2008), social support networks foster student persistence and allow students to become connected to the institution and faculty members. The authors further assert that in order to achieve greater satisfaction with the collegiate experience and promote student development and success, inclusive climates must be created through peer interaction. Moreover, social support for students is fostered when administrators and faculty serve as personal and professional advocates and take on parenting roles for students.

In Hirt, Amelink, et al. (2008), it was evident that administrators nurtured students with the othermothering theory in mind at HBCUs where they treated the students like family members. For example, some AA administrators invite AA students to their houses for dinner and other family events. In the study, the administrators at HBCUs were surveyed and stated that they believe when relationships are fostered with AA students, they create a support network for them as well. Here is a quote from one of the administrators who was a participant in the study:

Our kids . . . their needs are very simple. They don't come with a lot of attitude. Because a lot of them come from single-parent homes . . . and they're the first generation coming to college . . . they feel blessed being

here. And I'm blessed, I'm happy to be here. Because I went to a majority school so I know the other side. (Hirt, Amelink, et al., 2008, p. 221)

Moreover, Mallinckrodt and Leong (1992) argue that graduate students encounter many problems in graduate school. Some of the graduate students' challenges are psychological distress, psychological health problems, and lack of resources. The lack of resources includes, but is not limited to, financial aid. Existing literature confirms that social support has benefits on the psychological well-being of people. Mallinckrodt and Leong (1992) discussed two areas of social support, which are family environment and graduate programs. They also addressed how the two areas could prevent graduate students from being stressed and unproductive in college.

As evident in the research, when the institution supports students' lives, it affects the students' social and academic experiences (Nora, 2001). While Nora speculates that college students flourish in social and academic settings when they are supported, he did not consider the fact that financial support plays a major role in whether or not students persist in college. Lastly, while academic, financial, and social support may be critical to student success and graduation, one must also take into consideration the importance of familial support. In my study, I shed light on the importance of having familial and peer-support at PWIs. Familial support was essential to me and two of my participants in this study.

### **Familial Support for AA Female College Students**

There has been an ongoing debate as to whether having family support hinders or helps AA women to be successful in college. Guiffrida (2005b) states that other research



has challenged the belief that friends and family relationships may stymie students' college matriculation and found, instead, that family support is a strong predictor of AA student success in college. According to Winkle-Wagner (2009), family support is vital to the success of AA female students and allows them to graduate from colleges and universities. On the contrary, Sax (2008) asserts that AA women, more so than men, must dissolve all family ties in order to be successful in college. In support of Sax's (2008) assertion, Tinto (1993) argues,

[Students] too must separate themselves, to some degree, from past associations in order to make the transition and eventual incorporation in the life of the students. In a very real sense, a person's ability to leave one setting, whether physical, social, or intellectual may be a necessary condition for subsequent persistence in another setting. (p. 96)

Although both arguments could be valid, AA women are still at a crossroads as they try to decipher whether to sever or retain familial ties while attending college.

Another kind of support that is used within the AA community is fictive kinship.

Fordham (1988) defines fictive kin as "a cultural symbol of collective identity among Black Americans, and is based on more than just skin color" (p. 56). Many scholars have critiqued Tinto's (1999) argument regarding familial ties. For example, Tierney (2000) refuted Tinto's (1999) argument and stated his claim that familial ties, historically, only gave privileges to those with White, heterosexual, upper-middle-class, Protestant backgrounds. Tinto failed to include AA women in his argument. Since this problem is prevalent, concurrent tensions and strife constantly occur among these AA female students regarding familial ties.

There are two strands stemming from this area of support for AA women who

attend PWIs. One diverging strand argues that in order to assimilate culturally, these students must cut off family ties. The other strand posits that, to be successful in college, AA female students need their families. More research needs to be conducted in order to obtain a better understanding of this issue. Therefore, this study will direct some attention to this variable in graduate school success. Another form of support is called othermothering, which will be discussed in the next section.

### **Othermothering**

While there are support systems that guide and help AA women graduate from PWIs, there are other forms of support that could help them succeed in graduate school, such as othermothering. Troester (1984) coined the word *othermothers*. She states that othermothers are grandmothers, cousins, and aunts who were kin to the bloodmothers. The othermothers would live and have lifestyles different than the lives of the biological mothers. Originally, othermothers provided safety nets and served as sounding boards to the daughters of the bloodmothers. In some cases, birthmothers had to be strict and direct, while othermothers were tender and affectionate towards non-birth daughters. When issues such as racism and sexism in White America, birthmothers would shield their daughters and be overprotective while raising them.

Often, there have been emotional distances between mothers and their daughters. Troester (1984) argues that othermothers were able to give their daughters gifts that the birth mothers could not provide. Furthermore, in her article, she showcases a young lady who had three different types of othermothers in her life. Each othermother had strengths, characteristics, and flaws that the young girl learned were valuable tools she used in her

life. Troester further argues that Black mothers were aware of the social, yet detrimental, constructs within the communities and found ways to protect their daughters from these obstacles. Even though the mothers did their best to be protective, sometimes they would be overprotective, and the daughters would be isolated from the world rather than develop a closer relationship with their daughters. Over time, the term othermothers and how they are used have taken on a new role, particularly in the education field.

In lieu of traditional mentoring relationships that are often instituted in educational literature, othermothering goes beyond the call of duty for AA students and provides them maternal guidance and nurturing. Collins (2000) defines othermothering as the process where women help blood mothers by sharing the mothering responsibilities. Othermothering was used when bloodmothers were too poor to raise their children or were not prepared to care for them. Othermothering permitted Black women to socialize and teach children in their own cultures in order to improve the Black community (Guiffrida, 2005b). Even though slavery ended, othermothering is still prevalent today and has a positive impact on the role of AA teachers and students. Guiffrida (2005) attests that some othermothering is prevalent in the work of successful AA educators in elementary and secondary schools. The othermothering concept applies to the higher education field. In Guiffrida's article (2005), he examined how othermothering was used as a way to enhance AA students' relationships with faculty members at PWIs.

AA women in the community see themselves as valuable assets to children. Some of them serve as othermothers to the children by babysitting, picking up report cards, and disciplining children. Collins (2000) contends that some AA women also view themselves and are labeled within their communities as othermothers. Collins (2000)

defines othermothers as women who serve as advocates for the Black community by articulating and illustrating an ethic of care and accountability on a personal level. By exemplifying themselves as othermothers, they embrace conceptions of mutuality and transformative power. Throughout the years, AA women have brought the practice of othermothering into the educational system. They use othermothering as a tool to help, nurture, and educate AA students in school.

In the next section, I will elaborate on othermothering, specifically, community othermothering.

### **Community Othermothering in the Educational System**

Community othermothering is defined as AA women's maternal assistance given to children of bloodmothers within the AA community (Collins, 2000). According to Collins (2000), "community othermothers tradition also explains the 'mothering the mind' relationships that can develop between AA women teachers and their Black female and male students" (p. 191). The "mothering the mind" concept among AA women aims to move toward a notion of a common sisterhood that connects AA women as community othermothers. The term othermothering comes from slavery and also refers to a survival mechanism that served as a way for cultural and educational transmission (Collins, 2000). Othermothering traditionally occurs within the urban elementary school setting.

### **Support for AA Women at PWIs**

According to Sims (2008), many AA female students feel isolated, excluded, intimidated, and lack confidence on predominately White college campuses. Coker (2003) concurs with the notion of AA female students feeling isolated by mentioning

Carroll's (1982) quote in her article: "Black women in higher education are isolated, underutilized and often demoralized. They note the efforts of [B]lack men and [W]hite women in higher education, while they somehow are left behind in the work of both the [B]lack and feminist movement" (p. 184).

While there is a lot of literature that confirms that AA female students excel and achieve more with support systems, Sims (2008) argues differently. He contends that AA college students can persist and excel in college without formal or informal support systems and social connections. However, Sims states that without the proper support and resources, many students resort to inappropriate behaviors if their needs are not addressed on White campuses, and some of them eventually drop out of college. The retention rate among AA graduate students is significantly lower than the same students in undergraduate school. In the 1980s, while there was a decrease in AA graduate students' enrollment at PWIs, students were approximately 5% of total graduate school enrollment (Johnson-Bailey et al. 2008).

Moreover, while looking at the current trends in AA participation in graduate study, it became apparent that more women than men enroll in graduate studies (NCES, 2001). Of those women in graduate school, the largest proportion pursue graduate degrees in education. By gaining a better understanding of the experiences of current students, it is hoped that inherent barriers and obstacles to graduate study might be mitigated, and in turn, more AA students will be encouraged to pursue graduate study in the future (NCES, 2001). AA graduate students who attend PWIs often do not have the support they need in order to excel at these respective institutions. Othermothering is another form of support that can be used to address the expectations, unique needs, and

experiences of those AA students who attend PWIs (Guiffrida, 2005). While there are a number of formal support programs for graduate students, othermothering remains an important support system alongside formal and informal mentoring for AA students.

The role of mentoring to support is discussed in the next section.

## **Mentoring**

Existing literature states that mentoring is one way for students, specifically students of color, to persist and graduate from PWIs. The term “mentor” has been used for more than three thousand years and has its origins in Greek mythology. It originated in Homer’s poem, *The Odyssey*, as Odysseus was prepared to go to battle in the Trojan War (Campbell & Campbell, 2000). Current literature suggests AA students who attend HBCUs are more successful than AA students who attend PWIs (Reddick, 2006). He further argues that PWIs could learn valuable tools from HBCUs that will help in the development and success of AA students.

Some of the best tools include being humble in their interactions with students, having nurturing environments, and connecting with students’ lives and cultures outside of classrooms. Here is an example of one of Reddick’s (2006) tools that he encountered with one of his college professors: “[Her] intentional interventions in my development as a student leader strongly influenced me to pursue a career in education. She also served as a keeper of institutional memory and a campus mother to many students, especially students of color and African-American students” (p. 61).

Unlike some professors at PWIs, the HBCUs’ faculty members also develop informal mentoring relationships with AA students outside of the classroom and

university. In his article, Reddick (2006) researched mentoring relationships for college students through the experiences of four professors, three of whom attended HBCUs. In his findings, he concluded that HBCUs contribute to the American higher education system by graduating more AA students who later teach at PWIs. While this article discusses some best practices that PWIs could implement, it may or may not be applicable to all PWIs. In addition, Reddick is making an assumption and generalization that all PWIs do not implement the best practices. This is certainly not the case. Mentoring has become a buzzword in the educational and professional fields and in corporations (Bogat & Redner, 1985).

The overall goal of mentoring relationships is to foster students' academic success and to facilitate the progression to post-graduate plans, either graduate study or a career in the workplace (Campbell & Campbell, 2000). Mentoring and othermothering can be viewed as forms of support. However, mentoring and othermothering are not the same concepts. While othermothering can be viewed as mentoring, the othermothering concept expands on the mentoring concept and also uses maternal guidance, ethics of care, nurturing, and warm demanders as ways to help AA students.

In the next section, I will discuss fictive kinship and how it can serve as a means of support for AA women in doctoral programs.

### **Fictive Kinship as a System of Support**

Fictive kinship has been defined by Fordham (1988) as “a kinship-like connection between and among persons in society, not related by blood or marriage, who have maintained essential reciprocal social and economic relationships” (pg. 56). Fictive kin

are often considered the same as family, or people that are unrelated by legal or blood ties and are also important in an individual's support system (Braithwaite, et al., 2010). These definitions demonstrate that fictive kin are considered important in an individual's support system, although they do not explain exactly how having fictive kin affects a support system.

Additionally, Fordham gives a practical understanding of performance and how it is shaped by the available discourses of everyday life. Fordham postulates that because fictive kinship symbolizes a Black American sense of people-hood in opposition to White American social identity, it is closely tied to African-American students' various boundary-maintaining behaviors and attitudes toward Whites. An example is the tendency for Black Americans to emphasize group loyalty in situations involving conflict or competition with Whites (p. 144). Besides othermothering, fictive kin relationships, and general graduate school mentoring programs, there are particular programs for AA women, which are discussed in the next section.

### **Mentoring AA Women in Graduate School**

There are several possible ways to increase the likelihood of AA women graduating from PWIs. One possible way is having mentors. While there is a surfeit of mentoring programs and services for undergraduate students, there tends to be a shortfall of mentoring programs for AA women who attend doctoral programs. Graduate mentors help guide students in their academic studies and offer encouragement in the transition from undergraduate to graduate studies (Moss et al., 1999). In some cases, it is understood that female doctoral students have mentors who help them persist in their



academic studies. However, AA women benefit from mentoring relationships because their mentors at their respective universities can assist in increasing their visibility and success in a societal context and providing competitive edge where otherwise they may have been unheeded (Wai-Ling Packard et al. 2004). Besides mentoring, a concept that contributes to the idea of support for students as a priority in higher education comes from the philosophical commitment to the well-being of students, described as the ethics of care.

**Ethics of care.** Ethics of care is a facet of the othermothering concept. Several authors have contributed to research on ethics of care (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984; Collins, 2000; Hirt, Amelink, McFeeters, & Strayhorn, 2008). Ethics of care is the emotional and attentive response given to others and is an ongoing process for students. Ethics of care also helped foster a social conscience in the AA community. Ethics of care is a shared sense of morality to improve the lives of African-Americans holistically. The authors are not alone in their beliefs. Case (1997) stated that ethics of care is when othermothers in the community show that they are genuinely concerned with the welfare of other mothers' children. Gilligan (1982) defines ethics of care as a part of women's gender role socialization that places a lot of attention on addressing the needs of others. Noddings supports the concept of ethics of care and posits that caring should be a foundation for ethical decision making. Moreover, she argues that natural caring is a moral attitude and a longing for goodness that arises out of the experience or memory of being cared for (Flinders, 2001).

Collins (2000) adds to the body of literature on ethics of care and states that it is based on three areas: individual uniqueness, appropriateness of emotions in dialogue, and

developing the capacity for empathy. While each individual is unique in his or her own way, individual uniqueness is grounded in African humanism. In essence, every AA person is whole and contributes holistically to the AA community. Secondly, appropriateness of emotions in dialogue is when people wholeheartedly think what others are saying is sound and concrete. Lastly, developing the capacity for empathy is when African-Americans are transparent in their conversations with people who they believe care for them, are compassionate, and are genuinely interested in the opinions they share with others. In the next three sections, other forms of support such as *institutional guardianship*, *cultural advancement*, and *warm demander* are discussed.

**Institutional Guardianship.** The second area of othermothering is institutional guardianship. Institutional guardianship is where schools serve as important locations for othermothering. According to Hirt et al. (2008), schools are a safety net for AA students and are repositories of intellectual and cultural capital. Hirt, et al. further asserts that it is the responsibility of institutions to serve as safety nets and support for students regardless of their class, race, and gender.

**Cultural Advancement.** Cultural advancement is demonstrated when people receive mentoring, advice, and in some cases, parenting, that is often shown in AA communities (Hirt et al. 2008). This component of othermothering also transcends the nuclear family and runs throughout the AA community. Even though relationships are commonplace in colleges, cultural advancement is inherently linked to academic success for students.

**Warm Demander.** While the concept of othermothering is prevalent and plays an integral role in nurturing and supporting AA students, warm demander is another concept

that teachers incorporate to assist AA students to achieve in schools as well. Irvine (1999) quotes Vasquez (1988) in her article, noting “warm demanders are committed, respected, dedicated, and competent educators who are not afraid, resentful or hostile toward their pupils” (p. 253). Irvine (1999) confirms how imperative guiding, facilitating content knowledge, and teaching are for AA students. She also states that caring, othermothering, and offering discipline to students is important because warm demanders expect the best from students.

On the other hand, Ware (2006) suggests that teachers are warm demanders when they are successful in teaching students of color, often because the students wholeheartedly believe that the teachers sincerely care about their welfare. Moreover, the students think that the teachers who are culturally responsive did not minimize their standards and were more than willing to help them. In her research, Ware outlines common traits of AA teachers of high caliber. The traits are ethics of caring, beliefs about students, and community and instructional practices. On the other hand, some PWIs do not acknowledge that their AA students are in need of warm demander or ethics of care.

When Ware (2006) uses the term *warm demander*, she describes culturally responsive and effective teachers. In her study, Ware posits the feedback from two teachers in the following contexts: 1. as caregivers, 2. as authority figures and disciplinarians, and, 3. as pedagogues. Teachers are acting as caregivers—one aspect of the warm demander role—when they are dedicated to their students’ needs and the teacher’s perception as being othermothers. Teachers are also being warm demanders when they act as authority figures and disciplinarians who are stern, straightforward, and demonstrate a no-nonsense attitude towards their AA students. Warm demander teachers

serve as pedagogues when they incorporate parts of the students' culture into their lessons, have high standards and expectations, and adapt instruction to meet the students' learning style.

I will discuss AA students in doctoral programs in the next section.

### **AA Students in Doctoral Programs**

In 2004, 2,382 African Americans were awarded doctoral degrees at U.S. universities. Of the 2,382 AA doctoral students, 1,409 were women and 973 were men. A year later, however, the number of doctoral graduates decreased for AA students. In 2005, a total of 2,182 AA women earned doctorates and only 910 AA men earned doctorates (NCES, 2005). The description of the reasons for the decline is not included in these figures. However, one reason may be due to the absence of support systems for students. Another reason for the decline may be due to financial or other factors. Thus, this review of literature confirms the need to conduct further research on the need for support systems, specifically for African-American women in doctoral programs at PWIs.

For the present study, the issues are framed in the historic and academic experiences of African-American female students and their support systems at institutions of higher education. Existing research confirms that many AA students are confronted with isolation, loneliness, insensitivity, and discrimination in colleges and universities (Johnson-Bailey, Valentine, Cervero, & Bowles, 2008). Collins (1999) declares that there are several issues, such as gender, race, ethnicity, class, along with other identities, that have complex consequences for women's experiences in a variety of areas. For example, some women's experiences as graduate students in the scientific disciplines reflect harsh

conditions, as they navigate the academic terrain. Furthermore, Gloria, Kurpius, Hamilton, and Wilson (1999) and Gusa (2010) argue that AA students view the predominant White institutions they attend as being more negative than their White peers. In order for AA students to feel a sense of belonging at PWIs, the environment must validate, cultivate, and sustain the strengths and contributions of people of color (O'Donnell & Green-Merritt, 1997).

### **Factors Leading to Success in College**

Reddick (2006) posits that if PWIs would adopt academic success strategies from HBCUs, AA students would flourish in their studies at PWIs. In her study, Coker (2003) identified three emerging themes that contribute to why AA adult learners are motivated and how they succeed in college, among them community development, family development, and self-development. The excerpt below, from Coker's (2003) study of AA Female Adult Learners, reflects the importance of attending college:

Education has been about real empowerment for me. When I came out of high school, college was something I wanted to do. When I finished in the service, I had a good GI bill. I worked at the post office. I didn't like it. Success in school has showed me that I can do all things. . . . Before I was intimidated, but not anymore. Through education I know I have the power in me! (p. 663)

The quote stresses the importance of having a solid foundation and knowledge of how the power to excel and succeed resides in the self-concept of individuals. Of particular concern in Coker's (2003) study is the fact that she failed to consider how race, gender, and class affect the livelihoods and educational experiences of AA female college

students. Beyond the threat to the validity, the conflicting findings of the study suggest the need to address issues of power and privilege as to this effect on AA female learners' sense of engagement and belonging in the learning process. While the existing body of literature expounds on the benefits and drawbacks of having limited to a plethora of social support for African-American undergraduate students, the literature fails to address how African-American women in doctoral programs need social support as well while attending PWIs.

Some factors that may contribute to stress for African-American women in graduate school include financial constraints and family matters. It is imperative for institutions of higher education, specifically, PWIs, to institute support programs and services designed for this population of students. Berry (1997a) postulates that one specific stress factor may be cultural distance. Cultural distance characterizes the interactions and relationships students have with faculty members. As noted in this literature review, female doctoral students are confronted with personal and professional stress and matters that could prohibit them from graduating. Therefore, I interviewed four African-American women who earned doctoral degrees at a PWI.

In summation, this study indicates that research focused specifically on the support for AA women in doctoral programs at PWIs is scarce. Historically, AA women's voices have been silenced in the education system, specifically at the doctoral level. Conducting further research on AA female students who graduated with doctorates from PWIs and their experiences while attending such institutions will inform colleges and universities, help the posterity of AA women in graduate school who attend PWIs, and enhance and contribute to the existing body of literature about AA women who

graduated attended PWIs. This study provides portraits of academic and personal experiences of four AA women who earned doctoral degrees at a PWI. In the next section, I will discuss the methodology, theoretical framework, data collection, storing the data, validity, ethical considerations, and confidentiality of the study.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the experiences of four African-American (AA) women who graduated from a predominantly White university (PWI) with a doctoral degree in educational leadership. As part of the examination, the study focused on the role that various formal or informal support systems have played in contributing to their academic experiences while attending a PWI. My question in this study was whether AA women who earned doctoral degrees at a PWI had challenges and if they perceived formal support systems or the lack of support systems that contributed to their capacity or record for degree completion. In this qualitative study, the research question that guided this study was the following: What are the experiences of AA women who earned doctoral degrees from PWIs? From this research question, the following sub-questions were examined:

1. What factors do the four interviewees perceive as contributing to the successful completion of their doctorate?
2. What elements facilitated their degree progress?
3. What elements inhibited their degree progress?

#### **Significance of Study**

The increasing number of AA women enrolled in higher education is simultaneously inspiring and discouraging. The number of AA women who are graduating from colleges and graduate and professional schools is constantly increasing. There is a body of research on support systems for AA undergraduate students, which identifies important social and academic intervention variables that contribute to retention and graduation for



AA undergraduates. In the absence of AA role models among staff and faculty members at IHEs, research has indicated that AA undergraduate students depend on other sources of social support (Willie, 2003). Some examples of other support systems include family (Hinderlie & Kenny, 2002; Barnett, 2004) and the Black community (Brown, 2008). However, there is little existing research about AA women's support systems in graduate school, specifically, AA women in doctoral programs at PWIs.

Overall, AA students are in need of social support for college success at both undergraduate and graduate levels. Fleming (1984) argues that academic environments provide little or no support for AA students. Social and personal isolation and lack of belonging seem to be central issues for many AA satisfaction and success. PWIs and university administrators and professors should address these concerns through appropriate plans and programs in an effort to resolve them. According to Sedlacek (1999), who writes about Black studies advises, "Blacks need a supportive group that can give them advice, counsel, and orientation to sustain them as they confront the larger often hostile systems they must negotiate (p. 542)." Based on Fleming's and Sedlacek's arguments, it is evident that PWIs should identify support programs and plans in an effort to help the population of AA students at their respective institutions. Lastly, because of this, it is important in my study to look at the supportive groups available for AA doctoral students at PWIs.

As an AA female studying in a PWI, I examined the experiences of four AA women to identify the social supports they received or did not receive, while simultaneously using my own experiences as a lens in this study. In examining our lived experiences, the study listened to the four AA women's voices to find out how they

navigated the academic terrain at a PWI while earning their doctorates. The study also identified and expressed the concerns they confronted at this PWI. Currently, there is limited research about AA women's support systems in graduate school, specifically, AA women who received doctoral degrees from PWIs. This study looked at whether support systems were in place, what the systems look like, and what implications could be drawn from examining the lives of these AA women that would contribute to a knowledge base to foster doctoral academic success for AA women who attend PWI and earn doctorates.

### **Rationale for Qualitative Research Design**

Qualitative research focuses on how the complexities of the sociocultural world are experienced, interpreted, and understood in a specific context and at a particular point in time (Bloomberg & Volpe 2008, p. 80). Qualitative methods are connected to a constructivist theory of knowledge, because the methods focus on comprehending the experiences from the point of view of peoples' lived experiences (Rudestam & Newton, 2007). According to Creswell (1998), "the researcher is an instrument of data collection who gathers words, analyzes them inductively, focuses on the meaning of participants, and describes a process that is expressive and persuasive in language" (p.14).

Additionally, the qualitative researchers have more control of the research. Creswell (2003) postulates that qualitative research employs the use of philosophical assumptions, collaborates with and gathers the meanings from participants. Many of these methods also permit researchers to interject personal experiences and reflections into the narrative.

The intent of qualitative research is to also examine a social situation or interaction by allowing me to enter the world of others and attempt to achieve a holistic

rather than a reductionist understanding (Schram, 2006). Thus, the fundamental assumptions and key features that distinguish qualitative research are a good fit for this qualitative study. These features include 1. adopting an interpretive stance, 2. understanding the processes by which experiences take place, 3. developing contextual understanding, 4. facilitating interactivity between the researcher and participants, and 5. maintaining design flexibility (Schram, 2006). I employed the aforementioned features in this qualitative study. While it is important to know what kind of study is being examined, it is also imperative to use the appropriate theoretical framework. Therefore, for this study, the appropriate theoretical framework that was utilized was critical race theory (CRT). While the overarching theoretical framework is CRT, I also used Black feminist theory (BFT) because BFT added to my specific focus about AA women.

### **Theoretical Frameworks: Black Feminist Theory and Critical Race Theory**

Black feminist theory (BFT) and critical race theory (CRT) are central to the examination of my questions in my study. Since my study intersects feminism and racism, I chose to use two theoretical frameworks. I will first discuss Black feminist theory and how this theory aligned with my study. Since this qualitative research study focused on African-American women, the research questions traced the experiences of four AA women who were in a doctoral program and the Black feminist theory framework fits well with this study.

BFT originates from feminist theory (Freedman, 2003). BFT consists of theories or specialized thought produced by AA women intellectuals designed to express a Black woman's viewpoint (Collins, 1991). Collins argue that there are four tenets of Black

feminist theory. They include 1. lived experience as criterion for meaning, 2. the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims, 3. the ethic of caring, and 4. the ethic of personal responsibility. These tenets reflect Collins's main objective: "A feminist perspective presumes the importance of gender in human relationships and societal processes and orients the study in that direction" (Patton, 2002, p. 129). According to the Black feminist framework, "This marginality is viewed as the outsider within status, in which Black women have been invited into places where the dominant group assembles, but the AA women remain outsiders because they still are invisible and have no voice when dialogue commences" (Howard-Hamilton, 2003, p. 21). The Howard-Hamilton argument aligned with some of the responses of the AA women participants as they navigated the academic terrain at a PWI and some of the four participants stated they felt invisible and unwelcome on campus.

"Selecting appropriate theories for understanding the needs of African-American women should, however, not be based upon their cultural, personal, and social contexts, which clearly differ significantly from those men and women who have not experienced racial and gender oppression" (Howard-Hamilton, 2003, p. 20). It is noteworthy to state that Black feminist thought includes a deeper interpretation than the general feminist definition. Instead, it goes further to represent a voice for Black women, who have been historically ignored (Howard-Hamilton, 2003).

Based on Howard-Hamilton's (2003) argument, Black feminist thought consists of three themes. The first theme states that the framework is shaped by the experiences of Black women throughout their lives, regardless of whether previous accounts have been documented. The second theme in the Black feminist thought is to acknowledge the AA

women's experiences as distinct while simultaneously extracting commonalities in the data. The third and final theme in this framework consists of bringing together the commonalities and diversities that each of the AA women possesses in order to better understand the entire group of AA women.

In addition, BFT focuses on the specific social inequities that Black women experience within institutions that impose a normative gaze. The normative gaze is defined as "Western, White, male, and middle class and one that holds a positivist presumption" (Fine, 1991, p. 453). The theory creates a space where the social, political, cultural, geographical, and psychological aspects of Black women can be considered. Since my study will address issues directly related to the experiences of AA women in a doctoral program at a PWI, BFT will serve as a powerful lens to look at the prevalent issues they encountered while earning their doctoral degrees.

Moreover, the second theoretical framework that was used in this qualitative research study was CRT. CRT scholars seek to help increase racial justice for people of color (Bell, 1987; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). CRT encourages the use of stories and narratives that bring voice to marginalized groups (Ladson-Billings, 1999). Counterstorytelling can serve to redeem the voices and validate the experiences of those who have been the targets of racial discrimination (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). CRT offers space to conduct and present research grounded in the experiences and knowledge of people of color in the educational field (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). CRT was chosen because of its ability to examine the impact of race in society for the historical role race plays in educating students of color at a PWI. DeCuir and Dixon (2004) postulate, "Given the insidious and often subtle ways in which race and

racism operate, it is imperative that educational researchers explore the role of race when examining the educational experiences of African-Americans” (p. 26). Since students of color are confronted with subtle racism and discrimination at PWIs, it is equally important for scholars to examine the racial constructs that are prevalent and how the racial constructs affect the experiences of students of color in the educational system and allow the students’ voices to be heard and captured.

The origins of CRT can be found by examining the efforts of lawyers, activists, and legal scholars who have pursued strategies to effectively address the emergence of post-civil rights racial structures and inequalities in the 1960s and 1970s (Abrams & Moio, 2009; Malagon, Huber, & Velez, 2009). Crenshaw (1991) reports that in the late 1980s, various legal scholars felt limited by work that separated critical theory from dialogue regarding race and racism. Historically, issues of racism and inequality have been a part of the American experience for all individuals of color. One of the scholars who established the foundations of CRT in the field of education, Ladson-Billings, postulated (1995) that society operates from a premise of being colorblind as an attempt to marginalize people of color.

Furthermore, Matias (2012) argues, “scholars of color are also heroes who are constantly challenged because of our nuanced knowledge of race and racism, and intimate understanding that [W]hiteness blinds [W]hite folks to. We are the warriors that shoulder this agonizing racial burden despite being chastised as not being collaborative, wrongfully accused of being personally mistrustful, or worse, mislabeled the ‘real’ racist when we bravely engage how the ugly reigns of race is manifesting itself” (p. 5). As a theoretical framework, CRT provided a lens with which to examine these experiences.

The experiences described by the four participants served as a catalyst for transformational changes as they related to AA women who earned doctoral degrees at PWIs. In this qualitative study, CRT served as a theoretical framework, as well as the methodology.

In the next section, I will discuss the methodology.

### **Theoretical Framework: Critical Race Theory**

In addition to origins rooted in legal studies, CRT has also evolved as a vehicle to legitimize narratives and storytelling (Parker & Lynn, 2002). Given its ability to provide a framework for incorporating the elements of narratives and storytelling, CRT can serve a dual role as a theoretical framework and methodology in qualitative research studies. Through storytelling, CRT provides a medium for persons of color to provide their interpretation of how the law is used to justify racism. The final outcome of this study challenges readers to understand the thick descriptions the four AA women interviewees described as institutionalized practices of racism (Parker & Lynn, 2002).

Furthermore, the researcher interviewed four AA women who earned doctorates in educational leadership at a PWI. This approach is consistent with the average number of participants that is typically used in critical race theory studies. This methodology allowed me to actively listen to the four participants' experiences and stories. Understanding the four participants' experiences at a PWI will enable colleges and universities to help future AA women in doctoral programs. Additionally, this study will help AA women who attend PWIs and contribute to the limited existing body of literature about AA women who earned doctoral degrees while attending a PWI.

## Methods

In order to obtain the data necessary to answer the three research questions and learn about the experiences of the four participants, the researcher conducted semi-structured and open-ended interviews with four AA women who graduated with doctoral degrees in education from a PWI. The primary research question for this qualitative study: What were the experiences of African-American women who earned doctoral degrees from a PWI? The three sub-questions:

1. What factors do the four interviewees perceive contributed to the successful completion of their doctorate?
2. What elements facilitated the successful completion?
3. What elements inhibited the degree progress?

Interview-based research allowed me to uncover many facets of the human experience that quantitative research cannot (Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003).

Furthermore, a qualitative methodology was appropriate for this study because it enabled me to capture a richer and more detailed description of the subject matter. The interviews took place at agreed-upon locations that were convenient for the four participants. The data from the interviews was collected by a digital tape recorder and later transcribed by MedEase Transcription Company, which is a private transcription company. I also took field notes during the interviews in order to assist in obtaining a fuller and richer picture of what took place during the interviews. The four AA women in this study attended Jetson University (JU)<sup>2</sup>. I forwarded the recruitment flyer to the

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<sup>2</sup> Jetson University is a pseudonym used to protect the university in this qualitative study. Data source was the university's website.



College of Education at JU. Afterwards, the college disseminated the recruitment flyer to past and current doctoral students in the educational leadership program via email (Appendix G). I conducted a series of open-ended and semi-structured interviews for the four AA women participants (Appendices A-D). Each participant was interviewed on three different occasions.

### **Setting**

The setting for this qualitative research study was Jetson University. JU is a large and private institution. The university has over 25,000 students, including over 16,000 undergraduates; 7,900 graduate students and over 1,000 law students. JU has more than 275 undergraduate and graduate programs of study and five campuses throughout the Midwest. In 2011, JU had a total of 270 doctoral students.

### **Access to Participants and Selection**

I asked JU to email the recruitment flyer to current and former doctoral students from the College of Education (see Appendix F). Once potential participants contacted me via the telephone, I used a screening protocol to ensure that they are eligible for the study (see Appendix G). If the potential participants were eligible for the study, I thanked them for contacting me and scheduled the first interview and received their consent and demographic information. I provided the four participants with copies of their signed consent form in a sealed envelope for their records.

If the potential participants were not eligible for the study, I thanked them for contacting me. The flyer was used to solicit participants from JU in order to obtain contact information on AA women who graduated from JU with doctorates in the last

five years, specifically from Autumn 2007 through Spring 2012. I interviewed AA women from this selected period of time in order to obtain current data from recent Ed.D. graduates. Pseudonyms were used in this research study for the university and the four AA participants.

### **Ethical Considerations**

While conducting research, there are many ethical issues that I needed to address, such as my position and access as a doctoral candidate at JU. Typically, with any research project, ethical issues may occur. For this qualitative study, I ensured confidentiality and informed consent throughout the process. Schram (2006) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that trustworthiness lies in confirmability, dependability, credibility, and transferability. I provided the four participants a copy of the informed consent form for their participation in this study. I also read the informed consent out loud at the beginning of each initial interview. I also informed the four participants that I have an insider's perspective since I am an AA woman who currently attends a PWI and is pursuing a doctorate in education leadership.

I am also an AA woman who lacked support systems as a doctoral student while attending a PWI. With this in mind, I carefully designed the semi-structured interviews with tact and professionalism, and informed the four participants that the information they provided will remain confidential and only be used for this qualitative research study. I bracketed my life and educational experiences so that my experiences did not interfere from the qualitative research study. She postulates that researchers of color's research shades how their research informs their design. The semi-structured interviews

were free from any and all biases and opinions from my past and present experiences and opinions. I reminded the four participants that it was not my intent to impose my personal and professional beliefs in the qualitative study. Thus, I was only interested in hearing and learning about their academic experiences of being AA women who received doctorates from JU. Throughout the interviews, I wrote and reviewed field notes frequently for content and accuracy.

Additionally, I shared similar experiences in the doctoral program with the four participants. However, I did not want to appear zealous, nor dwell on certain topics. Therefore, I used my experiences as a lens in order to examine the experiences of the four participants in this study. Some experiences I brought to this study were similar to the four participants, while other experiences were different; however, we shared race and gender, which were the perspectives that I examined. My life and academic experiences in the doctoral program shaped the lens for this study.

In professional school, both on the graduate and doctoral levels, I had to use various forms of support systems while attending graduate school in two PWIs. The last possible ethical issue that I was confronted with was disengaging and staying in contact with the four participants. According to Schram (2006), it is imperative for the researcher to have an open door because there may be a possibility that the researcher may have to follow up on or clarify the interviews with the participants. Therefore, I made an effort to inform the four participants that they could keep in contact with me via email and phone. I provided the four participants copies of their individual transcripts, the coding and notes relative to the qualitative study.

## **Issues of Trustworthiness**

*Credibility.* Some researchers are skeptical of qualitative research (Padget, 2009). In order to enhance the credibility of this qualitative study, I conducted member checks during the interviewing process. The first member check occurred after I typed the transcripts. The second was done after the data analysis. Each of the four participants received copies of codes, transcripts, and study results from the research study.

*Dependability.* According to Lincoln and Duba (1985), dependability in qualitative research involves whether the findings are dependable and consistent with the data collected. Therefore, I constantly reviewed field notes, memos, and interviews that were used and later transcribed to ensure that the information is correct. In the next section, I will elaborate on the interviewing process.

## **Interviewing Process**

According to Marshall and Rossman (2006), in-depth interviews focus on individual lived experiences. Seidman (2006) argues that interviewing allows access to the context of people's behavior and allows researchers to conceptualize the meaning of that behavior. An in-depth interview is a face-to-face conversation involving open-ended questions intended to elicit descriptive responses from participants (Creswell, 2009). With respect to interpreting the meaning of the phenomena, the interviews examined the four participants' realities, while seeking to understand the meaning of central themes of the participants' lived experiences (Kvale, 2007). For this study, open-ended interviews were the best method for me to investigate, understand, and gather data about four AA women who earned doctorates at JU. Marshall and Rossman (2006) argue that qualitative

researchers readily use in-depth interviewing.

Furthermore, Marshall and Rossman argue that a particular strength of in-depth interviewing is that it provides data in quantity quickly. Patton inferred that interviewing people provides a way for researchers to find out what their participants know; three approaches to collecting data through interviewing are informal conversations, general interview and guided approach, and standardized open-ended interviews (Patton, 2002). For this qualitative study, I used the open-ended interview approach because the method captured the experiences of the four AA women participants by using their own words as the primary source of the data (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

The next section that will be discussed in this study is data collection.

### **Collecting the Data**

Negotiating access to conduct research on AA women at PWIs can be a challenging process. Being a doctoral student granted me access to information and the four participants that were needed for the study. I completed the required documents for IRB approval and identified the four participants in the winter 2013 quarter. The data for this study was collected in three phrases. In the first phrase, beginning in winter 2013, I asked the four participants to complete a demographic questionnaire. During phrase two, semi-structured interviews with the four participants were conducted. In the third and last phrase, follow-up interviews were completed to ensure validity and accuracy of the interviews. Once again, field notes and a tape recorder were used in this qualitative study in order to gather concise and accurate data. I reviewed field notes immediately after each interview and several times during the interview process.

Since confidentiality and professionalism are required in research studies, I will elaborate on how I stored the data in the next section.

### **Storing the Data**

The data collected in this qualitative study will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my home, and I will be the only one who has access to the data. The interview transcripts and other research documents are stored on a different thumb drive that will be password protected, stored in a secured and locked cabinet in my home as well. Lastly, the data will be stored in my home for three years. The next section discusses how I shared the data.

### **Sharing the Data**

The raw data collected for this qualitative research study was not shared with the researcher's dissertation committee and the College of Education at JU. Only the researcher and the participants had access to the transcripts of the interviews. The transcripts from the study were given to the four participants for their records. Validity is a vital component of research studies and in this qualitative study. Therefore, validity will be discussed in the next section.

### **Validity**

In qualitative studies, it is imperative to ensure validity in findings. Creswell (2003) identified eight strategies to increase validity. The eight strategies are triangulation; member checking; using rich, thick description in findings; clarifying bias? presenting negative or discrepant information; spending prolonged time in the field; using peer debriefing; and using an external auditor to review the project. While Creswell's list is extensive, he recommends researchers use at least two of the recommended strategies. I

used member checking and rich and thick description.

**Member checking.** According to Rudestam and Newton (2007), it is imperative for researchers to come back to the participants and provide them with narratives and interpretations from the research study. This process is called member checking. Therefore, I contacted the four participants and provided them with my interpretation of the interviews for accuracy and credibility. Member checking was considered by Lincoln and Guba (1985), to be “the most critical technique for establishing credibility” (p. 314). In this study, each of the four participants confirmed that my interpretations were correct.

**Rich and thick description.** Qualitative research requires the use of thick description. In order to document the wide range of participant experiences, rich, thick description is used in this study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Creswell, 2009). The detailed description provides the reader with an understanding of the phenomenon examined and the perspectives of the participants, resulting in a shared experience of the realities during the discussion, which makes for a more realistic and richer result (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Creswell, 2009). This rich and thick text method of presenting narrative data captured the lived experiences of the four participants and used quotes taken from the interview transcripts. This method conveys the multiple perspectives of the participants and provides a means of detailing the richness and complexity of their career paths and leadership experiences through data gathering (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Creswell, 2009; Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

### **Summary of Methodology**

I selected four African-American women who volunteered for the study. My

study is limited in the fact that it is not generalizable and the outcomes do not represent all AA women who are in doctoral programs at PWIs. This qualitative research study contributes to the limited literature involving support for AA women who earned doctoral degrees in education at PWIs. Because there were only a total of four AA women participating in the study, the study provided a small sample relative to the study of support systems they received as doctoral students. The benefits of a smaller sample enabled the researcher to spend more time with the four participants and achieve depth in this research study. Thus, the results of this study contribute to the existing body of research and literature. The next section will discuss the conclusion of this chapter.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to capture portraits of the experiences of four AA women who earned doctoral degrees in education at a PWI. I utilized the critical race theory as a framework and methodology, which enabled me to accurately capture rich and thick descriptions of the experiences of the four AA women. JU was chosen as the site for this study because of its reputation for service for students. The institution was also chosen because of its reputation for its academic programs, specifically its graduate programs. A total of four in-depth interviews were used in this qualitative study to collect data. Credibility and dependability were employed via different strategies, such as member checks throughout the process of this study. I maintained confidentiality with the four participants. Ethics and trustworthiness issues were carefully addressed in this qualitative research study as well. Lastly, I will discuss the analysis, conclusion, and results in Chapter Four.



## Chapter 4: Results of Study

So I'd like to know where/you got the notion/Said I'd like to know  
where/you got the notion/to rock the boat/Don't rock the boat, baby./Rock  
the boat/Don't tip the boat over./Rock the boat/Don't rock the boat  
baby./Rock the boat-t-t-t-t (Hues Corporation, 1973).

While the song, “Don’t Rock the Boat” is about love and devotion, it certainly was not the case with two out of four participants in this study. Bleu Ivey and Lisa were hurt and in pain because of some of the experiences they were confronted with as doctoral students on Jetson University’s (JU) campus. Hues Corporation’s lyrics above summarize how two of the four participants, Bleu Ivey and Lisa describe the culture at JU. Two out of four African-American (AA) women participants in this study experienced a multitude of emotions that ranged from being hurt, in pain, and feeling love due to two of the thematic categories in this study, which are racism and isolation. They did not obtain the support they needed, because if they expressed their needs, they would have “rocked the boat.”

In essence, rocking the boat meant going against the status quo, which is ingrained in the culture in the doctoral program at JU. Moreover, they did not want to tilt the boat, in other words, disrupt the flow of the dynamics and culture that are commonplace at JU, racism, isolation, and the lack of support. So begins the story of the qualitative study based on the experiences of four AA women who graduated from a predominantly White institution (PWI) with degrees in educational leadership.

In contrast, the other two AA women participants, Kim and Eboni, did not have the same experiences. For example, Eboni mentioned during her interview that she did

not encounter any racism or isolation in the doctoral program. However, she did mention that she experienced an issue with a male professor regarding an assignment for a class that left her feeling ignored by the male professor. She tried several occasions to talk to the male professor to get clarity for a paper. After the male professor ignored her, Eboni discussed the matter with the education department. Finally, Eboni's problem was resolved; she obtained clarity for the assignment and received a D as a final grade in the class. Eboni was disappointed that after the negative experiences with the male professor she earned a low grade in the class. Lastly, she stated she wished the professor did not leave her feeling ignored because she was not clear about the assignment.

Additionally, while Kim was not confronted with any racism or isolation at JU, she did state that she heard that other AA doctoral students did experience racism and felt isolated on JU's campus. She mentioned that AA doctoral students said they were ignored by some of the professors, unsupported by the culture, unsupported during the selection of dissertation committee members, and felt they were in silos during the dissertation process. Thus, as a JU doctoral student, who had also attended PWIs, she was well aware of the institutional culture at PWIs and how to navigate the academic terrain at such institutions. Kim said she was prepared academically, financially, and emotionally to excel at JU. As a result, she obtained favor from some of JU's professors in the doctoral program. Some of the favor included becoming an adjunct professor and being showcased in JU's marketing publications. I will provide more details of Kim's overview of JU later in this chapter and Chapter Five.

As part of the examination, this study focused on the way various formal and informal support systems contributed to the participants' academic and personal

development while attending a PWI. The following research question guided this study: what was the experience of AA women who earned doctoral degrees at a WI? From this research question, the following sub-questions were examined:

1. What factors do the four interviewees perceive as contributing to the successful completion of their doctorate?
2. What elements facilitated their degree progress?
3. What elements inhibited their degree progress?

This chapter presents the findings for each part of the guided questions in this study. The data derived from this study were used to answer the overall research questions. The four AA women participants wanted to participate in this study in an effort to shed light on the many complex issues and experiences they encountered at JU. JU is a PWI. Currently, out of the four AA participants, one is a principal, one is a teacher, one is a college professor, and the last is a school administrator. The four participants' voices contribute to the holistic portrayal of their experiences. The themes that emerged from this study: 1, the participants' perspectives of support, 2. variations of isolation at JU, 3. institutional culture, and 4. racism.

The four participants provided in-depth insights on their experiences while they earned doctoral degrees in educational leadership at JU, which is a PWI. Each of the participants were interviewed a total of three times. Two of the four participants had similar experiences; while the other two participants had very different experiences. The theoretical framework that guided this qualitative study is critical race theory (CRT). CRT was chosen because this framework acknowledges the widespread nature of racism, race, and White supremacy while validating counter-stories (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

CRT encourages the use of stories and narratives that bring voice to marginalized groups (Ladson-Billings, 1999). CRT offers space to conduct and present research grounded in the experiences and knowledge of people of color in the educational field (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). CRT was chosen because of its ability to examine the impact of race in this society and the historical role of race in the education of students of color. The origins of CRT can be found in the efforts of lawyers, activists, and legal scholars who pursued strategies to effectively address the emergence of post-civil rights racial structures and inequalities in the 1960s and 1970s (Abrams & Moio, 2009; Malagon, Huber, & Velez, 2009).

Historically, issues of racism and inequality have been a part of the American experience for people of color. Ladson-Billings (1995) postulated that society operates from a premise of being colorblind as an attempt to marginalize people of color. Bonilla-Silva and Embrick (2006) argue that, “[W]hites, as a social collectivity, have developed a new, powerful, and effective racial ideology to account for the contemporary racial complexities, which is color-blind racism” (p. 21-22). Additionally, scholars have made several arguments about how colorblindness has worked to maintain a system that protects space for privileged groups at selective universities (Guinier, 2003). I examined the extent to which these arguments factored into the experiences and perceptions of four AA women who earned their doctorates at JU. Moreover, during this qualitative study, I encountered an ethical consideration, which I will discuss in the next section.

### **My Voice**

According to Matias (2012), researchers of color have an intimate understanding

of race just as Black feminists do with racism and patriarchy (Collins, 1990; hooks, 1994). Therefore, below I share my story as an AA woman completing my doctoral degree at JU. My story serves as a counter-story that illuminates the microaggressions so commonly felt by two out of four AA participants in the study. Bleu Ivey and Lisa shared their thoughts, experiences, and pain as they pursued and completed their doctorates at JU. Two of the participants, Lisa and Bleu Ivey gave poignant examples that parallel with the tenets under CRT. The tenets ranged from White supremacy, racism, Whiteness, and microaggression. I elaborated on each of the tenets in separate sections in this study.

In the introductory chapter, I provided an in-depth explanation of my background as an AA woman who attended a PWI, why this study is relevant, and why it is so important to me and future AA women who earn degrees in education leadership from PWIs. Initially, I started the study with hunches coupled with questions that have been in my mind since my journey as an AA female doctoral student at a PWI. During this study, my curiosity turned into themes, which serve as testaments to my academic, personal, and professional experiences as an AA doctoral student. From being brushed off by a White professor and feeling like I was invisible to him to being silent when I needed help or clarification in classes and choosing not to voice my need for help, I felt as though I did not matter! Lastly, I conclude Chapter Five with my original poem, “I Don’t Matter.”

However, after the completion of this study, I am convinced that more attention should be paid to ensuring AA women receive the necessary support systems in order to complete their doctoral degrees. I encountered many challenges personally and academically as a doctoral student at JU. I think there may be countless other AA women in doctoral studies who may have experienced or are experiencing the racism, the

unwelcoming institutional culture, and the lack of support that Bleu Ivey, Lisa, and I encountered at PWIs. If this is the case, more dialogues needs to take place in the Academy about the real effects of racism on individual human life and how the effects of racism make lasting impressions on AA women who pursue doctorates at PWIs.

Besides racism, culture shock, and the institutional culture, I initially was convinced that the doctoral program was not a place where I belonged. I did not feel a sense of connection at JU. Thus, after countless hours of research and conducting this research study with my interviewees, I now know that the issues I faced are somewhat commonplace at Jetson and may be prevalent at other PWIs as well. Based on my current research, there are AA women in doctoral programs who adhere to the code of silence and fear of “rocking the boat” if they expressed that they needed help. Lastly, if it were not for the few AA women who I met in the doctoral program at Jetson, coupled with a mustard seed of faith, I probably would not have completed the doctoral program.

This has been a transforming task for me to pursue and complete. Upon reflection, I also hope the outcomes derived from this study will assist, support, and enlighten other AA women at PWIs and other public and private institutions. Some of the findings from the study have confirmed my hunches about the indifferences and similarities that occur with AA women doctoral students holistically. The findings of my study will bring new understanding and a different lens for examining other AA women’s experiences in this particular academic space.

### **Data Coding**

Each participant was interviewed on three separate occasions, using a series of

open-ended and semi-structured interview questions (Appendix A-D). In order to best capture the four participants' experiences, I conducted three semi-structured interviews with the four participants. In the first interview with each of the four participants, I asked them questions about JU culture. In the second interview, I asked my four participants about the relationships at JU. In the third and last interview, I asked the four participants about their overall experiences at JU and to follow up on any areas that were not discussed in their prior interviews. The four participants' interviews were conducted at locations that were convenient for them during the study. I took field notes and the notes were reviewed frequently for clarity and insight.

MedEase Transcription Services, a private transcription company, transcribed the four participants' interviews. Following the collection of the transcripts, I coded the interviews. Coding of the data followed a thematic analysis, which is a way of analyzing data by theorizing from individual cases versus across cases (Riessman, 2008). The thematic analysis approach is appropriate for "stories that develop in interview conversations" (p. 54). Thematic analysis also uses extended sentences and phrases rather than short codes.

I examined and coded the data and focused on the participants' experiences and not the structure of speech or language style that the participants chose to use during the interviews (Riessman, 2008). I reviewed the transcripts line by line to check for accuracy and consistency of the transcription. I forwarded the individual transcripts to the four participants and requested that they review the transcripts and report any inaccuracies and errors as well. Additionally, the four participants added data to the transcripts that were not captured during the interviews and corrected data that was misinterpreted. In this

research, the coding process was completed through analyzing the data gathered from the four participants' interviews.

My coding process also involved a thorough review of the data transcribed and the field notes acquired during the interviews. I later transcribed the interviews. The interviews were reviewed and analyzed to find similar statements that were made by some or all of the four participants. The similarities were used to create thematic categories from the data. Lastly, I continued to review and reorganized the data until the final thematic categories materialized for this study. A total of four thematic categories emerged from this study and will be discussed later in this chapter. Next, I will discuss the validity in the next section.

### **Validity**

During the interview process, I conducted *member checking* to confirm the four participants' experiences, feedback, and responses were valid. Member checking is the process of checking out interpretations, conclusions, and assumptions with members of those groups from whom the data was originally obtained (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Validity in qualitative research refers to the trustworthiness of the inferences made from the data. It is also the hallmark of good research (Freeman, deMarrais, Preissle, Roulston, & St. Pierre, 2007). The terminology that captures the rigor of qualitative research includes dependability, confirmability, credibility, verification, triangulation, inter-rater reliability, member checking, and audit trail (1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To verify the validity in this study, I used dependability, credibility, and member checking.

In an effort to ensure dependability, I continuously reviewed my field notes for



accuracy. In order to confirm the validity and credibility in this study, I conducted member checking and used rich and thick descriptions. Member checking minimizes misinterpretation of participants' intended meaning (Maxwell, 1992). Each participant received electronic copies of her transcripts. I encouraged the four AA participants to review their individualized transcripts and check for inaccuracies, errors, and misrepresentations and then inform me. I also asked the four participants to let me know if they wanted any information removed in this study.

At this point during the process, I allowed the four participants opportunities to add to or revise what they stated during the interviews. The four AA women participants checked their individualized transcripts and informed me that the transcripts were accurate. None of the four participants added any additional information. Thus, I followed best practice procedures in member checking as recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Once the four participants approved their transcripts, I proceeded to the next step, which was rich and thick description. Finally, I conducted member checking a total of three times.

The rich and thick description “informs the reader about transferability” (p. 244) and provides detailed verbatim data (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). The rich and thick data from this study are the voices of the African-American women who obtained their doctoral degrees in educational leadership at a PWI. I selected quotes and statements from the four participants to paint a vibrant picture of their experiences at Jetson. The rich and thick descriptions were essential to this study, particularly given that it used CRT as the theoretical framework. The rich and thick descriptions of the four participants were derived from the transcripts verbatim. Lastly, the rich and thick descriptions were

used to ensure accuracies were documented from the four AA participants. The next section contains the findings of this study.

## **Findings**

This chapter describes how four African-American women participants made sense of their experiences at JU as former doctoral students. The data in this study is categorized into four sections: 1. participants' perceptions of support, 2. variations of isolation at JU, 3. institutional culture at JU, and 4. racism. The findings illuminate a specific picture of the meaningful sources of support that helped the AA participants while simultaneously helping them navigate the academic terrain at JU. The findings also include ways in which the thematic categories inhibited and facilitated the completion of the participants' doctorate degrees in educational leadership at JU. The findings are the results of carefully analyzing and coding the data in the study. Lastly, the occurrences were then categorized into related thematic categories to illustrate the relevant themes relative to the research questions in the study.

Furthermore, I wanted to find out from the four AA women participants what their experiences were as doctoral students at JU. Therefore, during the interviews, I asked the four participants about the culture of JU, whether or not they received support and if they were part of any support programs and services. I also asked them to discuss their overall academic experiences at JU. The findings of the study provide the participants' responses to the interview questions. During the interview process, the four participants revealed their experiences and perceptions to various aspects of their academic journeys as AA women who earned their doctorates from a PWI. The four

participants learned about my research study through the College of Education at JU. The College of Education distributed my recruitment flyer through email to all alumni from its department who earned doctorates in educational leadership.

The following are the profiles of the four AA women who participated in this study. The four AA women in this study are recent graduates. The participants' profiles were derived from the interviews and the four participants' demographic information. The four participants were given pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality. The University was also assigned a pseudonym for confidentiality.

### **Participants' Profiles**

#### **Bleu Ivey Black**

Bleu Ivey is a single, 40-year-old African-American woman who does not have children. Upon arriving at her home to obtain her consent and for the first interview, I was greeted with a warm smile as she opened the door of her home. She wore a lime green tracksuit and her jewelry was colorful and unique. She had been born and raised in the Midwest. She has been an educator in a public school system for over twenty years. She is professionally trained as a therapist and enjoys working with adolescents in elementary and high schools. While she attended public schools in her formative years, where the majority of the students were African-Americans, she chose to attend PWIs and earn her college degrees.

She chose to attend PWIs because of their resources and opportunities. Bleu Ivey decided to attend JU because of its reputation and competitive doctoral program in educational leadership. She wanted to pursue a degree in education that would allow her

to incorporate her background in youth development. She earned her doctorate in educational leadership at JU, concentrating in curriculum studies. During her doctoral studies she earned a scholarship from American Association of Women and represented JU at an Association of College's conference.

When Bleu Ivey contacted me to be part of this study, it was apparent that she was eager to share her story and experiences from JU. Bleu Ivey was very expressive when she discussed the institutional culture at JU during the interview sessions. During the interviews, Bleu Ivey was poised and forthcoming as she answered the interview questions. However, when I asked her if she knew of any clubs or organizations specifically for doctoral students at JU, she folded her arms and seemed apprehensive about expressing her experience with them. She mentioned that she did not have a major sense of belonging at JU. She often felt left out and an outsider. Later, I will elaborate more of Bleu Ivey's experiences regarding not belonging in the institutional culture at JU section.

#### Eboni White

Eboni White is a 54-year-old married AA woman who has two children, a daughter and a son. Her son is her youngest child. She has been happily married for over twenty years. Eboni describes herself as a professional educator, administrator, and person who is passionate about helping children. When I met Eboni at her office for the first interview, she was warm, welcoming, and elated. It was apparent that she was interested in sharing her story as a former JU doctoral student. She wore a brown skirt suit and colorful, earth tone scarf. After we shook hands, she gestured that I follow her

into a conference room for the interview and privacy. Eboni watched me take copious notes while she responded to the interview questions.

In addition to graduating from JU with her doctoral degree, she earned her bachelor's degree from JU. Eboni obtained her master's degree from another university in the Midwest. She originally learned about the benefits of having an education degree after a pivotal experience. Since she lived in walking distance from the campus, she went to JU to obtain information about home schooling for her two children over twenty years ago. A nun who worked at JU met Eboni and gave her information and brochures about the institution. As the nun learned about Eboni and her passion for education, she told Eboni that it would be a shame if Eboni did not become a teacher and help children other than her own. Eboni was grateful for the nun's pearls of wisdom and confidence the nun had in her without even knowing Eboni.

Moreover, when she first started attending JU as an undergraduate student, her children were young and she needed childcare when she went to class. She recalls some professors encouraging her not to miss class and to bring her children to class with her. She said the professors at JU were supportive and understanding at the time. She vividly remembers some professors asking Eboni's two children to give their opinions about subject matter related to the human development of children. However, as she continued being a student at JU, Eboni mentioned JU's culture changed and she did not obtain as much support as she initially received when she started going to school at JU. I will elaborate and share more of Eboni's story in the institutional culture at JU later in this chapter.

After thinking about her children's future and her own, Eboni registered for

classes, earned a bachelor's and doctoral degrees from JU, and never looked back. She concentrated in administration and supervision. Since she attended, earned college degrees, and initially seemed to enjoy JU, I was discombobulated when I asked Eboni, out of curiosity, if she encouraged her children to attend JU for college. To my surprise, not only did her children not attend JU, but also she strongly urged her children not to attend JU. Eboni stated that she would not recommend other AA women to attend JU as well because of the lack of financial support. I will provide more details on Eboni's response later in this chapter in the culture at JU section.

#### Kim Brown

Kim Brown is a 35-year-old divorced AA mother of three. She was born and raised in Dallas, Texas. One of the reasons why she came to the Midwest was to attend JU. She graduated with her doctoral degree with a concentration in administration and supervision. She chose to attend JU because it is competitive and its great reputation in the field of higher education, specifically, the doctoral program. Kim always attended PWIs, as well as predominately White elementary schools. She describes herself as being a self-leader and self-driven. Kim also describes herself as a self-thinker and one who thrives in environments where she can chart her own course, which is what JU allowed her to do in its doctoral program. From being a team leader at a public school to an adjunct professor at a university, Kim has always worked in the field of education. Currently, she is a principal in a suburban school system. She is passionate about helping students, specifically, students who attend schools and live in urban communities.

Upon initially arriving at Kim's job, her staff greeted and escorted me to Kim's

office for the first interview. Kim greeted me with a firm handshake and gentle smile as we sat at a brown table and talked. It was apparent that Kim is straightforward, professional, and intelligent. She is very precise as she encounters situations at her job and in life, as it was apparent from our conversations and how she interacted with her staff when she told them that she would be meeting with me. When I asked Kim about what she thought about the institutional culture of JU, she was skeptical in answering my question. She shared her experience about the culture as she explained a situation that occurred in a class with a female doctoral student who was a Christian.

She further explained that the female doctoral student said that people who are gay should not be part of the multicultural group. Kim mentioned that the male professor attacked the female Christian student's position. The professor alluded to the fact that the Christian student was not politically correct. The experience was pivotal in Kim's academic journey at JU, and it made her think about how students could be isolated in the classroom. Overall, Kim had a positive experience at JU. I will expound on Kim's experience about the culture in the institutional culture at JU section in this chapter.

Lisa Greene

Lisa Greene is a 40-year-old married AA female who does not have any children. She was born in a suburb in the Midwest. She has been a teacher with the public school system for fifteen years. She enjoys working with low income minority children, especially at the school where she currently teaches. Lisa is a leader and mentor to many students. In undergraduate school, she knew she wanted to become a teacher. While she is a product of a public school system, she wanted to attend a PWI where she could grow

and learn more about other ethnicities. She describes herself as having a natural shyness when it comes to having and building relationships with others.

When I arrived at Lisa's home for the first interview and received Lisa's consent, Lisa and her husband greeted me. Lisa and her spouse gestured that I follow them into their kitchen for the interview. Lisa was interested in learning more about my study and wanted to contribute to the study as much as she could. Lisa describes her overall experience at JU as being bittersweet. She had a lot of painful memories, such as the lack of support in the doctoral program and always feeling as though she had to justify herself as an African-American and as an AA woman at JU.

### **Interview Questions and Thematic Categories**

In an effort to find out what the four AA women participants' experiences were as doctoral students at a PWI, I formulated interview questions that pertained to the institutional culture, the kinds of support they had or did not have, and the relationships at JU. The complete list of interview questions can be found in appendices A-D. Thematic categories materialized from the answers to the interview questions; in the next section, I will discuss the four thematic categories that emerged. The thematic categories are as follows: 1. the participants' perceptions of support, 2. variations of isolation at JU, 3. institutional culture, and 4. racism. The first thematic category discussed is the participants' perceptions of support they received at JU. In the next four sections, I will analyze the four themes that emerged during the interviews with the four participants.

### **Theme 1: Participants' Perceptions of Support**

During the interviews, I asked the four participants whether or not they received



support or were in any support programs and systems at JU. During the interview process, two of the four participants, Bleu Ivey and Lisa, articulated several types of support they had or wished they had during their matriculation at JU. Based on the language, like *sisterhood*, *nurturing*, and *support*, that Bleu Ivey and Lisa used when they described their perceptions of support, I believed their words stemmed from the *othermothering* concept, assistance with the dissertation process, and outside support they received or wanted to receive. Collins (2000) argues that othermothering is when women serve as advocates for the Black community by articulating and illustrating an ethic of care and accountability on a personal level. From Bleu Ivey's and Lisa's statements about the peer-support they received from other AA women in the doctoral program, it was apparent to me that their statements align with the othermothering concept. Conversely, in this section, I will also discuss how one out of the four participants, Kim, did not feel she needed any support at the doctoral level. On the other hand, one participant, Eboni, stated that she only needed support during the dissertation process in the doctoral program. I will begin with the discussion of othermothering as a means of support for two participants, Bleu Ivey and Lisa.

**Othermothering as a Form of Support for AA Women at PWI.** From the interviews about support, based on the words Bleu Ivey and Lisa used when describing support, such as *sisterhood* and *support from other African-American women*, I thought these code words were part of the othermothering theme. Othermothering permitted Black women to socialize and teach children in their own cultures in order to improve the Black community (Guiffrida, 2005b). Even though slavery ended, othermothering is still prevalent today and has a positive impact on the role of AA teachers and students.

Guiffrida (2005) attests that some othermothering is prevalent in the work of successful AA educators. Two of the four participants mentioned the support from other African-American women helped them in their academic journeys as doctoral students at JU. The support of other African-American women was necessary in order for Lisa and Bleu Ivey to earn their doctorates. The following quotes from Bleu Ivey and Lisa confirm the need for support. I asked the four participants if they found any support while earning their doctoral degrees from JU. Bleu Ivey stated,

Mostly my support was found among people that I attended school with or the class with. I think we recognize that we had to form our own support or a pseudo-cohort to kind of have that supportive environment. I would have liked to have seen more student interaction at that advanced level where you had maybe a faculty member who you know kind of was bringing the group together, where we had brown bags lunches, or brown bag dinners, or whatever that may have been. I didn't feel like. . . I felt like the professors were there. I felt like they may have been vested to a degree, but not really willing to go beyond the teaching aspect of it, because I don't feel like there were other avenues that were even created that could have probably been created in terms of support for students. And I think again, coming in the door as an African-American woman you tend to want to have a sisterhood or some type of bond or some type of connection to the institute that you're at. And unfortunately, I don't feel like there was that strong of a connection when I was in attendance. And you know just talking to other people even I don't feel like. . . And I didn't form those bonds, then you were just attending class. Because we didn't come in as cohorts, we didn't come in this group of individuals, and so you pretty much formed your bond with who you formed them with. I think initially in my first year I was, and I don't want to say I was in a

group, but we tended to work well together and work with each other, and it was a mixture, one was Hispanic, one was a White male, and it was myself. And I remember another student saying, “Oh, we thought you guys were like the dynamic duo.” And we’re like, whoa. You know I was like, “Well what’s that about?” Because we always worked together. But I don’t think that. . . I think later on as we got into the program more, my relationships were probably more, my relationships were probably formed with African-American women. And there wasn’t that many Black males in the program. A sprinkling, maybe a couple, maybe four or five during my time., it wasn’t a whole lot. Maybe six? I could probably name them all. There wasn’t that many Black males. And so the few African-American women that were there, I think we all tended to try to support each other in different ways. You know everybody brought something to the table, everybody tried to lend their support or lend their information or just try to maintain contact even. Because we recognized that we didn’t I think have a major sense of belonging or connection, so we felt that was necessary in our own way and so we kind of just did it.

Lisa confirmed the need to have sisterhood relationships with other AA women at JU by stating the following:

The relationships I had been with African-American female students. I believe the fact that we needed to support each other. The bonds that were made going through classes, experiencing what we were experiencing, having to depend on each other, support each other, I don’t know why it did not naturally form with other ethnicities, but it formed with African-American females.

From Bleu Ivey’s and Lisa’s statements above, it was apparent that support was needed and important to them as African-American women in the doctoral program at JU. These two women were successful in their quests to complete their doctoral degrees

at a PWI because they supported one another. One of the ways they were successful and able to navigate through the academic terrain at JU was to serve as peer-support and utilize the traits of othermothering, such as ethics of care and fictive kinship. As part of CRT framework, fictive kin is coined by anthropologists to denote non-biologically related individuals given the status of kin (Taylor, 2000).

Moreover, Yosso (2005) confirmed that fictive kinship is a good method to support African-American women by stating that familial capital is “those cultural knowledge nurtured among familia (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition. The kin also model lessons of caring, coping and providing (educacion), which inform our emotional, moral, educational and occupational consciousness” (p. 79). Fictive kin are often considered the same as family, or people that are unrelated by legal or blood ties and are also important in an individual’s support system (Braithwaite, et al., 2010).

During the interviews, from Bleu Ivey’s and Lisa’s languages and words, such as bonding with African-American women and forming a sisterhood while at JU, it was apparent to me that the kinds of relationships they discussed alluded to the othermothering concept. This concept has been typically at HBCUs. However, othermothering has been described as being used among African-American women in doctoral programs at PWIs. Womanist theory aligns with the theme of othermothering and is known as womanism. In her book, Walker (1983) defines womanism as, “being committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female” (p. xi). Walker’s theory of womanism, which parallels with what Bleu Ivey and Lisa, stated in their interviews about the need to connect with other women, particularly African-American

women. The womanist theory seeks to eradicate domination based on class, race, and sex (Collins, 1991). Collins further argues that African-American women, in short, seek an Afrocentric process that empower women to experience a community that recognizes the “oneness of all human life” (Collins, 2000, p. 39.)

Bleu Ivey and Lisa mentioned that it was imperative for them to form a support group among themselves as AA women at JU. The two participants were committed to surviving the academic terrain at JU even though they thought Jetson lacked the support they needed to matriculate in the doctoral program. They sought out and secured support for themselves in the way that Watt (2006) describes that womanist identity attitudes appeared strongly as an influence on how AA college women perceive their environment. This finding can be indicative that race is a more salient identity for this population of women. The womanist identity attitudes reflected how Bleu Ivey and Lisa perceived the environment at JU, which was isolating and racist.

Conversely, the other two participants in this study, Eboni and Kim, did not receive peer-support from AA women in the doctoral program at Jetson. Here is what Eboni expressed about peer support:

Initially when I was an undergraduate and graduate student at JU, I received a lot of support. It was almost as if the younger you were the more support you had, or if you were just starting out there, they seemed to be more understanding, but as you moved along and toward the doctoral level—the support seemed to get less and less in my opinion. They [Jetson University and its professors] were less understanding about adult obligations that you had, whether they were personal or professional. And my feeling was that if I did not meet my personal or professional

obligations, then how could I be a success with anything else? That would prompt me not to be successful at Jetson University because I have other things, other obligations that would come first. And I think that that's the reason why they may have so many people who did not, who took the classes but couldn't complete the dissertation so. . . because as you went through different programs, the higher up you went, the support seemed to get less and less. And I can say that because I have quite a span in that institution.

Based on what Eboni expressed about the kind of support at JU, as a follow up, I asked her who she did form relationships with at JU. Here is Eboni's response:

I formed relationships with White male students in the program. I am still close friends and keep in contact with two White men. I am also a mentor to them as the two men are completing their dissertations at Jetson University.

Additionally, Kim provided her overview of the support at Jetson University by expressing the following:

I developed relationships with both White men and White women while being a doctoral student. I didn't personally feel like I needed support, but I saw people who complained a lot about the support, or heard people, I should say. But they complained a lot about the support that was provided from the program and whether or not it helped people get through it so that they graduated. A lot of people had conversation about that. I didn't support it because I felt like if you were getting a doctorate, it's supposed to be the highest level of scholarly studies, no one should be holding your hand for you through that process. But I don't think I was the majority because a lot of people blamed Jetson. Blamed Jetson for them not getting through at a fast enough rate, and I just didn't think that that was fair. But

I think Jetson. . . or Jetson thought it was fair because I saw a lot of positions added, policies changed, tools provided to people so that they felt more supported and more guided through the experience.

I further asked Kim to elaborate and provide me some examples of the tools, programs, and services that were offered at JU. Kim expressed:

They were regular, they started doing these sheets about what courses you [doctoral students] had left and what you had left and what you [doctoral students] should register for and what, you know, it sort of took away the flexibility of the program and I like that because I like being able to go at the pace that worked for me and for my life, and I also felt like it was my responsibility to make the program work for me. But they [JU's doctoral program] would do more checking in. I think they wanted us to assign advisors. I mean, just sort of like they developed a scope and sequence for the program now and certain things are built into classes with regards to you [doctoral students] completing your dissertation. I think even classes were created around you receiving support as you complete your dissertation.

Another form of support that three of the four participants (Bleu Ivey, Eboni, and Lisa) mentioned in this study was the support they needed during the dissertation process, which will be discussed in the next section.

**Support during the Dissertation Process.** During the interviews, I specifically asked the four participants if they had any other kinds of support as doctoral students at JU. Bleu Ivey, Eboni, and Lisa provided their perceptions about another form of support they needed during their matriculation at JU, which was when they worked on their dissertations. When I asked the four participants if they could give specific ways in which they needed support in regards to the dissertation process and the three participants

expressed the following statements. Bleu Ivey stated,

My former AA women classmates told me where to go to look up certain articles, loaned me textbooks, told me who to talk to and not talk to when deciding who should be on my dissertation committee and what classes to take next. My committee chair was absolutely phenomenal. I couldn't have asked for a better committee person just all the way around above and beyond because I think he understood the institution [Jetson University] that we were at, the odds that we were against, and he made it so that he would help us [African-American doctoral students] navigate JU. So he [committee chairperson] was a good navigation tool, and he was resourceful, and people respected him, respected his work, and so I think it made it a lot easier when he needed to access additional resources nobody had a problem telling him no when he asks others to assist me in the dissertation process.

Bleu Ivey expounded on the kind of support by providing an example she encountered with a professor who offered doctoral students help outside of Jetson University. Here is another excerpt from Bleu Ivey:

You might know an instructor who was willing to kind of go above and beyond to help you out, or you know to ensure that, if she [Jetson professor] feels like you're a student that's worthy, then she might say, "Okay, well here's this opportunity, you know, to do this. Whereas, the other student might not get the same opportunity. Like, I know one professor, the students were going to, you know, meet with her on a Saturday in Batavia, and I was like, "I'm not doing that." You know, the drive, and I didn't think it was necessary. It was like they [doctoral students] were going above and beyond something that really didn't quite call for, but it was a way to kind of secure support from that faculty member. That's how I felt. Because I was like, that's, unnecessary, why



do I need to spend my Saturday's at her home or you know spend my Saturday going to her house or what have you? And I didn't get it, I didn't, you know, I just didn't get it, so I guess for me, the favor that shown back from having done that is you know about it. Hey, you know, I think you're capable, but there are other capable students. So, I guess that inequality comes through in subtle ways, like how does one student benefit from a Chair or their committee, and then another student doesn't? You know, how does that happen?

You know if the student was able to make it to candidacy and get there, then how is it that when they get to candidacy they don't get the support from the committee members or their Chair? I don't know? So, I don't know if it's favor, if it's relationships, if it's the lack of relationships, if it's the lack of opportunity to develop those relationships, because you don't get that opportunity to cultivate relationships with your professors, I don't think, unless you really go above and beyond you don't get that opportunity. And some professors are more open than others; some of them don't welcome the opportunity.

Equally, Lisa offered the following example:

My classmates [White males and females] were not able to find committee members or they had issues of having these inordinate amounts of times to move from one phase of your scholarship to the next—candidacy papers or that process being delayed and the student trying to negotiate through those issues. We were able to support each other and make recommendations. Sometimes we had to mentor each other and say, okay, maybe this may not be the best committee member for you. It's that type of support and mentorship that occurred through peer-to-peer relationships. My dissertation committee chairperson was very supportive. My chairperson guided me in the process [*dissertation process*] of what that would look like and helped me to develop my topic [*dissertation*

*topic*] that I would later do my dissertation on and just helping, guiding me through that whole maze of what I needed to do for that.

It was apparent that Bleu Ivey and Lisa were clear and gave poignant examples about the kinds of support they received during the dissertation process at JU. It is also clear that these two AA women had to create their own kinds of support systems while simultaneously knowing there were not any support systems that existed that met their needs as AA women in a doctoral program at a PWI. Even though Eboni did not partner with other AA women in the doctoral program, she still made efforts to form relationships with White classmates to obtain assistance in the doctoral program. On the contrary, during the interview, when I asked Kim what kind of support she received at JU, she stated the following:

I did not receive any support from AA women or from any other ethnic groups on campus [Jetson University]. I think once students [doctoral students] arrived at the doctoral level, they should be equipped with all kinds of support necessary to compete and complete the dissertation process, as well as, the Ed.D. program. A doctoral degree is supposed to be the highest level of scholarly studies. No one should be holding your hand through the process. I do not think I was the majority [doctoral students who needed support] because a lot of people [doctoral students at JU] blamed Jetson for the lack of support.

On the other hand, Eboni affirmed, “While I did not obtain peer-support, I wished Jetson offered financial support that assisted me with the financial costs associated with the doctoral program.”

**Support from Outside Resources for the Dissertation Process.** With the limited support she needed to complete her doctoral degree, Bleu Ivey sought and found

support from outside resources. Because she was not able to find anyone besides her dissertation chairperson who was interested in her study and serve on her dissertation committee, Bleu Ivey, with the assistance of her dissertation chairperson found two other professors from other universities to serve on her committee. She also attended writing groups at one of her alma maters during her doctoral program. Bleu Ivey stated that the writing groups helped her in the development stage of her dissertation. Writing groups were not offered at JU when Bleu Ivey was a doctoral student. It is noteworthy to state that due to the scarce financial resources at JU, she was able to secure funding to help pay for her tuition and other financial needs from outside resources.

In the following section, I will discuss social capital and how this CRT tenet aligns with the thematic category of support for Bleu Ivey, Eboni, and Lisa.

One of the tenets of CRT is *social capital*. According to Yosso (2005), social capital is defined as community resources and networks of people that give emotional support to maneuver through society's institutions. This tenet fits well with this thematic category of support in this text because the tenet states that networks of people can help assure the students emotionally and socially. Additionally, social capital in the AA community can take the form of trust and reciprocity between neighbors or the sharing of mutual values among community members (Putnam, 2000). Social capital was a vital resource that three of the participants (Eboni, Lisa, and Bleu Ivey) utilized in their matriculation at JU. They each confirmed throughout their interviews that they needed emotional assistance to help them navigate through the institutional culture and racism as doctoral students at JU. I will discuss the institutional culture and racism, which are the other three themes that emerged later in this chapter. The assistance also included

financial assistance to help with the dissertation process. Eboni stated, “I needed help [with] the dissertation process. JU did not prepare me with being successful at completing my dissertation. I wished I could have met and talked to former JU doctoral students who completed the dissertation process.”

While Bleu Ivey sought assistance among her AA peers who were women at JU, she also found assistance at other universities in the Chicago area. She knew she had to go outside of JU and get all the help she could in order to complete her doctorate. Next, I will discuss the second theme, which is the variation of isolation at JU. While the two participants obtained support from other AA women, Bleu Ivey, Lisa, and Eboni mentioned that there were other kinds of support they needed in the doctoral program that they did not receive. I will discuss the support the participants did not receive later in this chapter.

## **Theme 2: Variations of Isolation at JU**

As part of the interview, I asked the four participants to discuss the culture at Jetson University. Based on Bleu Ivey’s and Lisa’s body language, tone, and demeanor, it was quite evident that isolation was part of the culture at JU. Therefore, the term *isolation* emerged, which is the second theme in this study. During the interviews, I asked the four participants if they thought their experiences would have been different if there were support systems and programs instituted at JU, specifically for them as AA women. Lisa, Bleu Ivey, and Kim provided feedback on this thematic category. Conversely, both Kim and Eboni said they never felt isolated at any point as doctoral students. They stated that Jetson made all AA students feel welcome. Here is an excerpt of what Lisa stated about

being isolated at JU:

I think that the isolation is rooted in the university, feeling alone, the apparent and obviousness of being a minority in a predominantly [W]hite institution. So the isolation is the perception, I believe I walked into the program with. The fact that there were not an overwhelmingly, you know, a lot of African-American students in the program and knowing, once again, that either you academically cut it, you financially make the cut, or you are not going to remain at Jetson University. My experience would have been different if JU had supportive programs for African-American students. The program [*doctoral program*] was done pretty much in isolation.

To follow up Lisa's responses regarding being isolated at JU, I asked her if she thought isolation was commonplace at PWIs for AA women. Here are her responses:

I believe so. Unless there is a concerted awareness of the struggles, of just being in the minority, what that feels like to be sitting in a classroom with students and you're perhaps the only African-American or one of two, I think unless the university [Jetson University] really takes a deliberate effort to understand that and really see what students experience, what their perceptions are, yes, the students that are in the minority, the African- Americans, are experiencing the same feelings that I felt of isolation. Yes I do. If the university [Jetson University] is not putting it front and center that we know these students are encountering certain issues or if the university is not studying the fact or surveying the students to see what their struggles are, it was a challenge coming into an environment in which I did feel clearly in the minority; I clearly felt alone and isolated. I don't think the university necessarily did anything to make me feel that way. I think it was just the nature of the environment, the experience and unless there was someone that said, "Hey, this student is

here. This student is coming from, you know, being in a majority African-American community to now she's in a different world,” I don't believe that was, there was something in place to look at that and say, “You know what? We need to do something with African-American students. We need to address their unique needs. We need to see, what does it feel like for them to be on the campus in which they are in the minority? Everything varies from what they perhaps maybe used or accustomed to.”

Unless the university has made a deliberate effort to address that and put supports in place, I do believe isolation is a big problem; and I do believe that it's a secret problem because you're not going to go and tell, “Hey, I feel isolated, alone,” because it is perceived. The perception is that you're weak and may not be fit for that institution. Isolation is very much, was very profound doing the doctoral program, doing the doctoral level.”

Bleu Ivey also provided examples of the variations of isolation that occurred while she was a doctoral student at JU. Bleu Ivey declared,

I would almost say you [African-American women in doctoral program] could be invisible on campus too, if you didn't engage ourselves in situations. I guess you know people could just like walk past you. They see you, but they don't see you. The lack of engagement hurts, and then not having a level of recognition also hurt.

Furthermore, when I asked Bleu Ivey if she would recommend AA women to attend JU, she replied no. Additionally, Bleu Ivey stated the following:

I think that you [AA women at JU] can get lost in the crowd at a big institution like that [Jetson University], and so as an African-American woman, while I didn't have a lot of fears or anxieties about attending a [W]hite institution, I think that there might even be this insulation that we

walk around with where we don't think about it as much because it is what it is. Whatever the conditions are, I think that's probably why the fear isn't present or isn't as easily recognizable. Those relationships [with other African-American women] were good to have because they're needed in a program like that [Jetson University] because you do feel isolated.

Additionally, Kim provided a variation of isolation that she witnessed at JU in a class. In a classroom discussion, a female Christian student told the male professor who taught the class that she thought gay people should not be considered part of a multicultural group. According to Kim, the female Christian student was isolated because the male professor purposefully singled her out because she gave her opinion about gay people, which was contrary to the male professor's belief. Kim said: "The professor attacked the Christian's student's opinion and went out of his way to attack her thought."

She also said, "the student's beliefs were somewhat isolated and pushed away by the professor because it didn't match with what the professor considered politically correct."

During their academic journeys at JU as doctoral students, two out of the four AA women experienced isolation and witnessed a situation of isolation with another doctoral student. It was apparent that isolation is part of doctoral program at JU. The participants stated that they felt invisible on the college campus. Prior research on CRT has shown that students of color have negative experiences on college campuses, including isolation (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). Isolation, which is a subtle form of racism, has been reported by AA students at PWIs on the undergraduate and graduate levels (Johnson-Bailey, Valentine, Cervero, & Bowles, 2008; Yosso, 2005). Additionally, Gildersleeve, Croom, and Vasquez (2011) argue socialization process can often leave students of color

feeling isolated and questioning their self-worth.

Moreover, Gildersleeve et al. (2011) problematize that the feeling of being isolated on PWIs can leave the students of color feeling like they are going crazy. Two of the participants in this study, Bleu Ivey and Lisa, experienced isolation related to needing assistance in classes. The two participants stated there was a hidden code of silence embedded in the doctoral program for them as AA women. The hidden code of silence is one when doctoral students, mainly AA women, do not voice their opinions because they are not comfortable doing so. According to Lisa, the code of silence is perceived as “letting the cat out of the bag when they needed help.”

Additionally, Hine (1995) coined the phrase *culture dissemblance* as she argued how Black women in the United States historically protected themselves in oppressed situations. She characterizes that culture dissemblance as “the behavior and attitudes of Black women created the appearance of disclosure and openness, but actually shielded the truth of their inner lives and selves from their oppressors” (p. 380). While her study was written over a decade ago, Hine’s argument is still relevant today, as shown by Bleu Ivey’s and Lisa’s experiences at JU. They adapted coping skills in an effort to stay the course in the doctoral program. Hine also declared that Black women in doctoral programs protect themselves in threatening environments in which power is given to Whites.

I will discuss the third thematic category for this study, which is the institutional culture.

### **Theme 3: Institutional Culture**

During the interview process, I asked the four participants to discuss their perspectives



about the institutional culture at JU. Thus, the third theme that emerged that will be discussed is the institutional culture, which is part of JU's culture in the doctoral program. According to Yosso (2005), "*culture* refers to behaviors and values learned, shared, and exhibited by a group of people" (p. 75). Bleu Ivey and Lisa repeatedly mentioned climate, as well as culture in this study. Thus, the theme institutional culture in JU's doctoral program emerged.

When I asked the four AA participants to discuss JU's culture, three of the four participants (Lisa, Bleu Ivey, and Eboni) offered some responses that shed light on this thematic category. Lisa presented an example of the type of culture that she perceived as prevalent in the doctoral program at JU:

I think the aggressiveness of being in a predominately White institution you know that you have to perform. As an African-American student, you have to be good; you have to perform to remain there. And I'm not even sure if weakness would have even been necessarily a good characteristic to display to have a need for support. I'm not sure if that environment [Jetson University] would have. . . if that would have been well received. And I do believe as definitely as a doctoral student if you come in and you're displaying how needy you are, the question becomes, are you really fit, or are you really a good candidate to finish this program? So, no, that's not something that a student would feel comfortable, or even myself feel comfortable displaying. It's communicated that if you are accepted into this doctoral program, the premise is that you have what it takes to finish. And if you are not displaying what it takes to finish, then maybe this was not the right road for you. It is very clear that I swam, you swim or you sink at Jetson. You either cut it or you don't, and there is [B]lack or [W]hite; there is no in-between. You either make the grades or you don't.

I learned that I had to rely on myself and not seek out extra resources or supports because it was just very clear. There was not a lot of room for error, not a lot of room for failure. I think that they [Jetson University] conditioned me to not even bother to seek support as a doctoral student. I primarily relied on [my] own self.

Lisa also obtained bachelor's and master's degrees from JU. When she arrived to the doctoral program at JU, she was already accustomed to the culture, lack of support and ways in which AA women were treated. However, as she continued talking about her experiences with the JU culture, Lisa provided the following statement:

By the time I got to the doctoral level, I did not pay attention to the fact that I was an African-American in a predominately White institution. As a doctoral student I was already a teacher. I did not focus, nor pay attention to the color issue at Jetson University.

Moreover, in Bell's book, *Afrolantica* (1992), he postulates how African-American lose hope amidst of the overwhelming presence of White supremacy. He also argues that *Afrolantica* is a study of White racism and a look at class conflict within the Black community. White supremacy, race, and racism are the main components of the CRT theoretical framework that guide this study. Further, Bell's argument is an example of what Lisa experiences as an undergraduate and doctoral student. Lisa was conditioned, accustomed, and had accepted the White supremacy that exists at JU. In the midst of the racist culture at JU, as a means to protect herself and self-preservation, she opted to accept the culture as face value and continue on with her studies at JU despite the pain she experienced as an African-American woman at PWI.

Additionally, Bleu Ivey provided insight on the institutional culture at JU. In her

conversation about navigating the culture at JU, she started the dialogue by stating the following:

The environment itself [Jetson University] did call for any type of supportive culture. I think the supportive network of individuals that look like African-American women that might be lacking, because academia is hard and trying to navigate that to see what it [the culture]; or whether I should say negotiate, so it's navigate, maneuver, and negotiate.

How do you negotiate with the institution that doesn't represent you in a larger sense? You don't see as many of your faces [African-Americans] as you would anybody else's. Yet, you're there [Jetson University] to teach and teach from a multicultural standpoint. How do you negotiate the variances that you see even within your own department where you know that somebody got passed up for a promotion for someone who—because you might be a vocal African-American sister on campus and then they [Jetson University] promote somebody who's non African-American who hadn't contributed as much—how do you contend with that and still be okay every day going to work and participating in that culture or that environment? So I don't see it being that different at other institutions at all.

On the contrary, Eboni disagreed with Lisa's and Bleu Ivey's comments about JU having a culture that is not inviting for AA women. Eboni gave her perspective on JU's culture: "Culturally, I think they [JU] did a lot to make us as African-Americans feel as though we were part of the university, especially in the doctoral program."

On the other hand, Kim was apprehensive when I initially asked her about the culture at JU:

I don't feel comfortable describing the culture as an objective truth. I only

wanted to discuss the topic, as I perceived it. JU is a progressive place based on the faculty and the student body. JU is considered a competitive university, so it [Jetson University] means something in terms of the value of the name and respect that the institution gets with regards to post-secondary institutions. I think my experience there [Jetson University] was positive. I can't say that there was . . . like I don't consider myself having gone through something negative there. I'm a self-thinker and I thrive in environments where I can chart my own course, and that is what the program allowed me to do. So I don't consider myself having missed out on anything. I would imagine that having things in place that support the success of students in general, you know just social thing, mentors and advisors, just people keeping track of how they're doing and a touch point that they can go to whenever they encounter difficulties. But then I feel like that's a part of college, that's part of life, you know, that's a time when you need to be assertive and you need to seek out and advocate for the things that you need. And I feel like Jetson is a pretty progressive about reflecting on programs and resources and things that contribute to successful students. It's clear to me that they would like to support the success of minority students in general. They have a lot of that, and I say that as an administrator who is a founding principal of a school where I send students away for summer programs and next year we'll have our founding class applying for college, and I would definitely want Jetson to be a school that they're considering. You know I haven't gotten on the financial side of things yet, and I know that that's a factor in determining whether or not a student will, in fact, attend there. But I know that it's important to them. My Dean of College Counseling had set out to build partnerships with local universities like Easternwestern, like Jetson, and different schools. And Jetson had been one of the most responsive. You know myself being a principal of a school that's 97% African-American and approximately 93% free and reduced lunch, you know I'm excited that

along with many of the other schools that we would be considering competitive colleges and universities in the local area, Jetson had definitely welcomed it with open arms. And you know have been a willing thought partner in sharing resources and ideas and what things we can build within our program. We always send kids to visit. We have kids go to lots of different college and universities ever since they were freshmen, just to visit and get a feel for it, do summer programs and things like that. Jetson has always been one of the places we can connect to for that.

Moreover, during the interview sessions, when she discussed the kinds of relationships she had with classmates and professors, Kim gave insight on the relationships that were built on power structures at JU. Simply put, the professors who had received tenure and promotions were the individuals with the power, according to Kim.

The power structures, I just think people, like there were professors that we had who didn't get tenured when that time came, but you saw other people who may or may not have had a course that was as rigorous, as informational as those other people, but they still received tenure. And not only did they receive tenure but they were promoted rapidly. So, I felt like they must have plugged it to some political or power source because it wasn't that their work stood out above and beyond, you know, that of people who were rejected for tenure. But then I'm not privy to the professional side of things, I don't know if they met deadlines, if they attended work regularly, if they did everything that they were supposed to in order to get tenured work published or whatever. But it did make me feel like, well, that person must be connected because they certainly are not the most experienced or published, or you know, the best professor in terms of following through on things. But at the same time I can't say that I didn't build relationships. You know I was featured as an alumni in the School of Education's newspaper, you know I was given sub opportunities

from my professors where I could sub for one day and be paid \$1,000 just to cover a class, more than once. So, I think that I know that those relationships are there, I have had to call on them for being references or write letters of recommendation, and I still see them. Sometimes they invite me and ask me to speak on panels and things like that. I have colleagues that went through the program with me and are not working for the university and have helped with different things, and I've helped with different things. One of them is a visiting professor, and she every quarter faithfully sends students to observe at my school across a variety of content areas so that they can see urban education and play and done in a quality manner, and that's a regular thing. That's from one of my classmates. I have another one who I've called upon to come and visit and sit down with me and problem solve around meeting the needs of a certain population of students. And she's always been one to share her expertise, always been one to. . . I mean there were times when I needed extra eyes on my work, and no matter how big, I mean this just being a classmate would take the time to read through everything. I have a very close friend who's a lifelong friend, I would say, from that program. Lots of Facebook friends. I mean, so we keep in touch like with regards to needs and things like that. I see people; you know I hire a share of Jetson alum. We host different events with them [Jetson University]. I always make sure that someone from my campus attends Jetson or Jetson fairs where they have career fairs and things like that. So, I mean, I would say I have a pretty vibrant relationship. I've been interviewed for different things, different forums where they were trying to inform the direction of the school and program and things like that.”

It was evident that some of the professors showed certain doctoral students preferential treatment over other doctoral students at JU. This kind of behavior was one that allowed Kim to advance in JU's doctoral program and receive opportunities that

other doctoral students were not privilege to. Even though Kim did not state that she received support in the doctoral program, it was clear in the interview that the favor she received served as a means of support that assisted her at JU. The institutional culture in this study is one of the important themes that affected Kim's experiences at Jetson.

All of the four AA women participants' interpretations varied in their interviews as they discussed JU's institutional culture. While Bleu Ivey and Lisa had similar negative experiences regarding JU's institutional culture, which was an environment that was unwelcoming and difficult to navigate, Kim and Eboni did not share the same negative experiences. Kim characterized "the institutional culture as being one that has power sources. If the African-American women doctoral students were not part of certain professors' power source, then they missed out on opportunities and were ostracized at the institution."

Moreover, in Eboni's opinion JU made AA women comfortable and welcome. There is a lot of research that speaks to the issue of institutional culture as it relates to AA women. According to Museus (2008), PWIs' campus cultures can be problematic for students of color because the cultures send messages of unimportance, devaluation, and exclusion. The last thematic category that will be discussed is racism at JU. The term racism emerged during the Bleu Ivey's and Lisa's interviews when they discussed the culture of JU.

#### **Theme 4: Racism at JU.**

During the interviews, I asked Bleu Ivey to describe JU's culture. As she elaborated on the culture at JU, I asked Bleu Ivey what her thoughts and feelings were

regarding being an AA woman at a PWI. Through her conversation, she used the term *racism* frequently, which formed the fourth theme--racism. According to Marable (1992), “racism is a system of ignorance, exploitation and power used to oppress African-Americans, Latinos, Asians, Pacific Americans, American Asians, and other people on the basis of ethnicity, culture, mannerisms, and color” (p. 5). Ponterotto, Utsey, and Pederson (2006) define racism as any attitude, action, institutional structure, or social policy that subordinates persons or groups because of their color. In discussing JU’s culture, Bleu Ivey mentioned that racism is ingrained in its culture. In her interview, Bleu Ivey further discussed the culture of JU by stating the following about racism:

I don’t see race as being a big denominator that was played out. I think it was a big denominator that was there, and whether or not people acknowledged it or gave it some credence is something different. Racism is embedded into the culture of the institution. The racism that occurs within the school’s [*Jetson University*] culture or school culture is subtle and hard to pinpoint. The disparities that exist are probably real subtle, so it’s kind of hard to say, “Oh, this happened and it could be racial,” or, “This happened and is it racial?” But I think there’s an undertone, an undercurrent that you experience as an African-American woman; you experience that in your interactions, and sometimes you might have that aha moment like, “What the heck? What was that?” You know, “I feel some sort of way and I don’t know what this is.” But it may be so minor that you really don’t know if it’s attached to anything that might have anything to do with race, but you have a sense that it is.

Bleu Ivey further expressed JU’s culture by providing an example of a racist incident that occurred when she contested a grade in a class:



I was very hesitant to raise an issue with a professor because of JU's culture. I was hurt and became disjointed about talking to my professor about the issue of my grade. It was a class where the professor tended to grade harder, at least in my situation. My writing as an African-American woman was often compared to another student, who was a female Asian student. I was apprehensive because I didn't want to rock the boat. I did not want to appear like I was stepping out of line if I mentioned the grade discrepancy. The institution [Jetson University] made me feel like a person or someone other than being White. Sometimes contesting or making the argument for the grade discrepancy was unsound or an injustice to me is a wrong thing to do. The culture did not seem as inviting for me to be able to do that [contest the grade].

From Bleu Ivey's overview of her experience contesting a grade in a class and the codes I heard during the interview, it was clear that there is an issue of racism that is prevalent in JU's doctoral program. Lastly, she said,

I was hurt that the professor compared me to another student, particularly, who was Asian and the unfairness attached to the comparison. And so at that moment I realized, I said, "Wow, he's [the professor] not grading me based on product, he's grading me based on who I'm presenting to him and his idea as a student." I think that he had an ideology already and just kind of felt that way because he was very. . . he gave me this long lengthy answer that sounded like he was taking me in a circle and I'm like, why? He eventually changed the grade because he saw that I wasn't letting up, but my experience with him after that made me think like, why, you know. I had to compare myself to another student who was not African-American to get him to make some moves. And he knew if I took it a step further then it would be something where he would have to pull out her grades [Asian student's grades] and my grades and it would be larger question.

Ogbu (2004) disputed the discrepancies that exist in the educational achievement of African-American students when compared to White students. Additionally, Bleu Ivey's comment during the interview regarding her issue of racism with her grade is congruent with Gillborn's (2005) argument regarding White supremacy. He agrees that most higher education systems in the United States are literally Eurocentric spaces and places. In essence, they are embedded with White norms, values, traditions, and are widely associated with Whiteness. Bleu Ivey stated that she always obtained good grades in this particular professor's class. Yet, when she encountered the grade discrepancy with a paper, in order to express her concern with the grade she was forced to mention the Asian student. Afterwards, the professor changed Bleu Ivey's grade. She was hurt and discombobulated because she had this racist experience at JU. Conversely, Matias (2012) further confirms that White supremacy is often instituted at PWIs. White supremacy is also part of the policies and culture and it makes students of color feel isolated, unwelcome, and hurt as discussed in the third theme in this chapter, which is isolation.

Another example of racism that occurred while Bleu Ivey attended JU was an experience with wanting to purchase baked goods at a student's bake sale at JU. I asked Bleu Ivey to elaborate on our conversation about the culture at JU. Here is what she stated:

I think being a student at Jetson, I think there's a culture within a culture. You have this urban institution that promotes urban diversity and talks about what that looks like. And it is located in the city, but I think there is also a culture within the culture that doesn't necessary address some of the more immediate issues when it comes to race. It's kind of like swept under the rug almost. Because I can recall being on campus and there was a

situation where I believe some different students were having a bake sale and one of the, I guess, clubs or whatever, decided that they would do a bake sale where they would put a price for different races on the cake. So if it was a cake, if you were African-American it would be a certain dollar amount, if you were Asian it would be a certain dollar amount, if you were Hispanic it would be a certain dollar amount. And finally, some students did complain to whether the Dean or what have you, and they issued a statement, but they pretty much swept it under the rug like oh, every club had a right to promote their values or promote you know, or to have freedom of speech, etcetera, etcetera. But it didn't negate the fact that some people were offended, that it bespoke some type of acceptance even of some type of racial antagonism. So while I won't say that Jetson is built on that, I think that there are instances where you can definitely see there's a contradiction in what's promoted as urban education, and then looking at what's actual or what's intentional within the school culture or the school climate.

After Bleu Ivey finished describing the bake sale experience as it related to Jetson's culture, I asked her how it made her feel as an AA woman. She stated the following:

I think going through Jetson, initially, I didn't have any reservation about Jetson and attending Jetson. I never gave it any thought about it being a White institution or a non-White institution. I knew that it was a mixed campus. I attended Westeastern for undergraduate school and the Mannea University for graduate school so it was similar in nature, except that it was a private institution. And I really didn't think any more about it. And I think that it's subtle, that you really don't get an opportunity to really see it for what it is or what some of those things are I should say, until you're probably heavily vested into the schooling or the school climate itself. So,

I think for me, my first. . . I guess my first time really maybe acknowledging that there may be some hint of a difference or variance would be with one of the professors. And I just had this sense of this inkling that there was something that was not right, but I couldn't put my finger on it.

Gillborn (2005) states under critical race theory (CRT), there is structural racism that mobilizes Whiteness as in Bleu Ivey's statement about the bake sale. Based on the responses she received from the Dean's office assistant, it was apparent that students are allowed to use racial tactics even during bake sales on JU's campus. According to Gildersleeve et al. (2011), Bleu Ivey's experience with the bake sale is a form of racial aggression, which is another tenet of CRT. Under this CRT tenet, there are two types of aggressions, which are microaggression and macroaggression.

“Racial macroaggressions are ‘large-scale,’ systems-related stressors that are widespread, sometimes becoming highly publicized, race-related, traumatic events” (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007, p. 554). Conversely, “racial microaggressions are commonplace verbal or behavioral indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults” (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquillin, 2007, p. 278). Further, Davis (1989) defined microaggressions as “stunning acts of disregard that stem from unconscious attitudes of [W]hite superiority and constitute a verification of [B]lack inferiority” (p. 1576).

As long as microaggressions remain hidden, invisible, unspoken, and unexcused as innocent slights with minimum harm, individuals will continue to insult, demean, alienate, and oppress marginalized groups (Sue et al., 2007). Further, Matias (2012)

postulates that when these racial aggressions are spoken aloud, they disrupt dominant narratives and allow people of color to feel supported, heard, and validated, which adds to everyone's understanding of a larger dynamic of race. In this text, I will be using racial microaggression that aligns with this theme of racism. Microaggression was displayed towards Bleu Ivey in the example she provided about the bake sale. The baked goods were priced differently for different ethnicities were examples of a racial insult.

In the next section, I will further discuss White supremacy and Whiteness.

### **White Supremacy and Whiteness**

The education system in the United States is often saturated with White supremacy and Whiteness. In this study, from Bleu Ivey and Lisa's responses, it was clear that they encountered White supremacy at JU. Taylor (1998) states that CRT challenges the experiences of Whites as being the normative standard and grounds its conceptual framework in the unique experiences of people of color in the education system. Feagan, Vera, and Batur (2001) debate that "whether or not White people give their Whiteness much thought, at some level, conscious or half conscious, many White Americans do have some knowledge of what Whiteness means" (p. 193). Leonardo (2009) declares that "the possibility of ending race in the task of bringing back clarity to a situation that for so long has been clouded with the miseducation of racialized humans."

Bleu Ivey experienced White supremacy and Whiteness as she described her experience with a grade discrepancy with a paper in a class and the bake sale. With the grade discrepancy, the professor candidly compared her to another student, who was Asian as he discussed her writing style and grade from the paper. The professor used the

Asian student as the model student to try to demonstrate how Bleu Ivey, as an African-American woman, should write papers. The professor viewed the Asian student as being superior and smarter than Bleu Ivey. This example correlates with Yosso's argument about racism. "Contemporary racism in U.S. schools is deficit thinking" (Yosso, p. 75). Also, Gillborn (2010) agrees with and expands on deficit thinking by arguing that people of color are often ostracized because they are compared to Whites as the measuring stick for intelligence. During her other example, Bleu Ivey's bake sale experience confirms that JU's institution can be somewhat racist because it supported and allowed student groups to charge different prices for their baked goods since the Dean's office assistant told Bleu Ivey that its students can exercise freedom of speech and have different prices for the baked goods. Conversely, Lisa endured White supremacy as well because during her days as an undergraduate and doctoral student at JU, she was always treated and felt as if she had to defend herself against Whites who thought she was an exception because of Affirmative Action. The poignant stories speak to the White supremacy and racial aggression at JU.

Furthermore, Solorzano (2002) asserts that racism is the symptom and not the disease. White supremacy is the disease. White supremacy has taken root in the spirits and minds and hurt a lot of AA women in the Academy. In her article, Matias (2012) demystifies White epistemology of ignorance by redirecting the impact of racial microaggressions onto Whites instead of people of color in hopes that Whites share the burden of understanding their Whiteness and its role in White supremacy, race, and racism. Thus, Gillborn (2010) agrees that there are various racial microaggressions that are maintained by institutional racism and White supremacy.

In an effort to fight the racial microaggressions, Matias (2012) developed a process to heal. As the four participants stated in this study, they had to create a peer-support in order to discuss the racism that is commonplace at JU. As an AA woman also experienced White supremacy at JU and could relate and have shared my counter-story like my participants in this study. Next, I will provide the overall experiences for the AA women in higher education and outline the factors that facilitated and inhibited the four AA women participants' degree progression in the following summary sections.

### **Summary**

In this section, I revisit the research questions in this study:

1. What are the experiences of AA women who earn doctoral degrees at a PWI?
2. What factors do the four interviewees perceived as contributing to the successful completion of their doctorate?
3. What factors facilitated the interviewees' degree progress?
4. What factors inhibited the interviewee degree progress?

First, I will elaborate on the overall experiences of the four interviewees in the next section and revisit the research questions for this study as well.

**Research Question #1.** What are the experiences for African-American women who earned doctoral degrees from a predominately White institution?

This section captures data that speak to the experiences of AA women in higher education who obtained doctoral degrees in educational leadership at JU, which is a PWI. The four AA women all mentioned that JU is an urban, multicultural, highly competitive, and progressive university based on its faculty and student body. It is a university that

accepts multicultural and minority students. According to the four participants in this study, while JU has many positive attributes, there are some concerns for some students, particularly, AA women doctoral students. For example, JU and its doctoral program in educational leadership can leave AA women doctoral students feeling isolated and not welcomed in the institution.

Additionally, two of the four participants, Bleu Ivey and Lisa, mentioned that the institutional culture at JU can be chilly and isolating, coupled with being an institution that does not support, nor have support programs for, AA women doctoral students. I had similar isolating experiences as an AA doctoral student at JU. While listening to Bleu Ivey's and Lisa's responses during the interviews, I recalled my bittersweet experience at JU. It was bittersweet because while I did have peer support from other AA women in the doctoral program, I thought my opinions during the classroom discussions were not important and decided to remain silent in the classes and refrained from expressing my needs, such as financial, emotional, and academic as an AA woman and doctoral student.

Furthermore, Bleu Ivey and Lisa said they did not want to be perceived as being problematic or one who "rocks the boat!"

During the interviews, I was relieved to know that I was not the only AA woman who experienced isolation and racism. Yet, I was saddened to know that there are some issues that went unnoticed at JU. I felt as though my voice was silenced and unimportant during my matriculation at Jetson. In addition to experiencing culture shock, being isolated, and experiencing racism, I struggled to complete my classroom assignments. According to Matias (2012), researchers of color have intimate understanding of race just as Black feminists do with racism and patriarchy (Collins, 1990; hooks, 1994). As such,



below I shared my story as an African-American woman completing my doctorate at JU. My story serves as a counter-story that illuminates the microaggressions so commonly felt by two out of the four participants. In addition to feeling isolated and invisible, I also experienced pain as a doctoral student. It was painful for me to mask my feelings during my matriculation. I constantly second-guessed myself as a doctoral candidate.

One of the thematic categories that emerged in this study was racism. While racism was not a deterrent to Bleu Ivey, it was part of her academic experience as an AA women doctoral student and worth mentioning in this study. Lisa stated that she did not encounter racism on JU's campus as a doctoral student. However, she did experience racism at JU as an undergraduate. I believe that, as an AA woman, Lisa conditioned herself to navigate the institutional culture and ignore any racial matters that occurred at JU. On the contrary, Eboni and Kim did not personally encounter any kind of isolation or racism. They both were familiar with the Jetson's culture and culture at predominately White institutions.

The next section contains the factors that facilitated the four participants' degree progress.

Kim had rewarding and positive experiences at Jetson University. She stated that she felt welcomed and had a sense of belonging as an African-American woman at JU. She would also recommend other African-American women to attend JU. Kim felt as though she did not need support in the doctoral program at JU. Lastly, because of the positive experiences at Jetson University, as a principal, she has partnered with JU in many ventures, such as having her students go to JU for college visits and career fairs.

**Research Question #2:** What factors do the four interviewees perceive as contributing to the successful completion of their doctorate?

The four participants' responses varied when they discussed their academic experiences at JU. As it related to what factors they perceived that contributed to the success of their doctoral degrees. Kim firmly stated that she was accustomed to the culture of PWI. Therefore, she did not look for any resources or support, because she felt as though since she arrived in a doctoral program, she was equipped with everything she needed to acquire her doctoral degree in educational leadership. However, as a doctoral student, she was favored by many professors and showcased as one of JU's scholar students. She did not admittedly state that favor was a determining factor in assisting in the completion of her doctoral degree.

Bleu Ivey and Lisa both confirmed that peer-support was a factor that contributed to their success in achieving their doctoral degrees. They knew there were not any resources at JU that specifically assisted African-Americans with academic, emotional, or financial support (other than loans). They formed their own group, a support group that included other AA women in the doctoral program. They relied on each other for support from the start of the program to the end. Additionally, Bleu Ivey also attributed the success of completing her doctoral degree with going outside of JU and acquiring assistance from other universities. While Eboni was not part of a peer-support group with other AA women in the doctoral program, she stated she was successful in completing her doctoral degree by doing what was required of her. Lastly, she partnered with two White males, who were doctoral students and they supported each other in the doctoral program at JU.

**Research Question #3:** What factors facilitated the participants' degree progress?

In this qualitative study, all four of the African-American women were forthcoming and candid about the factors that facilitated and helped them obtain their doctoral degrees in educational leadership at JU. The factors that contributed to the completion of their degrees were peer-support from their AA female classmates, favor from professors, and assistance with the dissertation process. Two of the four AA women claimed that they would not have made it through the doctoral program if they did not have mentorship, guidance, and support from other AA women in the doctoral program.

Moreover, another participant, Kim did not need to rely on peer-support from anyone, including AA women. She stated that she arrived at JU equipped with all of the academic, financial, and emotional tools required to excel and earn her doctoral degree from JU. Thus, I firmly believe that due to Kim having favor with JU's professors, coupled with her knowledge and experiences while attending PWI schools and universities, she did not depend on any kind of support, because she knew these factors did not exist at PWIs or she did not need them.

**Research Question #4:** What factors inhibited the participants' degree progress?

While there were positive factors and influences that helped the four AA participants graduate with their doctorates in educational leadership, there were drawbacks, as well that are worth mentioning in this study. Interestingly, while two of the four participants, Bleu Ivey and Lisa, stated they received support with the dissertation process; Lisa viewed this thematic category as an inhibitor in the doctoral program. Lisa said that she had to wait a protracted amount of time for one of the dissertation committee

members to give her feedback on her candidacy paper only to find out months later that the committee member wanted Lisa to attend remedial writing classes. This inhibitor prolonged Lisa's progress toward graduation to the point that she removed this particular committee member.

The other factors that inhibit the participants' degree progression were the institutional culture at JU and personal isolation. Gloria, Kurpius, Hamilton, and Wilson (1999) argue that the culture of the academic institution, efficacy beliefs, and social support are directly related to how and if AA students persist at predominately White universities. Some AA students believe that most PWIs are unwelcoming. Both the culture and isolation were deterrents that inhibited the participants' degree progression. Additionally, research shows that issues of isolation have been reported to cause AA students to leave doctoral programs (Jackson, 2004). Thus, the four participants navigated and maneuvered through the issue of being isolated and obtained their degrees because Bleu Ivey and Lisa felt as though they had to withhold from asking for help due to not wanting to rock the boat in the doctoral program. Howard-Hamilton (2004) argues that the voices of AA women as a double minority group have been muted or silenced. Moreover, Eboni told me that she felt as though a professor isolated her, and she felt invisible when she expressed the need for further instruction and advisement when she talked to the professor.

Additionally, all four of the AA women participants stated that they had problems with the dissertation process. Some problems stemmed from identifying professors who could serve on the participants' committees, convincing the professors that their dissertation topics were noteworthy, and experiencing professors who took a considerable

amount of time to provide the participants with comments from their dissertations. Even though it is known in the academy that some doctoral students experience these same problems, the four participants in this study stated that they had some of the same issues during some or all phases of the dissertation process. According to the National Science Foundation (NSF), a total of 2,383 African-Americans earned doctoral degrees, as compared to their White counterparts who earned 26,488 in that same year (2011). From this data, it is apparent that some attention should be dedicated in finding out the reasons why the number of AA women who earn doctoral degrees is low. In 2006, African-American women earned 6.5% of doctoral degrees (Anonymous, 2006).

The Council of Graduate Schools (2011) report that there was a decline in enrollment in doctoral programs for American Indians/Alaskan Islanders, Asian/Pacific Islanders, Hispanics/Latinos, and Whites. There was an increase in enrollment for Blacks/African-Americans. Between the fall 2010 and fall 2011, the increase for African-Americans' enrollment in doctoral programs changed to 4.4%. Based on the statistics above, it is evident that graduate schools and doctoral programs need to do more in an effort to accept, retain, and graduate more students of color in graduate and doctoral programs at PWIs. Particularly, PWIs should institute support systems in order to assist doctoral students of color during the dissertation process.

This chapter provided a summary of the analysis for this research study. The four participants' stories provided rich and thick description data and painted a picture of their experiences as AA women who earned doctoral degrees at a PWI. Moreover, the interviews gave insight into the four participants' experiences and perceptions they had at JU. These valuable insights also reflected on AA women's overall factors on what

inhibited and facilitated their degree progress.

The data from this study were grouped together and organized into thematic categories and offer insight into the conclusions for the group of AA women as a whole. The themes and corresponding experiences offer the conclusions of the data analysis. The next and final chapter includes the discussion, conclusion, and limitations.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusion, and Limitations

and when we speak we are afraid  
our words will not be heard  
nor welcomed  
but when we are silent  
we are still afraid  
so it is better to speak  
remembering  
we were never meant to survive (Lorde, 1978, pp. 31-32)

This study examined how African-American (AA) women reflected upon their experiences as doctoral students at a predominately White institution (PWI). There were four AA women who participated in this study. I discussed the kinds of support they received and factors that facilitated and inhibited their degree progression. Moreover, the four women participants revealed their experiences during the dissertation process. The four AA women all received their doctoral degrees in educational leadership from Jetson University (JU) within the last five years.

The opening Lorde (1978) quote encapsulates the experiences of Bleu Ivey and Lisa, two of the four AA women participants; this excerpt sums up how they interpreted their overall experiences at JU. They had bittersweet experiences as doctoral students at JU. Next, I will revisit the research questions. Afterwards, I will discuss the key findings and provide information on my voice and the limitations of the study. Lastly, I will offer recommendations for future research on AA women who earn doctorates from PWIs.

Bleu Ivey and Lisa stated they were compelled to remain silent and in pain because of the code of silence and lack of support they felt they needed when identifying

professors to serve on their dissertation committees, clarity with classroom assignments, their grades, and classroom discussions. Moreover, these two women felt isolated in the classrooms, and they did not see any point of communicating their needs to their professors or anyone else at JU. In essence, the two AA women felt they would have “rocked the boat,” been scrutinized and polarized if they expressed their needs and desire for any kind of support they needed in the doctoral program at JU. Another participant, Kim, felt if AA women articulated that they had any kind of need or required support, they would have been viewed as not being competent. Lastly, Eboni saw JU as an institution that isolated its AA women doctoral students.

While completing their doctoral studies, three out of four of the AA women participants (Bleu Ivey, Eboni, and Lisa) stated they had to navigate the plethora of cultures within a culture in order to complete their doctoral degrees in educational leadership. Essentially, they had to maneuver through the culture of JU and the culture of its doctoral program. Two out of four participants, Bleu Ivey and Lisa, confirmed that peer support was the main reason why they were successful in JU’s doctoral program. This form of peer support aligns with the othermothering concept. Even though Eboni mentioned that while she did not have peer support from other AA women in the doctoral program, she wished that JU had financial support to aid with costs associated with being doctoral students. Conversely, Kim stated that she was able to excel in all facets of the doctoral program due to favoritism shown towards her.

In addition to receiving favor from professors within the doctoral program, being a favored student, Kim was also given opportunities to be an adjunct professor in the graduate program. On the other hand, Eboni attributed her success at JU to relationships



she sought from White male doctoral students at JU. While Eboni believed she excelled in the program, she mentioned she wished she had mentors who guided her through the dissertation process and funding to pay for her doctoral program.

In this final chapter, I will provide the discussion, limitations, and conclusion for this qualitative study. Lastly, this study also provided recommendations for further research related to AA women who attend PWIs and earn doctorates.

### **Summary of the Study**

The focus of this study was to examine the perspectives and experiences of four AA women who earned doctorates in educational leadership at a PWI, JU. Moreover, the study sought to understand the experiences of AA women in higher education, find out what factors facilitated their degree progression and lastly, what factors inhibited their degree progression. Both of these factors will be discussed in length later in this chapter. This qualitative study, framed by critical race theory (CRT), sought to examine the experiences of four AA women who graduated from a PWI with doctorates in educational leadership. CRT was used as the theoretical framework to understand the experiences of AA women with a history of their voices being silenced in the mainstream dominant culture, White America. CRT was also selected for this study because of its ability to analyze barriers that stymie AA females in the past. More importantly, CRT was utilized because it includes storytelling as a means to portray the experiences of marginalized groups. This theoretical framework enabled four AA women's voices to be heard and the CRT framework captured their counter-stories, as they were doctoral students at a PWI.

The process for students earning doctoral degrees can be challenging. However, coupled with issues such as isolation and racism, obtaining doctoral degrees for AA women can be even more difficult and daunting. From the four thematic categories, it was clear that there were factors that facilitated the progression for the four AA women, as well as factors that inhibited their progression in the doctoral program at JU, which is a PWI. The factors that facilitated the degree progression were support and favor. However, the factors that inhibited the four participants' degree progression were isolation, racism, and the institutional culture at JU.

In the following section, I will discuss the implications for practice that was derived from my research study.

### **Implications for Practice**

There are several implications for practice that can be drawn from the findings of this qualitative study. This research study corroborates the need for future research in regards for AA women attending PWIs. The findings will help AA women doctoral students, professors, and administrators at PWIs and policy makers. Moreover, this study will add to the existing body of literature on CRT by exploring the academic experiences the four AA women participants. Although the study is limited in scope, it adds to the dialogues about AA women and their experiences they may encounter at PWIs as doctoral students.

Additionally, one of the most valuable implications of this research study is how PWIs support their AA women who are in doctoral programs. From the interviews, it was apparent from Eboni's, Lisa's, and Bleue Ivey's responses that they were expected to

come to JU's doctoral program prepared and equipped with all necessary tools that are required for them to complete their doctoral degrees. From the three participants' responses, this certainly was not the case. Bleu Ivey, Eboni, and Lisa needed support ranging from financial support to emotional support.

Overall, Bleu Ivey, Eboni, and Lisa articulated their concerns about the lack of financial support and the support necessary to complete the dissertation process, which included the selection of committee members. They raised their voices during the interviews and discussed some concerns they experienced as doctoral students. Therefore, PWIs should consider not assuming that once AA women reach the doctoral level, they are not in need of any form of support.

Below I provide practical implications for PWIs, researchers, and African-American women who attend PWIs.

### **Predominately White Institutions**

The stories and experiences captured from two out of the four AA women in this study recommend eradicating racism and unwelcoming institutional culture that is prevalent at PWIs. PWIs should do more to support this population of their doctoral students. PWIs should create safe spaces where AA women can voice their opinions without being ridiculed, misjudged, and viewed as not academically prepared to excel in doctoral programs. Equally, PWIs should reserve spaces and rooms on their campuses for AA women in doctoral programs to go and verbalize their concerns to mentors and coaches.

Another support program that PWIs should consider is having monthly brown bag

dinners and ice cream socials with their AA women in doctoral programs. At the dinners and ice cream socials, the AA women doctoral students could voice opinions and needs. PWIs should also create supportive programs that would help AA women prosper in their doctoral coursework. The support programs would include institutionalized peer-support programs and financial and emotional assistance. Moreover, PWIs should employ AA women professors who can offer support and guidance in the form of coaching to the AA women doctoral students. Lastly, the AA women doctoral students would feel a sense of belonging and encouragement from the presence of AA women professors on PWI campuses.

Additionally, PWIs should hire AA mentors and AA academic advisors who are familiar with the complex issues that AA doctoral students are confronted with at PWIs. The individuals should provide the AA women with academic and emotional assistance that will help with their academic journeys. In lieu of the traditional mentoring relationships that are often instituted in educational literature, othermothering goes beyond the call of duty for AA students and provides them maternal guidance and nurturing. Collins (2000) defines othermothering as women who help blood mothers by sharing the responsibilities of mothering. Like HBCUs, PWIs should consider adopting the concept of othermothering as a way to support their AA women doctoral students. As aforementioned in this study, Hirt, Amelink, et al. (2008) argue administrators and professors from HBCUs nurture and develop academic and professional relationships with their students of color. In turn, the AA women in doctoral programs could have a sense of belonging at the PWIs and excel in their classes and beyond.

Furthermore, there are many people losing jobs and getting downsized in the

workforce. Many people are going back to school to complete their degrees with the hope that they will have better chances of obtaining better paying jobs. Many people in the workforce have chosen to acquire advanced degrees. The cost of attending PWIs to earn doctoral degrees is quite high. For example, Bleu Ivey stated when she completed her doctoral degree from JU she owed a total of \$70,000 in loans. In today's society, excluding loans, there is a shortage of financial resources that could help defray the costs associated with attending doctoral programs at PWIs. Therefore, PWIs should consider seeking funding sources, scholarships, tuition waivers, and grants that could help AA women with costs associated with their doctoral degrees.

### **Researchers**

CRT was the theoretical framework that guided my research study. CRT gives voices to marginalized groups and incorporates counter-storytelling as a way for the marginalized groups to provide their overviews of their experiences. As previously mentioned in this study, there is a plethora of support programs for students of color. However, there is a limited amount of research specifically for AA women who attend PWIs and earn doctoral degrees. Researchers can play a vital role by educating scholars and others about the negative experiences, such as racism and unwelcoming cultures that are sometimes common at PWIs (Gildersleeve et al., 2011). Researchers should conduct research on the academic experiences of AA women and how racism, isolation, White supremacy, and Whiteness affect their experiences in doctoral programs. Finally, based on the negative academic experiences of the participants in this study, researchers should document how these experiences leave women of color in pain and second-guessing their

worth and values that they bring to institutions (Matias, 2012).

### **AA Women Who Attend PWIs for Doctoral Programs**

As Kim stated, doctoral students should come to doctoral programs prepared academically, emotionally, and financially to succeed in the programs. The AA women who decide to attend the PWIs should be proactive and do their research on the potential doctoral programs they are interested in before enrolling in institutions. The AA women should be assertive and ensure that the doctoral programs they choose have everything they need in order to complete their doctoral studies at the respective institutions. Moreover, AA women should develop peer-support groups and also support groups outside of their ethnicity to assist them in their academic journeys at PWIs. The AA women doctoral students should form writing groups at PWIs that will help them in the dissertation stage of the doctoral programs. Lastly, if the AA women doctoral students are not receiving all of the academic tools they need to excel in their classes at PWIs, they should voice their concerns and the lack of support to the respective individuals at their institutions. In any research study, there are limitations. In the next section, I will provide the limitations of my study.

### **Limitations of the Study**

There were four limitations that occurred in this study. The first limitation was the sample size. The study consisted of interviewing four AA women who attended one PWI and earned doctorates in educational leadership. However, this small sample size does not represent all AA women who attend PWIs in educational leadership and curriculum studies. Thus, the benefits of a smaller sample size enabled me to spend more time with

the four AA women participants and obtain in-depth, rich, and thick descriptions of their experiences in this research study.

The second limitation was that the study did not include AA men or other ethnicities who attend PWIs.

A third limitation of this study existed in the fact that there were not any AA women who attended public universities and HBCUs in this study.

The final limitation was my role as the researcher. As an AA woman doctoral student at a PWI, I had experiences similar to the four AA women participants. The AA women in this study do not represent all AA women who attend PWIs and earn doctoral degrees, nor all AA women's voices and their experiences.

### **Implications for Future Research**

My study only includes four AA women who attended a PWI. Due to the limited size of the participants' pool in my study, there should be future studies to confirm the findings. Even though the sample size is small in this study, the themes derived from the four AA women participants suggest that future research and conversations need to happen in an effort to explore support given to students of color at PWIs. After this study's findings, it is apparent that more attention is needed in the areas of lack of support for AA women in doctoral programs.

This factor is emphasized with the statistics provided by Golde (2005) who argued that less than 40% of African-American students complete their doctorates. According to NCES (2010), out of the 81,953 women who earned doctoral degrees, only 6,795 were African-American women. Forty to sixty percent of students who start

doctoral programs regardless of subject area do not complete their degrees (Lieberman & Dorsch, 2005). This percentage has remained steady for the past forty years (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005). According to NCES, in 2008 the enrollment for African-American doctoral students was 11.5%, yet only 6% of the enrolled were granted degrees (NCES, 2008). While there are many factors that could contribute to the low percentage of AA women graduating with doctoral degrees, one remedy to address this concern is to implement support programs and services for AA women who are earning degrees at PWIs. For the students who need it, doctoral programs should consider creating support programs for the students who need them; peer-support groups, for instance, could be tailored to suit a PWIs population of AA women doctoral students. Mentoring programs support the othermothering concept in higher education.

First, I suggest that the othermothering concept serve as a tool in PWIs in an effort to help AA women in doctoral programs because of its ability to be a tool to nurture and provide maternal guidance for this population of students at PWIs. I also suggest PWIs institute two mentoring programs. One of these would be for professors to mentor and coach current AA women in doctoral programs at PWIs on various topics. The topics could include the culture of PWIs, how to develop dissertations topics, select committee members, and so on. The coaching program would also feature effective strategies for supporting writing and research components of the program. The second mentoring program would entail hiring former AA women who earned doctorates from PWIs to mentor, guide, and support current AA women in the doctoral programs in all areas to enable the current students to feel supported and nurtured during their journeys in the doctoral programs, particularly the dissertation process.



PWIs should develop and administer surveys and focus groups for their AA women who are in doctoral programs to solicit their opinions on how PWIs could assist in the AA women's journeys to obtaining their doctoral degrees. The findings and feedback could be used to develop programs and support groups based on the outcomes of the focus groups and surveys. Lastly, I believe these initiatives would embolden the AA women in the doctoral programs to break the codes of silence and not be hesitant to rock the boat because there would be services in place tailored to address their needs.

Additionally, PWIs should consider making a conscious effort to secure more funding sources to help AA women defray the tuition costs and other expenses associated with being in doctoral programs. Future researchers should conduct research and devise ways that would embolden AA women in doctoral programs in the future to attend PWIs. Future researchers should also have a zero tolerance on the code of silence that exists in doctoral programs. In an effort to implement zero tolerance for silence in doctoral programs, I would suggest PWIs have policies that state that the doctoral program are safe spaces that will allow AA women and others to verbalize their needs, so that the code of silence can be eradicated. AA women should be free to express their needs in any space within doctoral programs. The AA women should not be afraid or apprehensive to share their opinions and thoughts or fear rocking the boat in doctoral programs.

Moreover, it is also evident that regardless of the factors that inhibited the four AA women participants in the doctoral program at JU, the four AA women overcame the challenges, earned their doctoral degrees, and are currently practitioners in their respective fields. However, I wonder if there would have been different outcomes, opinions, and experiences for this group of AA women if they received support from JU

in addition to peer support. It is noteworthy that even though they graduated, some considerations should be made in order to assist and support AA women who attend PWIs in the future. Based on the research regarding support for AA women doctoral students and the four thematic categories that emerged from this study, more research needs to be conducted to support AA women at PWIs who are in doctoral programs.

Existing literature on mentoring in higher education does not feature work that delineates the support structures for AA women in doctoral programs at PWIs. Also, the current literature does not provide information on any support systems that could help AA women in doctoral programs at PWIs. My study further highlights the lack of support systems for AA women. The overall purpose of this qualitative research study was to paint a portrait of four AA women's experiences that earned doctoral degrees at a PWI and allow their voices to be heard. I painted brushstrokes on the canvas that provided a mere glimpse of AA women who earn doctorates at PWIs.

Additionally, in Cook's (2013) article, "Presumed Competent," she postulates how race and class intersect for women of color in the academy. Through the counter-storytelling of women of color, she documents some of the experiences women of color in the academy. She offers five factors that can help women of color survive in higher education: 1. campus climate, 2. faculty-student relations, 3. network of allies, 4. social class, and 5. tenure and promotion. She states that women of color are often scrutinized and judged, and have misconceptions as they enter the higher education space. Cook's argument about campus climate correlates with what Bleu Ivey and Lisa mentioned about JU. Cook mentioned that some campuses' climate is subtle and ingrained, as did two of the participants in this study, Lisa and Bleu Ivey. Bleu Ivey and Lisa mentioned they "did

not want to rock the boat” because they did not want to be perceived as problematic or as targets for ridicule if they needed support or assistance as doctoral students.

Lisa’s and Bleu Ivey’s comments about rocking the boat parallels Cook’s argument about how the climate is ingrained into the institution and how the negativity affect women of color at PWIs. Some of the experiences they encountered in JU’s doctoral program left Lisa and Bleu Ivey hurt and scarred. Lisa’s and Bleu Ivey’s experiences at JU also align with what Gardner (2008) spoke of in her article about the negative experiences AA women in doctoral programs at PWIs. She summarized her article by mentioning that one AA woman participant stated, “I just hope I can make it of here without too many scars” (p. 132). The pain of experiencing racism at PWIs left the woman participant in Gardner’s study bruised and having scars like Bleu Ivey and Lisa.

Additionally, in their book, *Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia*, Muhs, Niemann, Gonzalez, and Harris (2012) confirm and magnify Cook’s and Gardner’s theories and my study about the painful experiences women of color are confronted with in higher education. In their collection of narratives of over thirty women of color who work in the Academy, the authors of the book document academic scholars’ storytelling of how the tenure and promotion, campus climate, faculty/student relationships, network of allies, and social class in academia intersect and impacted their careers in the field of higher education. The campus climate was one factor that was challenging for two of the four participants in this study, Lisa and Bleu Ivey. The authors ended the book by challenging PWIs and the higher education field to embrace women of color’s experiences and try to understand how race intersects with every facet in the academy.

The current research discusses some challenges such as isolation, institutional culture, and the dissertation process that occur in doctoral programs. It is my hope that I painted some brushstrokes about my four participants' experiences in this study. The results from this study will contribute to the limited existing body of literature regarding AA women who earned doctoral degrees from PWIs and specifically address the kinds of supports they need in doctoral programs. Lastly, I included quotes and lyrics in this study as ways to describe how my participants conceptualized and viewed their academic experiences at JU. As a way to summarize this study, I included an original piece of my own work, entitled, "I don't matter:"

#### I Don't Matter!

See me, hear me and understand me.

Well...that's what I believed, hoped and prayed for

I am a woman with wisdom, strength, vigor, and with hope and dreams

I come to this space as a resilient being and knowledgeable. Yet, you underestimate my silence as a sign of weakness and understanding.

The pain that I have experienced in this space has caused me to suppress my thoughts, knowledge and opinions because you don't see, hear or understand me.

I heard my ancestors say, "This too shall pass," but the pain and hurt have scarred my heart, bruised my spirit and left me feeling misunderstood.

This is a never ending story, so, I am left to believe that I don't matter!

(Coleman Hunter, 2013©).

One may ask why I am documenting the academic journeys of four AA women who attended a PWI if they earned their doctoral degrees. What is the point? The points that I am making are two: 1. AA women should not suffer and be in pain because of the racial

confines of institutions of higher educational systems while simultaneously trying to earn doctorates , and 2. to shed light on the lack of support AA women obtained on the doctoral level at a PWI. The experience of earning doctoral degrees should be a process in which AA women are learning to think methodically and analytically about theories, as well as creating new best practices in their respective fields. The AA women's experiences should not be plagued with heartache, bad memories, and racism.

In an effort to eradicate the problems, researchers should consider strategizing and developing ways to paint better and inspiring portraits of AA women in doctoral programs at PWIs that include hope, support, and care. It is also my hope that this study will shed light and create dialogues of the many facets some AA women experience in doctoral programs at PWIs. Based on my pain, the pain of the four AA women participants, and our counter-stories, it is evident that more research needs to be conducted, so that there will be fewer, or no, AA women who experience what the four participants and I did at Jetson University. It is my hope my counter-story, as well as the counter-stories of the four AA women participants will bring awareness of about the racism that can be prevalent on predominately White universities and within the universities' doctoral programs.

## **Conclusion**

My study included obtaining the counter-stories and experiences of four AA women who earned doctoral degrees from a PWI. Due to the limited size of the participants' pool, there should be future studies to confirm the findings of this very small sample size in my study. Even though the four AA women participants in this study are not representatives of all AA women in doctoral programs, the findings from my study draw attention to the importance of looking at ways the AA women are not supported on the doctoral level. The counter-stories of the four AA women participants recommend that PWIs should eradicate the code of silence that could be embedded within their institution's culture. Also, this study recommends that PWIs offer support systems for AA women in doctoral programs, ranging from writing groups and financial and academic assistance.

The current body of literature is saturated with support systems in place for AA women on the undergraduate and graduate levels. Yet the literature does not contain support systems for AA women in doctoral programs, specifically at PWIs. Historically, AA women's voices have been silenced in the education system, specifically at the doctoral level. Conducting further research on AA female students who graduated with doctoral degrees from PWIs and their experiences while attending such institutions will inform colleges and universities, help AA women in graduate school who attend PWIs in the future, and enhance and contribute to the existing body of literature about AA women who graduated attended PWIs. As mentioned in the beginning of chapter one, Carroll (1982) postulates that Black women in higher education are isolated, underutilized, and

often demoralized. According to Delgado and Stefanie (2001), “Many victims of racial discrimination suffer in silence, or blame themselves for their predicaments. Stories can give them voice and demonstrate that others have similar experiences. Stories can name a type of discrimination and once named, it can be combated. If race is not real or objective, but constructed, racism and prejudice should be capable of deconstruction” (p. 43). Racism was an essential component and played an important role of two of the participants in this study experiences at JU. Race, racism, and discrimination need to be eliminated from the educational system and institutional climate for AA women who earn doctorates from PWIs.

As previously stated, PWIs should adopt strategies and best practices like the othermothering concept that is used in HBCUs for their populations of AA women in doctoral programs (Guiffrida, 2005; Reddick, 2006). Second, PWIs should consider using the strategies outlined in Muhs, Niemann, Gonzalez, and Harris book (2012) about how race and gender intersects and colors the experiences of African-American women in doctoral programs at such institutions.

This study is from the AA women’s perspectives on peer-support, institutional culture, and racism. Although limited in scope, it adds significantly to the dialogues about AA women and their overall experiences as doctoral students at a PWI. In summation, with the understanding that I only worked with AA women in one doctoral program in this study, further research could also focus on the perspectives of AA women at other PWIs and public universities.

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## Appendices

## Appendix A

Biographical Questionnaire

Demographic Questionnaire

Please complete the biographical questionnaire to the best of your ability. You are free to skip any questions you prefer not to answer. Thank you for your time!

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Last) (Middle Initial) (First)

1. Please indicate your age \_\_\_\_\_

2. Please indicate your hometown \_\_\_\_\_ Country \_\_\_\_\_

3. Please indicate your preferred telephone number by which you may be contacted

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Please indicate your preferred e-mail address by which you may be contacted

\_\_\_\_\_

5. Please indicate your phone number \_\_\_\_\_

6. Please indicate the best times of the day when you may be contacted

\_\_\_\_\_

7. What was your major at this university? \_\_\_\_\_



## **Appendix B**

Interview One

Culture of Institution

Protocol #SH121412EDU

This conversation is being recorded for research purposes. Please let me know now if you do not agree to being recorded. You may request that the recording stop at any time. Your opinions and insights are greatly appreciated. Please feel free to ask me to repeat any question. Please take as much time as you feel you may need to reflect upon your responses.

Please describe the culture of Jetson University.

Please describe the culture of the classrooms at Jetson University.

Did you find any support while earning your doctorate degree at Jetson University?

Were there any support programs and services that helped you as an African-American woman at Jetson University?

Were there any clubs or organizations that you joined that were beneficial to you as an African-American woman?

Did you feel welcome as an African-American woman at Jetson University?

How did it feel being an African-American woman attending a predominately White institution?

As a doctoral student at Jetson University, were there any times when you felt as though your needs were not met?

Did you ever feel hurt or isolated because you were an African-American woman at Jetson University?

Did you have any fear coming to Jetson University? The classroom at Jetson University?

Would you recommend another African-American woman to attend Jetson University?

Thank you for your time and input with this study!

## Appendix C

Interview Two

Relationships at the Institution

Protocol #SH121412EDU

This conversation is being recorded for research purposes. Please let me know now if you do not agree to being recorded. You may request that the recording stop at any time. Your opinions and insights are greatly appreciated. Please feel free to ask me to repeat any question. Please take as much time as you feel you may need to reflect upon your responses.

As an African-American woman, could you please tell me if you developed any relationships at Jetson University?

How did you develop the relationships?

Could you please describe the relationship with these individuals? If not, why not?

Do you still keep in touch with the individuals today? If not, why? If so, please elaborate

In your experience at a predominately White institution, as an African-American woman, what was the level of support you received from professors? Please elaborate

If you had a sister, daughter or another female relative attend Jetson University, what would you want to be in place to ensure this individual do not have to go through what you went through at Jetson University?

Thank you for your time and input with this study!

## **Appendix D**

### Wrap Up Interview

During the course of the three interviews, we have discussed your experiences thoughts about Jetson University and your experience as an African-American woman in a doctoral program.

I want to share some of our responses with you and explain how I interpret them to make sure I have understood you correctly.

Is there anything else that we have not discussed that you would like to add?

Thank you for your time and input with this study!

## **Appendix E**

### Participants' Interview Script

#### Interview Script

You have agreed to participate in a study to gather descriptive data on the experiences of African-American women who graduated with doctoral degrees from Jetson University, which is a predominantly White institution. I truly appreciate your time and willingness to be part of this research study. You will be asked to reflect and share on your experiences as an AA woman who graduated with a doctoral degree in educational leadership program from a predominately White institution. You will have a total of three interviews while participating in this study. Each interview will last one hour. May I please have your permission to tape record this interview?

The tapes that are used to record the interviews will only be used for my own purposes to analyze our interview. Please take as long as you wish to respond to questions, feel free to ask for clarification if my question is confusing or unclear to you. I hope we can schedule a second and follow up interview in about a week, so if there is a question you need to think more about, we can come back to it at our next meeting.

## Appendix F

### Recruitment Flyer



#### Educational Research Study Needs Your Assistance!!!

A research study is in need of African-American women who earned doctoral degree from Jetson University. We would like to hear about your overall experience at this university as an African-American woman and former doctoral student. If you are interested in sharing your experience in order to assist current and future African-American women who earn doctoral degrees from predominately White institutions, please carefully read the information below, which provide more details for this study.

Interested participants must meet the following criteria:

African-American women who earned a doctoral degree in education from JU

Have graduated from Jetson University between Autumn 2007 and Winter 2012

Interested participants are being recruited for the purpose of research and will be asked to participate in the following activities:

Participate in three confidential audio-recorded interviews lasting 45 minutes to an hour at a location at your convenience.

Information gained through the interviews will remain confidential. Participation in the research study is voluntary and can be revoked at any time. Sherry M. Coleman Hunter is currently a doctoral student at Jetson University and heads this study.

If you are interested, please contact Sherry M. Coleman Hunter at (773) 501-8131 or via email at [hunter\\_sherry@hotmail.com](mailto:hunter_sherry@hotmail.com). All information will be kept confidential.



## Appendix G

### Screening Protocol

Protocol #SH121412EDU

(This screening process is a form that will be used when potential participants contact me for the research study).

In the recruitment process, I selected participants from the responses sent to my phone and email. The screening process will consist of asking the potential participants two important questions.

Potential Participant #

---

Hello. Thanks for contacting me about the research. This screening process is to see if you are eligible to participate in this research study about African-American women who graduated with doctoral degrees in education from a Predominately White Institution. In order to be sure that you are eligible to be in the research I need to ask you two questions. Is it ok for me to ask you these questions?

Are you an African-American woman who earned your doctoral degree in education from Jetson University?  Yes  No

Did you graduate from Jetson University between Autumn 2007 and Spring 2012?  
 Yes  No

Do both of these apply to you?  Yes  No

Thank you for your time!! What are a good time, date and location to meet for the first interview and for your consent?

## **Appendix H**

### 18 year old Consent Form

#### Assent to Participate in Research Study

Portraits of Four African-American Women who Earned Doctoral Degrees from a Predominately White Institution

What is the purpose of this research?

We are asking you to be in a research study because we are trying to learn more about the experiences of African-American women who graduated with doctoral degrees from a predominately White institution. You are invited to participate in this study because you are an U.S. born African-American woman who attended and graduated from Jetson University with a degree in Educational Leadership. This study is conducted by Sherry M. Coleman Hunter, a graduate student at Jetson University as a requirement in obtaining her doctoral degree.

How much time will this take?

This study will take about four (4) hours of your time over eight weeks. Three interviews will each take approximately an hour.

What will I be asked to do if I agree to participate in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to participate in four interviews where your responses will be audio taped and transcribed.

What are the risks involved in participating this study?

This study does not involve any risks. Your experiences will remain completely confidential during the interview, data collection and analysis. At any time, you can choose not to answer a question.

What are the benefits of being in this study?

You will not personally benefit from this study, by sharing your experiences, I hope to learn how your experiences could contribute to current and future African-American women who pursue doctoral degrees at predominately White institutions. Secondly, it will help predominately White institutions learn about ways to help their African-American women doctoral students at their respective universities. Lastly, when you share your experiences, your voice will directly contribute to the limited research that will shape future understandings of this subject matter.

Can I decide not to participate? If so, are there other options?

Yes, you can choose not to participate. Even if you agree to be in the study now, you can change your mind later and leave the study. There will be no negative consequences if you decide not to participate or change your mind later.

Assent to Participate in Research Study, continues

How will the confidentiality of the research records be protected?

The records of this study will be kept confidential. In any report we might publish, we will not include any information that will identify you. Research records will be stored securely, and only the primary researcher will have access to the records that identify you by name. Some people might review our records in order to make sure we are doing what we stated. For example, Jetson University's Institutional Review Board, faculty sponsor or another researcher who checks my work may review your information. If they look at the records, they will not know your name and will keep your information confidential. Research information will be recorded and kept on file for three (3) years. Once the three (3) years are up, audio files will be erased and transcribed data will be destroyed by a

paper shredder.

Whom can I contact if I have questions?

If you have questions about this study, please contact Sherry M. Hunter via phone at 773-501-8131 or via email at hunter\_sherry@hotmail.com or Dr. Gayle Mindes, faculty advisor, via phone at 773-325-7769 or via email at gmindes@depaul.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact Susan Loess-Perez, Jetson University's Director of Research Protections at 312-362-7593 or by email at sloesspe@depaul.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep with you.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have all my questions answered. (Check one box below.)

I agree to be in this study.

I **DO NOT** agree to be in this study.

Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix I**

IRB Approval Form (See Below)

# DEPAUL UNIVERSITY



Office of Research Services  
Institutional Review Board  
1 East Jackson Boulevard  
Chicago, Illinois 60604-2201  
312-362-7593  
Fax: 312-362-7574

## Research Involving Human Subjects NOTICE OF INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD ACTION

**To:** Sherry Hunter, Graduate Student, College of Education

**Date:** February 21, 2013

**Re:** Research Protocol # SSH121412EDU  
"Portraits of Three African-American Women Who Earned Doctoral Degrees from a Predominantly White Institution (PWI)"

---

Please review the following important information about the review of your proposed research activity.

### Review Details

This submission is an initial submission. Your research project meets the criteria for Expedited review under 45 CFR 45 CFR 46.110 under the following categories.

*"(6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes."*

*"(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies."*

### Approval Details

Your research was originally reviewed on December 18, 2012 and revisions were requested. The multiple revisions you submitted on January 2, 2013, January 22, 2013, and February 5, 2013 were reviewed and approved on February 21, 2013.

**Approval Period:** February 21, 2013-February 20, 2014

### **Approved Consent, Parent/Guardian Permission, or Assent Materials:**

- 1) Adult Consent, version 2/21/2013 (attached)
- 2) Screening script with verbal consent for screening process, version 2/21/2013  
Alteration of consent for shorted verbal telephone under 45 CFR 46.116(d), waiver of documentation of consent granted under 45 CFR 46.117 (c) 2 for verbal consent for telephone screening process

### **Other approved study documents:**

- 1) Recruitment flyer, version 2/21/2013 (attached)

**Number of approved participants:** 4 Total

*You should not exceed this total number of subjects without prospectively submitting an amendment to the IRB requesting an increase in subject number.*

**Funding Source:** 1) None

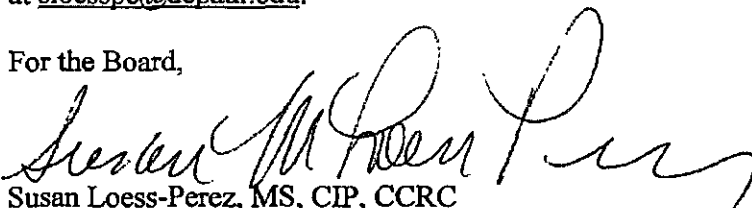
**Approved Performance sites:** 1) DePaul University

Reminders

- Only the most recent IRB-approved versions of consent, parent/guardian permission, or assent forms may be used in association with this project.
- Any changes to the funding source or funding status must be sent to the IRB as an amendment.
- Prior to implementing revisions to project materials or procedures, you must submit an amendment application detailing the changes to the IRB for review and receive notification of approval.
- You must promptly report any problems that have occurred involving research participants to the IRB in writing.
- If your project will continue beyond the approval period indicated above, you are responsible for submitting a continuing review report at least 3 weeks prior to the expiration date. The continuing review form can be downloaded from the IRB web page.
- **Once the research is completed, you must send a final closure report for the research to the IRB.**

The Board would like to thank you for your efforts and cooperation and wishes you the best of luck on your research. If you have any questions, please contact me by telephone at (312) 362-7593 or by email at [sloesspe@depaul.edu](mailto:sloesspe@depaul.edu).

For the Board,

  
Susan Loess-Perez, MS, CIP, CCRC  
Director of Research Compliance  
Office of Research Services

Cc: Gayle Mindes, EdD., Faculty Sponsor, College of Education  
Barbara Rieckhoff, PhD, LRB Co-Chair, College of Education  
Alexandra Novakovic, PhD., LRB Co-Chair, College of Education

