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Othermothering by African American Women in Higher Education at Predominantly White Institutions: How the Practice Affects Their Professional and Personal Lives

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Othermothering by African American Women in Higher Education at Predominantly White Institutions: How the Practice Affects Their Professional and Personal Lives

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Certification of Authorship Page

I certify that I am the sole author of this dissertation. Any assistance received in the preparation of this dissertation has been acknowledged and disclosed within it. Any sources utilized, including the use of data, ideas and words, those quoted directly or paraphrased, have been cited. I certify that I have prepared this dissertation according program guidelines, as directed.

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Julie Collins Date

Abstract

Many African American women who work in higher education, in non-faculty roles, incorporate a historical and cultural tradition commonly referred to as "othermothering" with higher education best practices when working with African American students. The practice of othermothering was used by enslaved African American women to assist other mothers with the care of their children and to maintain the family structure. The practice continues to this day in spaces where women are present such as neighborhoods, faith communities, community organizations and educational institutions. This research, using Black Feminist Theory as the theoretical framework, sought to study othermothering as practiced by African American women who work in non-faculty roles at PWIs and its effect on their professional and personal lives. Narrative inquiry was utilized to hear stories from five mid-career African American women in order to understand their personal history and professional experiences. The method for data collection was interviews conducted over a period of time using the Zoom audio and visual platform. The study found that (1) the women all had early and ongoing experiences with othermothering; (2) that othermothering shaped and influenced their professional development; and (3) the women incorporated othermothering when engaging with African American students at their respective institutions. The findings from this research can assist with raising awareness of the practice of othermothering by African American women while also informing higher education best practices when engaging African American students at PWIs.

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With gratitude I acknowledge the importance of the tradition of othermothering, as practiced by the ancestors. I acknowledge the gift of othermothering that I received from devoted women throughout my life. The support and guidance of these women has left a lasting impression on my life. The pseudonyms used in my research for the participants are dedicated to the othermothers I had/I have in my life. I extend a heartfelt thank you to my mother, who kept me in her prayers, especially during times I felt like giving up. To my amazing sisters and brother who cheered me on from the sideline. To the memory of my father, who I miss daily.

Without knowing the name of this practice, I also incorporated othermothering in my work as an educator. In my various roles in higher education, I am honored to continue the tradition with the brilliant students I have had immense pleasure to work with over the years. In conclusion, this research would not have happened without the supportive women, who gave of time to share their stories with me.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Background

Many African American women who work in higher education, in non-faculty roles, incorporate a historical and cultural tradition commonly referred to as "othermothering" when working with African American students. The practice of othermothering is a cultural tradition in the African American community, utilized during slavery and continues presently in neighborhoods, faith communities, community organizations, and educational institutions. There are several definitions of othermothering, but this study is informed by the works of Stanlie M. James and Patricia Collins. James defines "othermothers" as African American women who assist mothers in the community with responsibilities that pertain to child care for short- to long-term periods, in informal or formal arrangements (James, 1993). The definition by Collins expands upon the role of othermothering in communities that is applicable to this study on othermothering in higher education. She defines it as the practice of women who assist other women to care for non-blood children that mimics the family structure through care, education, community service, and moral training (Collins, 2000).

Research on othermothering provides an opportunity to gain insight into the complex nature of the personal and professional lives of African American women. With a focus on the lived experiences of African American women, the research must consider the importance of both gender and race (Collins, 2000). Othermothering, while a historical feature of the African American community during the period of slavery, over time was also practiced in spaces that African American women dominated such as race-specific social organizations and segregated classrooms. The concept of othermothering has been used in other research to bring attention to the nurturing and caring ways African American women support children not their own. In a

classroom context, the nurture and care given to young students by teachers incorporating othermothering into their practice has created an environment characterized by the "tradition of matrilineal caregiving associated within African American communities" (Hirt, et all., 2008, p. 217).

Othermothering is considered a long-held tradition practiced by African American women working with African American students at both Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), and Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) (Guiffrida, 2005). HBCUs are the 101 colleges and universities that received this distinction as part of the Higher Education Act of 1965. The United States Department of Education defines an HBCU as

> Any historically black college or university that was established prior to 1964, whose principal mission was, and is, the education of Black Americans, and that is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association determined by the Secretary [of Education] to be a reliable authority as to the quality of training offered or is, according to such an agency or association, making reasonable progress toward accreditation. (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 1991).

Predominantly White Institutions, for the purpose of this research, are colleges and universities where the student enrollment is more than 50% White (Brown & Dancy, 2010). However, PWI is not an official designation assigned to colleges and universities by the United States Department of Education (Bourke, 2016). In some research, these institutions are referred to as historically White institutions to acknowledge their exclusionary practices in the United States prior to 1964. Even though these labels describe the enrollment pattern of these institutions, what is also inferred by the label of "historically" or "traditionally" White is the

power relationship between “dominance and subjugation” (Bourke, 2016, p. 16). It is important for the researcher to acknowledge and be mindful of the power position that is part of the history and tradition of PWIs while conducting research on othermothering as it is being currently practiced at PWIs.

For example, the literature on othermothering describes the practice as being a part of a Black or African American tradition. While the researcher is comfortable with using Black or African American interchangeably, the researcher acknowledges that both words carry different meanings, based in history and culture. The word Black came into use in the late 1950s and early 1960s as the civil rights movement began to evolve and contributed to how Black people viewed themselves in the context of their presence in the United States and to move away from the previous identifier, *Negro*. For the user, Black conveyed a sense of racial pride, rejection of the past and being progressive (Smith, 1992). The use of Black created a cultural divide within the community because of its use by organizations such as the Black Panthers and Black Muslims that were considered more radical than other Black-led organizations.

The identifier African American came into use after Ramona H. Edelin, president of the National Urban Coalition, suggested the use of African American to replace Black during the organization’s annual meeting in 1988 in Chicago. The reason for the shift from “Black” to “African American” was to “help create as much as express a sense of ethnic identity among black Americans” (Martin, 1991, p.83). The use of African American sought to present an expanded view of Blacks by placing it within a global perspective (Smith, 1992). The use of African American does have its detractors because the term is considered too broad to provide an authentic cultural identity. African American conveys a cultural connection to Africa that for most people does not exist after generations have resided in America.

For this study on othermothering the researcher used African American because of its diasporic reference. The practices of village ideology and othermothering are historically placed and culturally referenced in western Africa. The practice of othermothering came to America and grew out of the conditions that enslavement created for people from western Africa. Similar to other west African practices brought to America, othermothering adapted to address the needs of the enslaved. The use of African American is a way to connect the focus of this research, othermothering, with its African origin.

Problem Statement

Despite the potential effect of othermothering on the personal development and academic success of African American students enrolled at PWIs, there is a relative lack of research on the practice of othermothering by African American women and the effect of the practice on the professional and personal lives of African American women. This study, with a focus on African American women employed at PWIs, looked to bring attention to the historical tradition of othermothering and how it informs and influences current higher education practices.

Guiffrida (2005) in his research used othermothering to describe the type of relationship African American students who attended PWIs sought out from faculty that were culturally and ethnically similar to them. Mawhinney's (2011) autoethnography on othermothering and guilt supports the finding in Guiffrida's research on African American students who attend college at a PWI intentionally, seeking out Black faculty for othermothering-type relationships. Guiffrida's research focused exclusively on the faculty and student relationship, while this proposed study seeks to better understand othermothering as practiced by African American women at PWIs in non-faculty roles.

African American women who utilize othermothering when engaging and advising African American students are aware of the significant amount of time and emotional expense required of these relationships. These factors, as a result of the practice of othermothering, are not often acknowledged or affirmed by college administrators. Research by Tevis et al.'s (2020) speaking on the work environment of African American women in higher education roles at PWIs, references their presence as invisible and their work as negligible which can present challenges for advancing their careers. Regarding their lives outside of higher education, ongoing research documents the challenges African American women face when trying to balance the demands of their professional lives when it carries over into their personal lives (Taylor, 2005). African American women who incorporate othermothering in their student advising practices find themselves working longer hours with an individual student. These longer advising sessions with African American students constitute what (Fries-Britt and Turner 2002) refer to in their research on Black faculty and students at HBCUs, as willing to go "beyond the call of duty". It is important to note that some students have significant academic, personal, or financial needs that result in longer and recurring advising sessions. For women who othermother, these interactions require significant student advising time that could result in reducing the time these women can dedicate to their other required work responsibilities.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to better understand othermothering as practiced by African American women who work in non-faculty roles at PWIs and its effect on their professional and personal lives. Discussions on othermothering have had a consistent presence in Black Feminist Theory because of the nurturing and caring elements that are present in African American culture (Hirt et al.'s 2008). It was important to the study to gain a better understanding of the practice of

othermothering and to question if African American women continue to feel compelled to engage in the practice because of the cultural tradition and responsibility to the African American community.

While othermothering characteristics are not specifically or solely used by female educators, for this study, the researcher chose to focus specifically on the experiences of women to define othermothering and answer questions regarding its effect on their personal and professional lives. The reasons for focusing on African American women only for this research on othermothering are based upon (a) the long tradition of othermothering in the experiences of African American women; (b) the dual identities of African American and female integral to navigating the complex space of higher education; and (c) better understanding how African American women incorporate othermothering practices into higher education best practices when working with same-race students to continue the tradition of racial uplift.

Research Questions

Through in-depth interviews, this study explored how the practice of othermothering informs the ways these women engage with African American students to address the following questions:

1. How do non-faculty African American women professionals,
   in non-faculty roles at PWIs understand the practice of othermothering
   in their lives?
2. How does the practice of othermothering affect their professional lives?
3. How does the practice of othermothering affect their personal lives?

In this study, I documented and analyzed the ways in which othermothering is utilized by African American women in their professional roles as higher education administrators at PWIs, as a culturally affirming way to advise and support African American students.

Brief Overview of the Methodology

This research on African American women who practice othermothering utilized a narrative inquiry approach because it allows for the participants to share their individual experiences through stories (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Narrative inquiry allows for African American women to share detailed stories that illustrate their "storied lives" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). The use of first-person narratives of African American women are rarely included in research, and sharing their stories challenges the perspective of currently existing research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

The qualitative study collected data through interviews with mid-career African American women who work in higher education at PWIs. For this research, a mid-career professional was defined as someone with a college degree (bachelor's and/or master's) at a minimum, not in an entry-level position and not considering retiring from their current position. The study focused on the personal and professional experiences of five African American women who work in higher education in roles that require a significant level of student engagement. Through the use of interviews, the researcher gained insight into the practice of othermothering by these African American women.

Individual, 50-60-minute interviews were conducted three times with each participant using the virtual meeting platform Zoom. The interviews were recorded (audio and visual) to ensure accuracy of the interview data and saved on a password protected laptop. After each interview using the Zoom platform, the software provided a transcript of the interview. In the

secure online portal where the interview transcripts are stored, the original audio/visual files are stored in a separate folder for ongoing review of the actual interview data.

The transcript from each interview was reviewed for accuracy using the companion audio/video from the interview. Each transcript was reviewed with the companion audio numerous times to ensure accuracy of the interview transcript. The editing process allowed for greater comprehension of the participants' stories. The use of the companion video made possible the inclusion of the physical responses of participants as they responded to interview questions. The interview videos also show moments of family life unfolding in the background and the emotional toil of working remote during a global health pandemic.

Rationale and Significance

In recent years, higher education research has gained insights into the cultural practices and traditions within the African American community that have led to increased academic achievement and persistence by African American students attending PWIs (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). One such practice is othermothering. The tradition of othermothering is integral to the foundational history of HBCUs. This study on the practice of othermothering is significant because of the focus on the tradition through the lens of African American women working in higher education at PWIs. The tradition of othermothering is not part of the history of PWIs, so the practice might not be as familiar to campus administrators. I hope to advance current research on how African American women, who work at PWIs, navigate both race and gender in spaces that are not familiar with the practice of othermothering as a way to engage with and advise African American students.

Moreover, there is limited research that discusses the phenomenon of othermothering utilized in higher education and even less research on the effect of othermothering on the

professional careers of non-faculty African American women. With minimal research available on the phenomenon of othermothering in higher education, the data obtained from the study will contribute to increased recognition of the ways in which African American women engage with students of color at PWIs. The research has the potential to support previous work that examines the practice of othermothering and its effect on their professional identity of African American women.

Currently there are 101 HBCUs in the United States that enroll 11% of eligible African American students while representing less than 3% of colleges and universities in the country (NCES, 2018). HBCUs have a historical tradition and recognized reputation of being more welcoming and supportive to African American students (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002). The reasons that African American students select an HBCU varies but consistent on the list is being in a place that they identify with based upon race and culture.

African American students who select and enroll in a PWI do so based upon a different set of enrollment criteria including their minoritized status on campus. While attending a PWI, some African American students will intentionally seek out same race faculty and staff to build community with someone with a shared identity. African American students who attend PWIs and persist to graduation do so in part because of the supportive and welcoming environment created by African American women who populate mid-career student services positions. It is through the stories of these women that this study sought to inform current knowledge of othermothering as a higher education practice that aids in the academic success of African American students and the ways the practice affects the professional and personal lives of these women committed to the academic success of African American students on their PWI campuses.

African American women, who work in leadership roles at PWIs, bring to their work their experiences based in their dual identities of gender and race. Othermothering practices have the potential to shape the leadership style of African American women. When leadership is being taught and discussed, it is usually from a Eurocentric and male-centric model. The voices and abilities of African American women who lead are often not present in traditional leadership models (Grimes, 2005). This research on othermothering addresses this gap by bringing attention to the ways in which African American women incorporate othermothering into their leadership styles.

Secondly, othermothering practiced in the setting of higher education needs to be understood in terms of its historical context and the theoretical practice that supports student engagement for academic success and personal development. Ongoing research into othermothering presents an opportunity to include this practice along with other student advising practices by those who work in higher education administration, while bringing attention to and a greater understanding of the ways in which African American women support African American students who are attending PWIs.

Lastly, research on the practice of othermothering merits the same consideration as other higher education student engagement practices and theories that are taught in graduate higher education programs. A better understanding of the practice of othermothering not only contributes to ongoing academic research in the areas of student advising, mentoring, personal development and "informal arrangements of care" (Strayhorn, 2014, p. 125) of African American students and other underrepresented students but also brings attention to the professional aspect of the practice by African American women.

African American women, like the students they work with on PWI campuses, experience feelings of isolation and marginalization. Collins (1986), in her writings on Black Feminist Theory, refers to this feeling of isolation as "outsider within" (p. 14). Even though African American women have been invited by the dominant culture to be a part of the community, these women still experience isolation as a result of not being heard and "the personal and cultural fit between the experiences of African American women and the dominant group" being at odds (p. 21). Research that seeks to gain insight into the experiences of African American women at PWIs must do so through the lens of their particular history in the United States (West, 2017), one that is based in a history of social injustice and inequality (Collins, 1999).

African American women at PWIs express feelings of marginalization because of campus environments that are not culturally supportive, with long-standing institutional barriers that foster their inability to connect with professional peers (Patitu & Hinton, 2003) and the stress related to attempting to avoid reinforcing negative stereotypes that highlight cultural differences relative to the dominant culture (West, 2017). African American women working in higher education practice the tradition of othermothering in environments where they experience "the dual stresses of isolation and marginalization that appear repeatedly as issues that affect the professional realities of African American women who work in higher education" (West, 2017, p. 283).

Role of the Researcher

In my 20 plus years employed at a PWI, I have practiced and observed peers engage in the practice of othermothering. In my heavy student-facing role (graduate admissions and financial aid), there have been students who sought out othermothering relationships as part of

their transition and acclimation at the PWI where I presently work. These techniques to adjust to college are shared in the research by Strayhorn and Sadler (2009) who studied self-authorship of African American students who attended an HBCU. The data from the research showed that African American students experienced social isolation, challenges with adjusting to such an unfamiliar environment, and issues with racism by faculty, staff and peers (Strayhorn & Sadler, 2009). At many PWIs, there tend to be a limited number of African American students on campus or campus organizations that do not feel welcoming or reflect their interests. African American students will seek out staff who look like them and share similar language, culture and traditions to create a sense of community on campus, and possess the academic credentials required to help them navigate campus life.

In conversations with colleagues who engage in the practice of othermothering, they speak of the ways in which their student engagement is perceived by their colleagues in the workplace and valued by administration. This perception has the potential to shape one's professional reputation, influence how they feel about their work, affect how they are perceived by their peers and leadership, and hinder their ability to advance their career in higher education. If the nurturing style of othermothering has no value for the majority culture, then it stands to reason that practitioners of othermothering could be at a disadvantage professionally for utilizing the practice when engaging with students of color.

As the researcher, my identities are much aligned with those of the study participants. It is because of my experiences as a higher education professional coupled with managing my career development that I am motivated to research the practice of othermothering. These motivating factors that have led me to research othermothering are personal, professional and of academic interest. Concurrently, as an African American woman, I am aware of the

underrepresentation of African American voices in qualitative research in the role of participant or researcher, and as such, the methodology of narrative inquiry is best suited to being able to hear firsthand stories from the women engaged in this practice of othermothering. Narrative inquiry allows for a more accurate documentation of the research study participants' personal and professional experiences.

Researcher Assumptions

I wonder how many African American women like myself have been told in polite conversation, "you are like a mother to the students." While the statement might be intended as a compliment, is it an attempt to disregard and negate the knowledge, skills, and contribution of African American women who expertly incorporate othermothering into their professional work practices. The comment also highlights the intersectionality of the research participants' identities, African American and identified female. In addition, the statement could be perceived as a microaggression. A microaggression is defined as a brief and ordinary verbal, behavioral indignity, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicates hostile, derogatory, or racial slights and insults (Yearwood, 2013). Through this research, I want to bring attention to the ways African American female administrators incorporate othermothering into their interactions with students of color to support their academic success, and their social and psychological development. Concurrently, the research has the potential to raise awareness of othermothering to university administrators so that African American women are recognized for their unique contribution to the mission of the university, which is to support graduate students.

I entered into this study with a few assumptions about othermothering as practiced by African American women who work in administrative roles that include significant student engagement. It was my assumption that the research participants were familiar with and actually

engage in the practice of othermothering. For those African American women who engage in the practice, I wanted to know the extent to which it is based on their own personal and/or academic experiences. African American women, who attended an HBCU for college (undergraduate or graduate school), are likely familiar with the tradition of othermothering and incorporate the practice with ease when interacting with African American students. Concurrently, African American women who did not attend an HBCU for college might engage in the practice of othermothering because of their familiarity with the practice from their neighborhoods or participation in local community organizations. Regardless of how these women experienced othermothering in their lives, some of them might feel obligated to continue the cultural tradition.

The researcher also assumes that administrators, who lead majority White institutions of higher education, most of whom are White, may not be familiar with the tradition of othermothering practiced by their African American peers. African American women who practice othermothering are engaged in creating a quasi-familial relationship with their students. In research that looks at management styles based upon gender, women's leadership style is often described as relational and transformational (Sugiyama et al, 2016). Transformational leadership focuses on mentoring and empowering protégés.

Campus administrators with a different racial and gender identity, White and male, engage in a leadership style that is best described as more transactional in nature and focuses on task completion. It is arguable that college administrators with a traditionally transactional leadership style who are not familiar with the relational and transformative elements of othermothering could have a negative reaction to the leadership style. The limited awareness and understanding of othermothering as practiced by African American women and its ability to

foster positive academic outcomes for African American students could, therefore, be problematic professionally for African American women. College administrators' assessment of the practice could result in labeling African American women's interactions with same-race students as more maternal than professional, or more informal than skilled. If considered more maternal and less professional, then African American women are perceived as merely using their inherent or natural skills because of gender and for some, as mothers, when engaging with students and not using academic knowledge and higher education best practices endorsed in specialized graduate programs. The practice of othermotheing by African American women also calls into question the professionalism required for them to carry out their job. Referring to the use of othermothering by White leadership as naturally maternal and negating its professional application has the potential to infer the racist mammy trope to the work of African American women.

In a personal reflection printed in The College Student Affairs Journal (2005), Taylor refers to this conundrum as the "double whammy" where race and gender affects the professional and personal lives of African American women. The practice of othermothering is influenced by racial and gender identities of African American women. With the lack of awareness of othermothering by college administrators, this study hopes to learn from the research participants how they describe and perceive these practices and experiences in their professional identity.

This assessment of their work could have a negative effect on African American women's ability to advance their careers. Concurrently, the work of these women could be devalued and by extension, their value to their institutions could be questioned. A negative assessment by college administrators of the use of othermothering by African American women, because of their lack of awareness, illustrates how racism and sexism affect their professional

identity and development (Jean-Marie et al., 2009). The lack of awareness of the practice of othermothering as a student engagement tool that supports students to persist to graduation needs to be given significant attention by campus administrators for the potential it holds to support all students on campus.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

It Takes a Village: Historically Black Colleges and Universities

African American students who attend Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) are educated in environments that in some of the research literature is referred to as Village Pedagogy (Harris, 2012). The concept of Village Pedagogy stems from the Nigerian proverb: "It takes a village to raise a child." The globally recognized proverb refers to the shared responsibility and commitment of all adults in the community/village to raising the children. The complexities of village life are well-described in Chinua Achebe's novel (1959) *Things Fall Apart* as one full of tradition, ceremony, and pride for heritage that is led by elders of the village for communal living. In research by Harris (2012), he identifies similar characteristics found at both at HBCUs and in the village in Achebe's novel such as "mutual commitments, celebrations and a shared heritage" (p. 335). Village pedagogy occurs wherever adults actively engage in providing support, instruction, and guidance to young people.

The practice of othermothering began in the United States as a result of this country's history with slavery. An aspect of slavery was the selling and separating of children and parents through purchase or trade. The slave industry greatly affected the ability of African American families to maintain traditional family structures. While slavery did interrupt the family structure, the importance of mothering and cooperative forms of caring for and raising children was continued by women (Collins, 2000). Othermothering was a necessity in slave communities to provide and care for children orphaned because of the death of their parents, their parents being sold to another plantation, or working away from home (Guiffrida, 2005). Caring for children also included formal and informal approaches to education.

In addition, the formerly enslaved were considered property of slaveholders, which prevented them from making personal decisions about their own lives and participating in any legal or contractual arrangements such as marriage (Williams, 2005). A man and woman could not, on their own accord, marry and establish a family while enslaved. Men and women who attempted to join together in marriage, using legal or religious means, were at the mercy of those who enslaved them to maintain their marriage agreement and family. Men were oftentimes separated from their families by being hired out by the current owner or sold to another owner. Through the practice of family separation, through the slave trade, African American women took on the responsibility of mothering their children, and non-blood-related children as single parents. This practice of othermothering serves as an example of the adaptive capacities of African American women in slavery and their descendants (Gutman, 1976).

During slavery, there were only a few colleges and universities in the United States that allowed for the education of free Black women and men. These colleges were based mostly in the North, while southern states enacted legislation that made it illegal to educate slaves. It was not until the end of the Civil War that the United States began to address the educational needs of former slaves. Freed men and women understood the importance of an education and viewed it as the ultimate emancipator that would enable them to distance themselves from slavery, move past their subordinate status in society, and achieve social mobility (Allen et al., 2007).

With the passage of the 13th Amendment (prohibiting slavery in the United States), 14th Amendment (equality of all citizens regardless of race), and the 15th Amendment (prohibiting the denial of voting rights based on race, color or prior status), former slaveholding states were required to provide an education to the formerly enslaved. With the passage of constitutional amendments and federal legislation, laws were enacted to ensure public education for former

slaves (Brown & Davis, 2001). The Morrill Act of 1862 provided funding for educating students in the areas of agriculture, education, mechanical studies, and the military sciences, and in 1865, the Freedmen's Bureau had the intended goal of providing funding to educate and retrain the citizenry regardless of race or state of residency. Congress created the Freedmen's Bureau with the purpose to aid former slaves in their transition to freed men and women.

The 1890 Morrill Act legislated the extension of federal funds to institutions that educated African Americans (Brown & Davis, 2001). To avoid integration and to secure the use of federal funding from the Second Morrill Act, many states in the South established public colleges and universities to specifically educate African Americans (Gasman & Commodore, 2014). Southern states used the establishment of separate colleges and universities serving the academic needs of African Americans through the Second Morrill Act as their reason for denying African Americans admission into White colleges and universities (Brown & Davis, 2001; Harris, 2012).

African Americans firmly believed that education was integral to gaining full citizenship and to distance themselves from their past enslavement. The founders of HBCUs were motivated to establish institutions of higher learning that would provide (a) an education to newly freed slaves that incorporated the history and tradition of the culture; (b) an education and experience that was reflective of their homes and communities; and (c) a service to the African American community and country that uplifted the people through education, leadership development, and pride in one's race (Jean-Marie, 2006). At the close of the 1800s, at least 200 HBCUs existed in the United States. Most of these institutions were founded by churches, donors, and philanthropic organizations.

Village Pedagogy at an HBCU is best described as a supportive community of elders with the focus upon the academic and personal development of young people. The pursuit and attainment of a college degree by African Americans is directly connected to the founding and evolution of HBCUs. College degree attainment to improve the plight of African Americans or "racial uplift" is directly attributed to the ongoing presence of HBCUs as an option for college (Guiffrida, 2005). The inability of freed slaves to obtain an education or attend college because of denied access prevented them from moving beyond their slave past and participating in the larger society. African Americans understood the importance of an education for the collective goal of racial uplift. African American educators, who were mostly women who worked in higher education, acknowledged the importance of obtaining a degree to uplift the race as a way to address social inequality and injustice (Jean-Marie, 2006). HBCU's have maintained the tradition of providing a quality education for the underserved and underrepresented students who desire an education to change their lives and contribute to their community (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002).

Village Pedagogy is also practiced at K-12 schools, churches, and community and social service organizations where women share in the raising of children not their own. The presence of Village Pedagogy in these institutions follows a long tradition of education and support in the African American community. Until the end of the Civil War it was illegal to educate an enslaved person. It was not until the late 1800s that African Americans could legally attend racially segregated schools. These racially segregated schools, led mostly by women, operated based upon the idea that teachers and principals also acted as caregivers or othermothers for their young students (Mawhinney, 2011). While this concept is mostly focused upon children, research has shown that the proverb also has value for young adults attending college.

Otto D. Harris (2012) is the first scholar to have used the phrase Village Pedagogy in his research describing the HBCU campus environment. Harris describes the HBCU environment as one "in which the members of the community have mutual commitments, celebrations with one another, shared heritage, and relationships beyond the classroom" (p. 335). The presence of White faculty at HBCUs offers a different experience for African American students. In research by Guiffrida (2005), African American students referenced that the lived experiences of White faculty are so different from their own experiences that it makes White faculty unrealistic role models for African American students. In research conducted by Palmer and Gasman (2008), the participants, African American men attending an HBCU, expressed the importance of role models "as a significant factor to support academic success" (p. 62).

While not directly referred to as Village Pedagogy, Palmer and Gasman (2008) use the "village" metaphor to advance the discussion on the importance of a college campus community that mimics one's family. Their research, while focused on men, generally confirms that the village community creates an environment where "students experience more contact with faculty, experience greater satisfaction with their academic lives, and exhibit higher career aspirations" (p. 54).

The Manifestation of Othermothering in Village Pedagogy

Othermothering relationships that African American women have with the non-birth children in their lives is a cultural tradition that began during slavery and persists to the present day (Hirt et al., 2008). Slavery shaped traditional family structures when family members were traded, enslaved, or given away to others. To address the care and nurturing of children as a result of a family separation or parents working all day on the plantation, other women, oftentimes older women, would step in to care for and raise the children. Othermothering was

considered a necessity for the survival of children orphaned or separated from their parents. Family members, broadly defined, or "fictive kin" took on the parenting role for orphaned children or for parents who, for a variety of reasons, could no longer consistently parent their children (Collins, 2000; Guiffrida, 2005).

The concept of othermothering is at the center of Patricia Hill Collins's seminal work, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, to acknowledge the role of African American women in their direct and extended families. In her book, Collins asks the reader to consider the idea that "African-American women need a revitalized Black feminist analysis of motherhood that debunks the image of 'happy slave' whether the White-male-created 'matriarch' or the Black-male-perpetuated 'superstrong Black mother'" (2000, p. 176). Collins intentionally presents the idea of othermothering as a way to describe women, who are not usually family members, who support other women with mothering duties (2000).

After slavery and through reconstruction, the practice of othermothering continued in Black communities and became increasingly important as African American children began to attend segregated schools in the South. During this crucial time period for newly freed African Americans, they understood the importance of education to move beyond their enslaved past. African American teachers, providing the first legal and formal education for African American students, were also required to consider the basic needs of their students to achieve academic success (Guiffrida, 2005). To move beyond their enslaved past, African Americans viewed education as the key.

In small numbers, after Reconstruction, African American students attended White majority colleges and universities in the North. After the decision of *Brown v. Board of*

Education, Topeka, Kansas (1954), and because of the Civil Rights Movement (1960s), the push for integration at the college level unfolded across the nation. As African Americans have the legal right to attend any form of higher education institution, many high school graduates elect to enroll in predominantly White institutions for their college education (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002) as a direct response to the successes gained through the Civil Rights Movement. There are some documented advantages in attending an HBCU over a PWI. In previous research (Allen, 1992; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002), those advantages include a more welcoming environment, increased networks of supportive faculty and peers, and increased campus involvement and academic success. Research that looked at the use of othermothering by student affairs administrators at HBCUs, has supported the idea that these types of relationships, family-like in nature, promote student development (Hirt et al., 2008).

The concept of othermothering, as a historical practice in African American communities, eventually found its way into institutions that nurtured and cared for children. As formal education for African American children became an option for families, othermothering practices shifted into the classroom, a space that historically had been dominated by women (Hirt et al., 2008). There is research that supports how African American teachers "use the theoretical framework of othermothering and ethic of care toward their students as a pedagogical practice within the classroom" (Mawhinney, 2011, p. 215). Case (1997) examined the use of othermothering in an urban elementary school and the findings suggest the continuing tradition of educators providing a "survival mechanism that served as a vehicle for educational and cultural transmission" (p. 25).

Educators, who were often women, taught their students using the practice of othermothering because of the inherent familial manner of the practice. The role of these

educators went beyond providing an education as they were often considered a part of students' families. Often the teacher lived in close proximity to their students and maintained a friendship with their parents. It is because of this familial approach with their teaching that African American educators were often considered an extended part of their students' family (Dempsey & Noblit, 1993).

Educators in the segregated South brought the tradition of othermothering into the classroom to support their students academically (Foster, 1993). The influences of women-centered education that model the home environment for children "have been continually reworked to help African Americans collectively cope and resist oppression" (Collins, 2000, p. 197). As a way to respond to the evolving role of the community, that in the past insulated and protected children, women's role continues to be integral to addressing the current needs of children. This characteristic of othermothering presented by Collins appears in later research on the practice of othermothering in higher education by African American women, faculty and staff. In Julie Anne White's (2015) research on othermothering as public care, she relies on Collins' definition of othermothering. White highlights the practice of othermothering from a U.S. historical perspective and an African cultural context. Strayhorn's (2014) research on administrative work life at HBCUs, also references the work of Collins when describing the ways in which othermothering practices go beyond mentoring, how these relationships are formed with students and how these relationships develop systems of care.

For this study on othermothering as practiced by African American administrators at PWIs, the researcher will utilize the three components referenced in the research by Hirt et al. (2008). In their research on othermothering as practiced at HBCUs, they identified three conditions for application at higher education institutions. The three elements to othermothering

referenced in their research are (a) the ways in which the ethic of care is transmitted; (b) cultural advancement; and (c) institutional guardianship. The transmission of an ethic of care refers to the emotional and social support provided by African American women through an ongoing relationship with their students (Dempsey & Noblit, 1993). This type of care is exhibited through the ways African American women successfully provided an education to their students.

The concept of cultural advancement as it relates to othermothering practices with African American students was a key finding in research conducted by Terrell Strayhorn. The purpose of Strayhorn's research was to gain insight into the relationship between student affairs administrators and their students at HBCUs. The research includes responses from over 70 higher education administrators from 25 HBCU campuses. Strayhorn's study participants were asked through in-person interviews, a questionnaire, and focus groups one question, "How do administrators at HBCUs describe their relationship with students?" (p.121). Strayhorn's (2014) research identified and defined cultural advancement as the creation of positive and supportive relationships for students by administrators, resulting in creating an inclusive campus environment that contributes to students' academic success.

Similarly, in Strayhorn's (2014) research, relationship is integral to institutional guardianship when speaking specifically of HBCUs. Institutional guardianship as applied to HBCUs considers the importance of maintaining the tradition, culture and history of HBCUs for future generations of African American students. This responsibility is equally shared by administrators, faculty, staff, students, and alumni.

Based on the literature, discussions about othermothering tend to focus mostly on the student perspective. For example, Guiffrida (2005) focused on othermothering and student-centered faculty, and how students responded to this interaction. The term othermothering is

used in his research as way to describe the unique relationship and expectations that Black students may have with faculty (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010), which is also applicable to African American women in non-faculty roles. Palmer and Gasman's (2008) research focused on Village Pedagogy, which also relates to othermothering, and how it aided the academic success of African American male students. The premise of their work supported the idea of the importance of the Village to help "students develop socially and overcome academic deficiencies" (p.53).

In the research presented by Griffin (2013), her qualitative study focused on African American faculty and their unique relationship with their students. While the research focused exclusively on faculty relationships with students, they described the engagement using terms that are often used to describe "othermothering." In her study, faculty described their interaction with students highlighting similar themes presented by Guiffrida (2005) such as a commitment to community uplift, setting high expectation for students, and the benefit to be gained from this form of student interaction (Griffin, 2013).

African American faculty and staff may have different roles and responsibilities on campus, but they both share a like-mindedness for having expanded relationships with their students (Guiffrida, 2005). The expanded relationship between African American faculty and staff with same-race students goes beyond providing academic instruction and student services. These relationships are best described as providing encouragement and support (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002) and mentoring as a social responsibility to the African American community (Reddick, 2006). The research done by Griffin (2013) was from the faculty perspective, to better understand their relationship with students. Griffin's research documented themes that could be present in this research on othermothering. This research focused on African American women in non-faculty roles that also share similar, if not a greater, level of student engagement. In

addition, some of the themes in Griffin's research are present in the research by Guiffrida (2005) and are also relevant to this study. Guiffrida's research on othermothering was from the perspective of African American students, to gain a deeper understanding of how they viewed faculty engagement and its impact on their academic success.

Generally speaking, African American students who benefited from othermothering relationships within their own communities, enrolled in college with the expectation that a similar type of relationship with their faculty and staff would be made available to them. Guiffrida (2005) found that African American students had difficulties connecting with and engaging with their White faculty. Researchers that study the African American student experience at PWIs have noted time after time that African American students tend to look for meaningful relationships through academic support and advice from faculty, staff, family, and mentors who looked like them and shared a similar experience (Strayhorn, 2014). Research continues to raise awareness of the importance of role models and reduced cultural barriers to improve the relationship between African American students and White faculty (Guiffrida, 2005).

When considering the importance of role models that share similar identities with their students, African American women are willing to take on this responsibility. African American women in student services roles, that also incorporate othermothering practices, will do so to make a genuine and intentional connection with their students. These campus role models welcome the opportunity to engage in relationships that are impactful as students begin to think about their professional development and possible career options. To better understand the historical foundations of othermothering by African American women it is critical to examine the practice through the lens of Black Feminist Theory.

There are four themes that Collins (1999) has identified that define Black Feminist Theory. The first theme is based upon the knowledge gained through the lived experiences of African American women. Second is the theme of the importance of conversation through authentic relationships to address collective or individual incidents of oppression. The third theme is the ethic of care for expressing empathy for others and the understanding of the unique experiences of African American women. Lastly, the theme of personal accountability refers to the responsibility women have to develop their knowledge through dialogue while being accountable to their knowledge claims (Collins, 2000). Collins examines the historical underpinnings and economic effect of Black woman's experiences. Collins (1991) refers to othermothers "as women who work on behalf of the Black community by expressing an ethic of care and personal accountability (p.132). The use of BFT allows for the intersection of gender and race when examining the use of othermothering by African American women. As discussed earlier, this intersection of race and gender is paramount to how African Americans navigate the space of the dominant culture. It is also important to reference that BFT is not only concerned with oppression but also focuses on resistance, engagement and engaging in the political process (Alinia, 2015).

Collins' consideration of othermothering to advance the ideas of motherhood through the lens of Black Feminist Theory was informed and influenced by the work of Rosalie Troester's reading of Paule Marshall's semi-autographical novel, *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959) which tells the story of the complex mother-daughter relationships between the main character, Mrs. Boyce, her daughter, Selina, and the women in the community (Suggie Skeete, Miss Thompson, and Miss Mary). The novel illustrates the complex life of African American women and how

they persist under adverse situations. Troester (1991) attributes one of the reasons for the complex relationship between mothers and daughters to a mother's need to protect and isolate their daughters until they have matured and prepared for what lies ahead of them. The presence of othermothers is to aid in the protection and development of the daughter while reducing the pressure and stress on the mother-daughter relationship.

The three women othermother Selina as she navigates changes in her life while reducing the pressures that are inherent in mother-daughter relationships (Troester, 1991). Troester (1991) examines the various roles of the women in Marshall's novel, while advancing the othermothering ideology as it evolved from its slavery context in a rural setting to a cultural way of life in an urban setting. The evolution of othermothering illustrates the ongoing and complex relationships between women, who are oftentimes not related by blood. Troester's (1991) exploration of mother-daughter relationships in African and African American communities focuses on the importance of othermothers in this paradigm. In these complex female relationships, Troester (1991) shows the varying ways African American women define their womanhood. Collins' take on Troester's (1991) concept of othermothering is viewed through the lens of Black Feminist Theory to acknowledge:

> In many African American communities, fluid and changing boundaries often distinguish biological mothers from other women who care for children. Biological mothers, or "bloodmothers," are expected to care for their children. But Africa and African American communities have also recognized that vesting one person with full responsibility for mothering a child may not be wise or possible. As a result, othermothers—women who assist bloodmothers by sharing mothering responsibilities—

> traditionally have been central to the institution of Black motherhood. (Collins, p. 179).

The practice of othermothering, as illustrated in the book *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959) furthers the idea of community-based childcare that challenges the widely held assumption that children are "private property" (White, 2015, p.217). The practice of othermothering, as a widely accepted form of childcare, seeks to continue the cultural tradition of the community's collective responsibility for others' children.

Othermothering and the Care Ethic

In her research, Noddings (1998) defines ethic of care as maternal in nature and resembling the mother-child prototype. In the research conducted by Case (1997) on othermothering, the findings support the role of African American women as educators with the global theme of ethic of care presented in the research by Noddings. Noddings' (1998) research affirms the educational, psychological, and social development benefits of educators utilizing an ethic of care in their educational practice. The characteristics that define the othermothering tradition, as practiced historically by African American female educators, also exist in the research by Noddings (1998) on the ethic of care. The othermothering tradition and its use of an ethic of care is in practice at and part of the HBCU identity (Hirt et al., 2008). Othermothering brings together maternal traits, shaped by a specific cultural identity, that informed Black Feminist Theory.

The carer in Noddings' research exhibits characteristics found in othermothering. The care ethic, like othermothering, places importance on those who care and their focused attention on the cared for at the expense of their needs and duties. This type of engagement is often described as "going beyond" what is expected or required of the carer. The "going beyond" by

the carer is a theme that arises in Palmer and Gasman's (2008) research on the experience of African American men pursuing their undergraduate degrees at an HBCU. The research by Mawhinney (2011) also highlights that the founding of HBCUs was based upon "the concept of care" (p. 214).

Aspects of othermothering, as a historical practice by African American women to care for non-familial members, can be found in other discussions on Black Feminist Thought and literature. As the discussions shift to a more contemporary practice, othermothering is seen as an attribute of successful African American college educators (Guiffrida, 2005). The type of care exhibited by "othermothers" is also found in the research by Noddings (2012) on care ethics. Noddings (2012) places the tradition of care ethics in the lived experiences of teachers. A characteristic of care ethics is the relationship that develops between the participants. Noddings (2012) says, "The carer is attentive, she or he listens, observes, and is receptive to the expressed needs of the cared-for" (p. 53). Care ethic as researched by Noddings is very much present in the tradition of othermothering. Care ethic or relational caring focuses more on the caring relationship and lesser on the carer (Noddings, 2012). With a focus on the relationship between educators and students, academic content was not sacrificed in the process (Dempsey & Noblit, 1993). Noddings (2012) considered the relationship, person and situation as consistent characteristics of the ethic of care. When othermothering is discussed within the framework of care ethics, it emphasizes the "attentive and emotional response to the other that is an ongoing part of one's engagement with students" (Hirt et al., 2008, p. 218).

In research conducted by Dempsey and Noblit (1993) on how desegregation affected caring in African American classrooms, they argued that caring is contextual. During segregation, it remained a popular belief that education was required for emancipation and

advancement of the race. With an emphasis on education to advance the race, African American women engaged their students by developing an authentic relationship with them and with their families that was informed by their shared cultural and social identities. Research by White (2015) relies on the ways both Collins (2000) and James (1993) define othermothering and emphasizes the broader sense of responsibility to the vulnerable and views the practice of othermothering as a resource used to address the needs of students and the community. A relationship established through shared social and cultural attributes allows educators to nurture their students in a way that describes othermothering (Dempsey & Noblit 1993). The historical and theoretical framework of othermothering is the embodiment of an ethic of care.

Othermothering versus Mentoring

Othermothering observed by those not familiar with the historical tradition has sometimes been confused with mentoring. Othermothering should not be conflated with traditional ideas of mentoring with which those who work or teach in higher education are mostly familiar. In the research conducted by Chandler (1996) on mentoring women in academia, mentoring involves the interaction between an experienced professional providing support and guidance while advising a younger professional for career advancement.

There is ongoing research that documents the developmental functions of mentoring that reference the psychosocial benefits of the engagement for those who are being mentored (Chandler, 1996). The psychosocial function of a mentoring relationship advances the relationship to a deeper and more personal level where the mentor serves as a role model, counselor, and friend with the goal that the young adult will develop his/her own personal and professional identity. The psychosocial function of mentoring relationships is evident in the ways

othermothering engages student. The psychosocial benefits attributed to mentoring align with the expected benefits of Othermothering.

In traditional mentoring relationships, the format has been described as directive and hierarchical in nature (Benishek et al., 2004). The mentoring relationship that most people are aware of and have participated in tends to fit a White male model of behavior and engagement, and this model tends not to be responsive to the needs of women, people of color, or other marginalized groups (Jean-Marie et al., 2009). With mentoring relationships, the mentor will determine the value of taking on a mentee. The relationship is "based on the anticipated receipt of some benefit or access to resources one might value or otherwise be denied" (Griffin, 2013, p.170). In an othermothering relationship, the benefit to be received is less about the mentor and shifts the benefit to the greater good of the community. The amount of support and encouragement a student receives from administrators and faculty contributes to gains made in a student's academic success and social development (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002).

What sets othermothering apart from traditional mentoring relationships is how the relationship is defined between the mentor and protégée. In othermothering, the relationship is defined by a less structured and formal engagement and goes beyond providing protégées with technical skills or a network of academic and professional contacts (Collins, 2000). Othermothering relationships provide access to a network of academic and professional contacts that contribute to advancing one's career. What also sets apart othermothering from traditional mentoring relationships is the length and the holistic approach to the engagement. Those who othermother understand that the relationship that they create with their students could endure over a period of time, for example the four years of undergraduate study at the university and extend a few years post-graduation. Concurrently, the othermothering relationship, unlike

mentoring, could be called upon to provide guidance and support for a number of challenges that a student could be facing while in college.

Othermothering has also been integral to the education of college-aged men and women who attended HBCUs. HBCUs educated and graduated "most of the African Americans, which helped to promote their social equality and social mobility" (Palmer & Gasman, 2008, p. 53). An increase in the persistence and graduation rates of African Americans that attend HBCUs is attributed to the practice of othermothering. The mentoring that is integral to othermothering practices lends to increasing degree attainment by African American students. With the focus on caring, educating, and uplifting young people, the tradition of othermothering as practiced in higher education has significantly contributed to the success of African American students.

Othermothering and Professional Development

The effect of othermothering on students' positive psychosocial adjustments, cultural awareness, and increased confidence (Allen, 1992) are rarely addressed when assessing students' graduation rates for an institution. There is research that documents the White faculty/Black student relationship at PWIs but minimal research that documents the keys to successful relationships between African American students and same race staff/faculty (Guffrida, 2005). Othermothering is based in a cultural tradition that is not familiar to or valued by the majority culture. This lack of familiarity with othermothering is attributed to care being historically the work of women and people of color (White, 2015), which has historically been undervalued financially and for its importance as work.

College and university administrators who lead these institutions of higher education are more than likely unaware that the ways in which African American women support and engage with African American students is referred to othermothering. It is for this reason that that those

who have engaged in othermothering have not received recognition or acknowledgment from leadership and their peers for their contribution to the academic success of African American students. Administrators and leaders in higher education have to acknowledge and acquire an understanding of the practice that aids in the academic success and personal development of African American students (Petty, et al 2019). The research by Banks and Dohy (2019) supports the need for a reduction in barriers that could prevent African American student success. The support of African American women, who incorporate othermothering practices in their student advising is just one example of reducing the barrier of academic success for African American students.

This lack of recognition for the professional and positive influence that African American women have on their students, while incorporating othermothering practices into how they engage with students, can affect their ability to advance in their professional careers. The research conducted by Traci Alexander (2010), using data from the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources, shows evidence that relatively few African American women serve in campus-wide leadership roles. While the research confirms the lack of African American women in higher education leadership roles, the reason for this situation is attributed to institutional barriers that prohibit the inclusion of certain groups or individuals based upon race, gender, age, identity, and so forth. There is insufficient research that specifically addresses the ongoing stigma African American women face in their pursuit of leadership within higher education (Alexander, 2010). The American Council on Education (2007) shared similar findings in its annual report, indicating that there is a limited number of African American women in prominent leadership roles in higher education, attributed to

numerous barriers that African American women face that implicate their race and gender (Wilson, 1989).

For women who engage in othermothering, there are also concerns about the use of this cultural tradition of supporting students and how it is received by professional peers. There are significant insights into the positive academic outcomes for African American students that reference the campus relationships that aided in their ability to navigate campus life (Allen, 1992). For African American students who attend(ed) a PWI where there are a limited number of African American faculty and staff with whom to forge a positive relationship, they tend to have a less meaningful college experience. As supported by previous research, there are differences in the ways in which HBCUs and PWIs support and engage with African American students (Nettles, 1998).

Those differences become salient for African American women who practice othermothering at a PWI, similar to their female professional colleagues at HBCUs. African American women who work with and support students of color on their campuses who strategically incorporate othermothering run the risk of their work being viewed by others as natural to their abilities based upon their gender and race, and not professional and academically informed by higher education methodologies. Campus leaders not familiar with the practice of othermothering may view the relationship between African American staff and students as familial and informal, which can be considered unprofessional. Those not aware of the practice or its significance to the culture relegate it to something that is natural and inherent because of the cultural and ethnic attributes and view it as a natural tendency of women to mother (Griffin & Reddick, 2011).

Student engagement practices that are used on college campuses to engage and support students by student service professionals, that are informed by graduate-level higher education courses, provide limited knowledge on the ways to address the specific needs of African American students enrolled at PWIs. The ways HBCUs support the academic success of African American students utilizing the practice of othermothering offers an opportunity for PWIs to become familiar with this historical tradition, and by so doing, commit themselves to supporting the African American students on their campuses (Reddick, 2006).

The proposed study on African American women's use of othermothering will be informed by research done by Jean-Marie et al. (2009), who examined leadership experiences of African American women who worked in executive roles in campus leadership. Their research found that in addition to the internal and external factors that African American women face when working in higher education, to lead successfully they also face and are required to address the scrutiny that comes from White peers not familiar with a leadership style that incorporates the characteristics of othermothering. The research conducted by Mary L. Grimes (2005) on the modes of leadership by African American women in education engages in a discussion about how the cultural, social, behavioral, and linguistic experiences of these women set them apart from their White female peers, and even more so, White male peers, in higher education. The practice of othermothering informs the ways in which African Americans lead within their respective organizations. This practice oftentimes is not familiar to non-African Americans in leadership roles at PWIs. If White administrators at PWIs are aware of the practice of othermothering, it is oftentimes not valued or seen as a legitimate leadership practice.

Othermothering, Afrocentric Epistemology, and Black Feminist Thought

For this research on othermothering by African American women, it was important to examine their experiences working at PWIs informed by Afrocentric Epistemology and Black Feminist Thought. Collins' use of an Afrocentric epistemology contextualizes the ways African American women "navigate institutional racism, sexism and discrimination that have continued to be part of their experiences" (p. 564). When discussing how discrimination affects their professional lives, African American women consider both race and gender. In higher education, identities in two marginalized groups, woman and African American, often make these women invisible (Zamani, 2003). With the dual identities of being female and African American, it is difficult at times to determine which factor is affecting them at a given time. In the research conducted by Patitu and Hinton (2003), the participants identified race over gender as the most significant in their professional lives. In research by Rosette and Livingston (2012), African American women's race and gender influenced how they were evaluated by leadership, in part because African American women do not fit the characteristics of a leader. African American women do not benefit from one predominant identity. In contrast, when evaluated as a leader, White women benefit from race and African American men benefit from gender.

An Afrocentric epistemology incorporates the ways of knowing by African American women that is directly influenced by both race and gender. The ways in which African American women gain knowledge come from formal and informal sources. Some informal sources of knowledge (family, friends, churches, and social organizations, etc.) bestowed upon African American women come through othermothering relationships (Holder & Vaux, 1998). African American women's knowledge is filtered through their dual identity of race and gender. Knowledge, and by extension, the experiences of African American women, because of their

dual identities, results in an approach to leadership that is not informed or influenced by male-dominated approaches to leadership. This results in African American women in leadership roles "that provide mutual aid and support to the community by enriching the lives of families, preparing future scholars, and supporting economic and social justice efforts for the betterment of the community" (Robinson & Ross Baber, 2013, p. 210).

Black Feminist Thought (BFT) as researched by Collins focuses on four ways of knowing and validating knowledge by African American women. Collins acknowledges that the ways of acquiring and confirming knowledge that inform BFT are in juxtaposition to generally held beliefs on attaining knowledge. As explained by Collins, the first way of knowing credits everyday lived experiences that inform knowledge that is shared by a specific group. The second way knowledge is acquired is through sharing or communicating stories, using a common language, that keeps the intent of the story intact. The third way of knowing brings together lived experiences and narrative as foundational to an ethic of caring. Collins (2006) acknowledges the challenges of researchers being value-free and "argues that all knowledge is intrinsically value-laden and should thus be tested by the presence of empathy and compassion" (pg.3). Last, knowledge is formed through personal accountability and veracity of knowledge through the assessment of a person's character, values, and ethics. The practice of othermothering is a tradition that has been shared by African American women through these four elements of knowing.

In her research on African American women in higher education, Zamani (2003) also draws attention to the significance of holding membership in two marginalized groups, which contributes to African American women being invisible in colleges and universities. The roles many women find themselves in at the start of their careers in higher education are in offices to

support underrepresented minorities (URM) and/or low socioeconomic students. The roles held by African American women are in offices that are oftentimes under-funded and under-staffed and do not carry the status of traditional student services department (Wilson, 1989; Chance, 2021). Despite this, offices headed by African American women serve the academic, personal, and professional needs of many students.

Othermothering by African American women not only exists at HBCUs but is also evident at PWIs as a way to create a supportive environment on a college campus that might not be as welcoming to African American students. African American female faculty and staff engage in othermothering motivated by providing a sense of "cultural connectedness through a nurturing relationship with students" (Hirt et al., 2005, p. 2019). Those who practice othermothering would have been a recipient of othermothering practices from their own college experience, participation in community organizations, and informal neighborhood relationships.

At PWIs, African American students are challenged by the inability to connect with White faculty and staff and the institution because of perceived feelings of their own self-efficacy and the institution's cultural insensitivity (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). African American students with limited involvement in campus life or a connection to the institution will face academic barriers. Through the student advising structure, African American women are assisting students to address issues beyond course work. Oftentimes these engagements, or advising sessions, are addressing issues that go beyond academics. Based upon their reputation on campus as being a supportive resource, African American women on a PWI campus are sought out by students in need regardless of their job title and function on campus. The African American women who engage with students using othermothering techniques tend not to turn away students that need support.

Students who are attending college away from home and missing their own families might turn to othermothers on campus for support and guidance, given that othermothers may feel familiar to them or like someone from their home community. The proposed research hopes to further the discussion on othermothering by looking at it from the perspective of African American women. With a focus on the African American women's experience in othermothering, Black Feminist Thought informs the discussion. To gain a better understanding of the current use of othermothering, it is important to understand the historical tradition of the practice. With a greater understanding of othermothering from previous research, the proposed study will examine the ways the practice affects the personal and professional lives of the African American women who othermother. It is of importance to the research to consider the ways othermothering informs mentoring relationships and leadership styles of African American women.

African American women's Afrocentric epistemology comes from "the richness of their African roots that inform what they believe to be true about themselves and their experiences" (Collins 2000, p. 188). It is because of these ways of knowing, based upon race and gender, that African American leadership, informed by othermothering, cannot be studied through the lens of a White hegemonic construct (Grimes, 2005). To consider the practice of othermothering, within the framework of Black Feminist Theory is to acknowledge the complex nature of race and gender. Given the complexity of race and gender, the challenge is to determine how these layered intersections influence the cultural, educational, social and professional positions that are held by African American women in higher education (Zamani, 2003).

Chapter 3: Methodology

This study sought to learn how the practice of othermothering informs the ways African American women engage with African American students to address the following questions:

1. How do non-faculty African American women professionals, in non-faculty roles, at PWIs understand the practice of othermothering in their lives?
2. How does the practice of othermothering affect their professional lives?
3. How does the practice of othermothering affect their personal lives?

In this study, I documented and analyzed the ways in which othermothering is utilized by African American women, in professional roles as higher education administrators at PWIs, as a culturally affirming way to support and mentor African American students.

Theoretical Framework

The research sought to examine othermothering from the lived experiences of African American women through the lens of Black Feminist Theory (BFT) as defined in the research of Patricia Collins. BFT seeks to examine the ways that both race and gender are uniquely experienced in the lives of African American women (Grant, 2012). BFT is a way to deconstruct how power, privilege and professional position influence the lived experiences of African American women. When considering the lived experiences of African American women, Black Feminist Theory takes into the consideration the dual identities of gender and race when discussing the effect of social structures, power, and oppression (Taylor, 2005).

For this research, the complex intersection of race and gender, as theorized in BFT and how it informs othermothering, is the lens through which the experiences of African American women who work in higher education at PWIs were analyzed. The research sought to bring attention to the ongoing practice of othermothering by African American women at PWIs in

professional roles that include significant student engagement and the effect on their personal and professional lives. Concurrently, the research attempts to raise the awareness of those unfamiliar with the practice of othermothering and the ways it contributes to students' academic success.

Rationale for Research Tradition and Approach

To better understand the ongoing historical practice of othermothering by African American women higher education administrators, this qualitative study utilized narrative inquiry research. Narrative inquiry focuses on the telling of stories to provide depth and for finding rich meaning in relationship to the identified research question (Robinson & Ross Baber, 2013). The use of narrative research is a way to move beyond the telling of stories to understanding the broader meaning of the shared stories (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The use of storytelling in narrative inquiry allows for women to share their individual life stories in a first-person format. Concurrently, narrative inquiry allows for voices that are missing in research to be heard and is used to offer a different or a more inclusive perspective on currently held thoughts on higher education best practices.

The use of narrative inquiry complements the four themes that Collins (2000) uses to shape BFT. The use of narrative inquiry allows for African American women to use their voices to share stories of their lived experiences that have the potential to address incidents of oppression and to resist reinforcing gender and race-based stereotypes. Storytelling is an oral tradition that is historically attached to African American culture as a way to share a lived experience (Collier, 2019). The participants sharing their stories in this manner "provides an avenue for continued resiliency" (Esposito, 2014, p. 279). African American women working in

higher education demonstrate their resiliency by their ongoing commitment to remain in the profession and to support the needs of African American and other marginalized students.

Through the interview process, the participants were encouraged to tell their personal stories as deeply as they felt comfortable to share. It allowed for participants to tell stories that incorporate their dual identities of female and African American. Through the use of narrative inquiry, I sought to gain a better understanding of the lives of African American women who practice othermothering from their perspectives based upon their past personal experience with the cultural practice and how it shows up in their work as a higher education administrator at a PWI.

Research Sample

For this study, the research participants are self-identified African American women who are mid-career higher education professionals in roles that require significant student engagement at a PWI. While the researcher has elected to use the term African American, during the data gathering for the study, the researcher asked participants to self-identify. The research participants tended to use Black more often but used Black and African American interchangeably throughout the interviews. The participants' selected identities will be used in the review and presentation of the data.

As shared earlier, for this study, mid-career is defined as a college-educated professional not working in an entry-level role and not considering retirement. Significant student engagement is integral in the following types of higher education positions: admissions, financial aid, student affairs, residential services, academic advisor, and career services, to name a few. For this study, I conducted five in-depth interviews of individuals who met the sample selection criteria.

In qualitative research, while the research sample might be small, the goal is to gather in-depth and detailed data from each individual (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Through the use of professional contacts and word-of-mouth, I secured the participation of five women who met the selection criteria for this study.

I have worked for over 20 years in higher education administration at a PWI specifically with graduate students in admissions, financial aid, and enrollment management. The avenue used for recruiting and selecting candidates for the study was through my membership in professional higher education organizations such as the American Association of Blacks in Higher Education, National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators, and the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers.

In addition, participants for the study were also solicited from my professional network of African American women who currently work in admissions, financial aid, enrollment management, and student affairs at PWIs. The process used to solicit participants for the study was approved by IRB. Through my professional network, I emailed colleagues who fit the research participant profile to ask them to consider participating in my research. If they were unwilling to participate in the research, they were asked to connect me with professional colleagues who fit the profile and criteria for research participants. The use of word-of-mouth or snowballing allowed me to create a list of additional possible research participants just in case one of the five participants decided not to continue with the research or were no longer eligible for the research because of a change in their employment status.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, change in employment status was an actual concern based upon higher education institutions experiencing financial challenges. The financial challenges these institutions faced were a result of not meeting tuition revenue goals because of

reduced student enrollment. With the cancellation of in-person teaching, some college students declined enrollment in online courses this year, instead opting to defer their enrollment until next academic year, which impacted on-campus student services at colleges and universities. While most universities shifted to working remotely during the health pandemic, some student services roles cannot be done remotely. Some student services and activities, such as athletics, which generates income, were also altered this year. As a result of reduced revenue from tuition, fees, and athletics, many institutions reduced their staff size through layoffs, furloughs, and voluntary early separation.

As a higher education professional employed at a mid-sized PWI, with a network of peers across two campuses, while it might have been easier to recruit participants for this study from my current institution, I purposely decided to forgo this option. The decision not to recruit participants from my host institution allowed for maintaining a positive working relationship with my colleagues, to protect their identities and maintain the integrity of the collected data. In addition, not recruiting my campus colleagues to participate in my proposed research also protected my role at my host institution. These accommodations with regards to my professional peers supported ethical practices and maintained the integrity of the research process. In addition, it helped to secure participants who were willing to speak freely of their experiences working in higher education when we were not employed by the same higher education institution.

All study participants were assigned a pseudonym. The names of the participants and their pseudonyms for the research were securely stored in a locked file cabinet and kept separate from the research data. The names of the colleges and universities where the research participants attended and are currently employed are not used when sharing the research

findings; instead, pseudonyms are also used. The research participants were not compensated for their interviews. A possible indirect benefit for the research participants was the ability to engage in a conversation that had the potential to inform the ways they engaged with students and the ability to gain insight into their professional and personal development.

Research Setting

I strictly followed the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's guidelines to "shelter in place" during the global health pandemic and conducted all interviews on Zoom. All research interviews were conducted from the privacy of my home. The research participants, in addition to giving me time on their schedules, virtually opened up their homes to me for these interviews. These at-home interviews allowed me to get glimpses into the private lives of the participants. In a few of the Zoom recordings, there were breaks in the conversations while the research participants addressed the needs of their children, barking dogs, and requests from spouses. I also acknowledge, over time, becoming increasingly aware of the time commitment these women were giving to the research. The women were not only working from home, but some were also assisting their children who were doing remote learning from home because of the global health pandemic. The researcher greatly appreciates the women for giving of their time to this research.

Data Collection

The participant interviews were recorded using Zoom software. The Zoom virtual meeting platform allowed for video and audio recording that, if saved to the cloud, provided a transcript of the interview in 8-10 hours. For this reason, I chose not to take handwritten notes during the interviews. The absence of notetaking allowed for the interviews to feel more like a conversation. It is my assumption that the conversational format of the interviews, combined with not needing to manually document the conversation, allowed for greater comfort for the

participant as the researcher was focused on the conversation, actively listening to the women tell their stories and not having to take notes.

At the end of each scheduled interview, if research participants needed to reflect on the interview questions and their responses, they were encouraged to reach out to me to continue the interview. At the start of the second and third interviews, study participants were asked if they wanted to clarify any comments or share additional insights that arose since our last conversation.

Data Analysis

After each interview was conducted, the audio and video files were saved using the participant's pseudonym with the number of the interview in the series onto a secured laptop. After the interview transcript was received from the Zoom software, it was also saved on the secured laptop using the same naming protocol. The transcript from each interview was reviewed for accuracy using the companion audio/video from the interview. Each transcript was reviewed with the companion audio two to three times to ensure accuracy of the interview data. The use of the companion video allowed for the inclusion of describing the physical responses of participants as they responded to interview questions. The use of video showed moments of family life and the emotional toil of working remote during a global health pandemic.

After reviewing the audio data, an accurate transcript of each interview was analyzed and coded for relevant and consistent themes that addressed the research questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). All participants' series of interview transcripts were read in chronological order to gain familiarity and a deeper understanding of their personal and professional experiences with othermothering. The reading of each transcript repeatedly, allowed for a deeper understanding of the big and small stories in the lives of each participant (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). At times,

while reading an interview transcript, the researcher would return to the appropriate video to watch that specific portion of the interview for a better understanding of the data.

The narrative data review process followed the research approach put forth by Creswell and Poth (2018). The interview data analysis involved (a) organizing the data files; (b) coding initially along with memoing about the data; (c) clustering into codes and examining for emerging themes; (d) identifying similar themes within stories and across the data; and (e) mapping emergent themes from the interviews back on to the main research questions.

As a way to look for similarities and differences in the lived experiences of the women, all of the transcripts from the first series of interviews were read together, then the second interview transcripts were read, and lastly, all of the third series of interview transcripts were read to identify consistent patterns or repetition in the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). The reading of the transcripts also included a process where participants' transcripts were read for the same specific time in their lives. The interview data that pertain to early childhood allowed the researcher to gain insight to their family life and respective communities. In the interview data pertaining to their early years to high school, the participants, richly describe experiences with non-family members that they would describe as othermothering even if the term othermothering was not used directly. The second interviews focused mostly on their college years and career development. These conversations allowed for the research participants to tell stories of the othermothers in their lives during their college years. The othermothers that the research participants spoke of from their college years aided in their personal development and aided them in identifying, a professional career in higher education. The final interviews focused on their current positions in higher education and the impact of othermothering on their professional and personal lives.

The reading of the interview transcripts across defined periods of time in the participants lives allowed for identifying similar words, phrases, and shared experiences. The frequent reading of the interview transcripts for a defined period of time aided the researcher with gaining a deeper understanding of their stories and identifying experiences that are similarly shared between one or more of the research participants. The individual experiences that are similarly shared by the participants showed evidence of the ongoing practice of the historical and cultural tradition of othermothering. In reviewing the collected data, I benefited from not only hearing but watching the research participants share their stories on the ways othermothering appeared in their personal lives and in their work in higher education.

The use of narrative inquiry allowed the participants to take ownership of their lived experience through the telling of their stories in their own words. Through stories shared, the teller highlights their personal condition within the contexts of broader societal conditions. I chose narrative inquiry as my qualitative methodology for its ability to provide a deeper understanding of the use of othermothering by African American women who work in higher education in non-faculty but student services role. The use of narrative inquiry privileged me to be able to hear these women's stories of othermothering in their own voices and using their own words. For this research, narrative inquiry was conducive for asking open-ended interview questions that encourage the participant to provide in-depth, detail-rich responses.

Issues of Trustworthiness

For this research on the practice of othermothering by African American women, it is important that the stories the research participants shared about their personal lives and professional experiences in higher education were presented accurately (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To establish trustworthiness of the research data, the research must show evidence of credibility,

transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To demonstrate credibility, I first and foremost acknowledged the privilege to hear the stories of the research participants and strove to honor the accuracy of their stories, by giving participants the opportunity to clarify statements made in previous interviews. This process is commonly referred to as member checking.

Transferability in qualitative research allows for broader application of findings and the ability to apply them to other related studies (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016), while maintaining the specificity of the study context (Jensen, 2012). To increase transferability of the research findings, Jensen (2012) directs researchers to (a) have participants with identities that closely align with the research participant profile; and (b) research with a clearly defined purpose. For this research, all participants have identities that strictly aligned with the research participant profile.

As for a clearly defined purpose, the research study's focused on African American women's use of othermothering in higher education and seeks to bring attention to the practice as a method to support students of color (African American students specifically), the presence of the practice in their personal life, and how othermothering informs the leadership of African American women. The research data is rich in details and contextually presented for broader application. For those new to the concept of othermothering and its cultural relevance, the research provides basic historical information to aid the reader's understanding of the historical context of the subject.

For dependability of the research data, each participant was asked the same questions. The research questions were reviewed by members of my dissertation committee and guidance was provided to ensure that the questions asked of the research participants aligned with the

research questions. Follow-up questions varied based upon the responses to questions provided by the research participant. Lastly, to demonstrate confirmability of the data, the researcher utilized an audit trail at the start of and through the conclusion of data review. The audit trail or confirmability process include details on the coding process and how the identified codes advanced themes. By providing such detail on the data analysis process, the reader can better understand how decisions were made regarding codes and themes. To support my findings, I met with my dissertation advisor to discuss and review my interpretations of the data and how it relates to the research questions. In addition, I incorporated a reflexive journal to document challenges faced and decisions made through the data collection process and to reduce the presence of my biases and prejudices in the analysis of the participant data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I do not assume that shared racial/ethnic and gender identities with the participants translated to an absolute understanding of their stories (Griffin & Reddick, 2011).

Limitations

The research on othermothering, as practiced by non-faculty African American women, focused on those employed for at least ten years at a PWI. The profile of research participants for this study does present limitations on the research findings for broader application. Using research participants employed at a PWI could result in participants having limited levels of student engagement with same-race students. Limited student interactions could be the result of limited same-race students on campus. In addition, since the number of women interviewed for the research was limited to five women, the data presents a limited viewpoint on othermothering experiences.

The setting for the one-on-one interviews with participants was through Zoom, a video-conferencing system. Because of the ongoing global health pandemic, I was not able to conduct

in-person interviews with the research participants. I acknowledge that the inability to conduct the interviews in-person, in the respective offices of the study participants, resulted in our inability to be in their professional environment where they actually engage with students. I hold the assumption that if we were able to conduct the interviews in their campus offices it could have aided in anchoring their responses to questions in the actual setting where they engage with students. The participants' offices as the setting for the research could "help focus the inquiry since it brings to life how the goals of the study meet the place and people in which you envision carrying out the study" (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 127). I also assume that the quality of the engagement with the participants, over time, would have progressed as they shared their stories, in rich and in-depth details, of the effect of othermothering in their personal and professional lives. The research participants would have had the opportunity to share their stories of how they engage with or othermother students in the exact physical space in which these engagements more than likely occur. The participants' offices as the site for the interviews would have allowed me to make note of the personal artifacts used to decorate their offices as a way to illustrate and document their stories.

Conclusion

For this study, I used the definitions of othermothering that James and Collins use in their respective research. This study attempted to answer these questions:

1. How do non-faculty African American women professionals in non-faculty roles, at PWIs understand the practice of othermothering in their lives?
2. How does the practice of othermothering affect their professional lives?
3. How does the practice of othermothering affect their personal lives?

The research study looked at the experiences of African American women who work in higher education at PWIs and their use of othermothering practices to engage with same-race students. The study using narrative inquiry sought stories of othermothering that shaped the lives of the research participants. The stories allowed the participants to reflect on their experiences and how these experiences shaped their live personally and informed their professional careers. The study also sought to gain a better understanding of the othermothering practice at PWIs and its effect on the professional development and personal lives of African American women.

The significance of the study was to document the continued cultural practice of othermothering by African American women in our communities, and colleges and universities, specifically at PWIs. The research has advanced the understanding of how othermothering is currently practiced by African American women and how these engagements are a part of the African American student experience at PWIs. I also sought a greater awareness into the ways the practice of othermothering by African American women at PWIs has bearing on their professional development. This research provides for additional ways for college administrators to work with students of color based upon an expanded definition of student-centeredness in higher education that includes the practice of othermothering (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). Previous research on othermothering has focused on students as recipients of the cultural practice while detailing the personal, psychological, and professional benefits garnered from this type of focused engagement. This study looked at the practice of othermothering from the perspective of African American women who work at PWIs. At PWIs there is a lack of awareness or familiarity of the cultural practice of Othermothering by most faculty and staff. Through qualitative interviews, I was able to gain insight into how the practice of othermothering by African

American women is received by their higher education peers who are not familiar with the practice and the possible outcomes on their professional development and personal lives.

Insights shared from the research participants have the potential to contribute to a greater understanding of how African American women combine othermothering practices, with other higher education methodologies when engaging with students. Concurrently, the study data has the potential to assist college and university administrators gain a deeper understanding of the ways African American women are familiar with and practice othermothering when working with same-race students and how their work contributes to students' academic success and personal development. A wider understanding of othermothering practices by higher education administrators and researchers could also bring acknowledgement of the unique manner in which African American women contribute to the higher education profession. The acknowledgement and recognition of the contributions made by African American women to the higher education profession could lead to greater professional opportunities and reduced pressures on their professional and personal lives.

Chapter 4: Findings

Research Questions

The purpose of this research was to gain a deeper understanding of othermothering as practiced by African American women who work at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) and the effect on their professional and personal lives. The research informed by Black Feminist Theory utilized a narrative inquiry methodology for its ability to obtain deeply authentic and original stories from African American women. The research used the stories of five African American women who currently work in higher education at PWIs. The voices of African American women are rarely included in academic research especially when their personal and professional experiences in higher education are discussed. There is limited research that brings attention to the ways African American women, who work in higher education at PWIs, incorporate the tradition of othermothering with higher education best practices in their work. The research investigated how the practice of othermothering informs the ways African American women engage with African American students specifically to address the following questions:

1. How do non-faculty African American women professionals, in non-faculty roles, at PWIs experience the practice of othermothering in their lives?
2. How does the practice of othermothering affect their professional lives?
3. How does the practice of othermothering affect their personal lives?

Data collection for this qualitative study entailed interviewing five mid-career African American women who work in higher education. Research participants were asked the same questions, with differing follow-up questions. The questions were crafted to hear the women's stories in chronological order. Each woman participated in three one-hour interviews that were

recorded (audio and visual) using the Zoom video platform. The Zoom platform generates a transcript of each interview recorded and securely saves it to the cloud. The transcript of each interview was delivered to the researcher's secured email 8-10 hours after the interview. The transcript was edited for accuracy using the interview audio for content and video for context. This process allowed for a deeper connection with the data for the purpose of identifying themes and detailed answers to the research questions.

Through a thorough review of the interview data on othermothering, the following themes were identified:

- the research participants' early and ongoing experiences with othermothering that shaped their knowledge of the practice.
- the research participants' utilization of the practice of othermothering as part of their student engagement practices.
- the research participants' awareness of how their identities impact their professional presence and development at a PWI.

Profile of Participants

For this study, the research participants are self-identified African American or Black women, who are mid-career, higher education professionals at a PWI where their job duties include some combination of admissions, academic advising, financial aid and financial wellness, enrollment management, student activities and organizations, and so forth. The women for this study were recruited from the researcher's professional network, word-of-mouth, and direct contact. As a member of a number of higher education professional organizations, the researcher directly emailed members that fit the research profile criteria, regarding participating in the research.

The outreach and research were conducted during the global health pandemic, COVID-19. During the time participants were being sought, most higher education professionals were working remotely because of closed campuses. With most campuses being closed and learning being delivered online, some colleges and universities faced financial challenges. To address the financial impact that COVID-19 had on college campuses, university leaders utilized a number of cost-cutting measures, including reducing staff through employment furloughs, layoffs, and voluntary early retirement. All of the women for this research maintained their employment throughout the data gathering to remain eligible for the research.

Each participant was interviewed three times for 50-60 minutes per interview using the Zoom video conferencing platform. Because of COVID-19 restrictions, all participants were working from home at the time of their scheduled interviews. The participants being at home for the interviews did present situations that could not be planned for such as family and pet interferences during the interviews. During the editing of the interview transcripts, these personal family interactions were removed from the transcript to maintain the families' privacy. These personal family occurrences remain on the video.

The profiles of the participants are presented here to paint a picture of the women and the effect that othermothering has had on their professional and personal lives. The profiles are meant to help put their stories in context of who they are and how othermothering factors into their life stories.

Anne

Anne was born and raised in the suburbs of a large city in the Midwest. She was raised by a female-only middle-class household in a community with similar family structures. Anne enjoyed English Literature as a high school student and pursued the major in college. While

working as an admissions recruiter for a private university with an academic focus on technology and engineering in a large city, it was her supervisor and mentor who encouraged her to pursue a graduate degree in higher education administration. It was during graduate school in higher education administration that Anne began meeting and engaging with other African American women in the profession who continue to be a significant part of her professional network. Anne is currently serving as the director of admissions and enrollment management at a large commuter college that serves upwards of 20,000 students in the Midwest. The student body is comprised of traditional college-aged students, adults continuing their education in pursuit of an associate degree, and non-degree life-long learning students.

Marie

Marie was born and raised on the East Coast with four brothers and a widowed mother in what she considered a middle-class family at the time. An avid reader who was influenced by her paternal grandmother, Marie also majored in English at a liberal arts college in the Midwest. She stated in our conversation even though her mother worked at the local university, that she did not know her family was poor until her college experience showed her differently. Marie stated,

> but I was shocked that I was underprivileged. Believe me, I remember that. I don't remember how I got that message, but I remember getting that message.

After earning her English degree, she pursued a graduate degree in higher education administration, opting to remain in the Midwest. With a career in admissions and enrollment management, Marie worked primarily at colleges and universities in the Midwest and in the South. It was while working for a private university in the South that Marie would marry and start a family. As her family grew, they would leave the South and move to the West Coast to be

near family. Marie is currently the associate dean of a graduate professional program at a large private university located on the West Coast.

Louise

Louise was born and raised in the South and while her family structure was a traditional two-parent family, she inferred her parents did not follow stereotypical gendered roles. Her mother, a nurse, preferred to work the late shift at the hospital which left her father to get Louise and her sister ready for school in the morning, help with homework after school, and prepare dinner in the evening. With a father as an educator, Louise and her sister were encouraged to read and write early. After her parents divorced when she was 12, Louise and her sister were raised primarily by their father.

For most of her life, Louise's father was a college student. While he was working on his doctoral degree in education, she and her sister would go with him to the college library. After the divorce, her father kept Louise and her sister with him as much as possible. As an educator, he had a keen interest in their development and growth. In hindsight, Louise would describe her upbringing as strict and sheltered. From the way Louise shared this information, to her it was not perceived as a negative experience, just more of an intentionally managed upbringing by an educator father. Her father was intentional in finding opportunities for Louise and her sister to engage and connect with women in the family or the community. Some of these engagements were based upon acquiring skills he determined as important to normalize their life and taking advantage of available opportunities to aid in their development.

Louise attended college in her home state and shortly thereafter started working in graduate admissions at a mid-sized university. Later in her career, she would relocate to a large city in the Midwest to lead a graduate admissions office. After 12 years in the Midwest, Louise

returned to her home state in the South as the associate dean of enrollment management for a graduate professional program.

Gloria

Gloria was born in the Midwest and was primarily raised by her mother and grandmother after her parents' divorce in a community she describes as full of military families. She described her community as follows:

> My grandmother was an army wife and the neighborhood that we lived in was mostly older people. A lot of retired folks, which felt like, that is where I spent my time was around retired folks and my grandmother's friends. Most of them were older than her, probably in their 60s and 70s. So that is who I hung out with, those were my people.

While she would value these unique relationships with her grandmother's friends, she would not describe them as othermothering. Gloria would specifically refer to her best friend's mom, who lived next door as the othermother in her life. Gloria shared:

> but between my grandmother's house and my mom's house was my best friend's house and his mom. She was a single mom as well. And so, between his and my mom. They othermothered the both of us.

Like others, Gloria's othermothers were women in her community, so close in proximity to her home, often times the mother of close friends and women who were leading a family as a single parent.

While Gloria would continue to see and visit her father periodically while she was young, those engagements increased when Gloria began college in the same Midwestern state in which her father lived. With an early career focusing on making college accessible for first-generation

college students, Gloria attended graduate school on the East Coast. She would eventually return to her home state to lead an office that provides financial aid advising for college students at the largest public university in the state.

Mae

Mae was born and raised with her sister in the suburbs of a large city by her divorced father. She attended the state's largest public university where she continued a tradition of active involvement in student-led organizations. After graduating from college, she enrolled in graduate school in higher education administration. She would work for colleges and universities; Mae would describe them as "mission-driven." With roles at a variety of colleges and universities that were very heavily student-facing, Mae shifted her career from a student affairs focus, which was much aligned with her college experience, to academic advising. Currently, Mae serves as the assistant dean for a graduate professional program at a private university in a large city in the Midwest.

The data obtained from the participant interviews about their experiences with othermothering led to themes that were present in most of the stories shared by the participants. To give voice to the participants, their actual words from their interviews will be used when discussing or explaining the various themes and to answering the research questions.

Review of the Data

Interview Theme #1: The Research Participants' Early Experiences that Shaped Their Knowledge of Othermothering

For their first one-hour interview, study participants were asked biographical questions to establish their personal stories. The questions asked of each study participant during the first session covered their childhood, background, immediate and extended families, education, and

the communities in which they were raised until college. Even though study participants were aware that they could answer questions with as much detail as felt comfortable sharing, many of the study participants, interested in the topic, were very detailed in their responses to the interview questions.

The five women interviewed for this research come from a variety of family structures. It is through these various family structures that the participants became aware of the practice of othermothering. For some of the women who participated in the research, their experiences with othermothering were in response to profound life experiences. As young children, some of the women experienced divorcing parents or the death of a parent. At the time of these profound life experiences women in their family or in the community stepped in to support the family as othermothers. When Mae's parents divorced and her mom moved to another state, the extended family became directly involved in the lives of the family. Mae shared,

> Our extended families, my grandparents were a big part of our lives,
> my life. We spent a lot of time. With my father's parents.

During these profound life experiences, the research participants were not aware of the actual term othermothering. But what was clear to them, was that there was a community/village of women who were present in their lives as a way to support their birth mothers or in the case of two of the participants, birth fathers. The participants never viewed their othermothers as a replacement of their birth mothers, but an extension of an informal family unit of women that was partly responsible for raising them. This network of women in their community was integral to their development and conveyed a sense of unconditional love. The othermothers in the lives of the research participants provided them an early example of the role and responsibilities of African American women in the community. The participants also shared stories of observing

their own mothers othermothering their friends. When telling stories of their own mothers othermothering friends, it was not expressed with discomfort, anger, or jealousy. The practice of othermothering was a regular occurrence in their respective communities. For many of the participants, since these types of relationships were prevalent in their communities, it normalized the practice and tradition of othermothering. As young children, living in communities where othermothering was practiced, it became an assumed practice wherever African American women were present.

Othermothering also expanded their view on what is family through these fictive kin relationships that were part of their lives from youth to young adult. The othermothering experienced by the research participants during their college years confirmed the ongoing value and importance of the practice. Throughout their lives, the participants participated in and benefited from the practice of othermothering, and overtime became increasingly aware of the historical tradition and cultural implications of othermothering. It is through this awareness of the importance of the practice to the African American community, from their own experience that the women of this study incorporated the practice into their work in higher education.

The first series of interviews sought to identify the participants' earliest recollection of the practice of othermothering. It was important to establish an understanding of the practice of othermothering though the participants' stories of their early childhood. These stories of othermothering evolved over-time as the participants gained a deeper understanding of these relationships that they had with other women in their community, or watched their own mother serve as an othermother to their close friends in their community. This expanded network of mothering broadened and deepened the level of care they received in their community. For some of the women in the research with challenging family situations, this network of care by the

othermothers was of great benefit to their personal development, identity attainment and sense of security.

Gloria's parents divorced when she was two years old, and she had an inconsistent relationship with her father until her college years. Gloria's small family also included her maternal grandmother who was present throughout her formative years. Anne lived in a community where many of the households were led by females. Anne was raised by a single mother, also having a very limited relationship with her father throughout her life. Both women grew up never having a consistent male/father presence in their lives. A number of families in Anne's community resembled her family, which normalized the female-led family structure. Both women were raised in homes and communities with a significant female presence. Gloria shared that while growing up, her grandmother was her "best friend". This was a relationship described fondly by Gloria about her maternal grandmother:

> When I was very little, we [daughter, mom and grandmother] lived in the same apartment, and by the time I started school, my mom and I moved to an apartment and my grandmother bought a house, and then we moved again across the street from my grandmother.

Gloria's family consisted of two generations of women who took care of all of her needs. If she was not with her mom, she was with her grandmother, or both. With periodic visits with her father, Gloria was able to navigate her family relationships. Gloria shared she had a very close relationship with both her mother and her grandmother:

> I was incredibly close to both of them. My mom worked in tourism, so anytime she went to work, I went over to my grandmother's and then

> I would spend half of spring breaks and a little bit of summers with my dad. I opted not to spend my holidays there [with dad] because the food was better at my grandmother's house.

The influence of Gloria's grandmother was felt through college. Her grandmother was always in search of opportunities for Gloria. It is one of the grandmother's arranged experiences that would later influence Gloria's selection of a college major.

Marie's father died early in her life, and her mother never remarried. Marie often reminded me that her mother was a widow and not a single mother. This was an important distinction that Marie would return to often as she shared her family story. This important distinction for Marie could have been based upon respecting and acknowledging the life of her father, while not presenting her mother as a single parent. It was obvious that Marie was pushing against the widely held narrative of the single African American mother. Marie's mom was a stay-at-home mother and did not join the work force until after the death of her husband. This change in family lifestyle was her introduction to othermothering. Marie's grandmothers and aunts became increasingly involved in their lives and provided support to the family. Marie felt specifically cared for by these women because she was the only girl in a family with four boys.

Louise's parents divorced when she was 12 years old and she, and her younger sister were primarily raised by their father. Like Louise, Mae was also raised by her father after her parents' divorce when she was a young teen. Single male-led families are not common in the United States. According to the Pew Research Center (2019), 9% of households are female-led compared to 2% of households being male-led in the United States. The Pew data leads the researcher to assume that male-led families in the United States at the time Louise was growing up was also rare.

The stories shared by the women about growing up in their respective communities, included the influence of the othermothers in their lives. The othermothers they talked about most often lived in close proximity to their homes. Gloria and Anne mentioned how their othermothers lived next door. The communities where three of the five women were raised could be described as large, segregated cities, and two of the women were raised in integrated suburbs. African Americans were not the majority in these integrated suburbs. Over time, both of these communities became less Black. Regardless of the location of or the racial identities represented in the communities, the participants recalled othermothers as being available and a part of their lives.

As an African American tradition, it is expected that othermotheirng relationships would be practiced currently in African American communities. The research showed that othermothering is present in all forms of communities where African American women are involved. The participants shared stories of othermothering experiences with women, who they were not related to but lived in their communities. with teachers at their schools, women at their church, and women who participated in community organizations.

Othermothers and Fictive Kin Relationships

Gloria referred to the relationship she had with the mother of her best friend, as othermothering. The best friend lived next door and his mom was also a single parent. Anne shared a similar othermothering experience with her best friend's mom who also lived nearby. In her community there were a number of women-led households and Anne recalled a number of examples of othermothering while growing up in her community.

This network of othermothers who resided in Gloria and Anne's community are similarly described in the research by Turner-Henderson and Leary (2021) on fictive kinship networks. In

their research, fictive kin is defined as an extended network of non-family relationships, oftentimes formed organically, that serve to support, nurture and mentor those with a shared value and cultural identity. Othermothering, while female specific, is an aspect of fictive kin relationships, which is not gender specific. These values shared between family and non-family members support the continuity and expansion of the family structure. It also enhances the meaning of 'family' for those who welcome othermothering or fictive kin relationships.

For Anne, she closely identified with the concept of othermothering through the relationships she had with the mother of her best friend who lived nearby. Anne said:

> I used the term 'hey mom' to my best friend's mother, so that was just a term of endearment. We would not dare call them by their first name so we just called them 'mom'.

The term of mother, for Anne, was a way to express respect and honor to the women that were there for:

> prom, boyfriends, and college. I felt that I was raised in, maybe it was not so much of the community raised you, it was my little, small knit group of girlfriends and their mothers.

Louise and Mae, along with their younger sisters, were raised primarily by their fathers. Louise's father was very intentional about arranging specialized opportunities for his daughters where they could engage in activities with women in the community who provided them with othermothering experiences.

Louise had very intentional experiences with women in the community. She shared:

> he [her father] didn't say that was what he was doing, but he would just set up these opportunities for us to spend time with women in the community

> to learn how to sew and bake cakes.

Louise's father considered these women in the community as filling a "mothering" gap for his two daughters. This was articulated by Louise in the following statement about her father:

> He was strategic in making sure that we had lots of women role models around us. He was raising two girls and he wanted to make sure we didn't miss anything by not having my/a mother.

All study participants, regardless of their family structure, recall othermothering relationships with female family members or with women in the community. In addition, most of the parents, after divorce or death of a spouse, relocated to be near family to help with raising their young families.

Louise shared examples of what these intentional and scheduled engagements entailed. These scheduled experiences were of such value to Louise and occurred at a pivotal time in her life:

> So, and I remember that fondly, and it was actually probably much, much more. It was more needed than I realized, to have those very positive experiences with women you know in my community.

The research on fictive kin relationships supports the statement shared by Louise regarding the value of these engagements at such an important time in her life. The research on the value of fictive kin relationships, like othermothering, for children and young adults highlights their ability to create healthy behaviors and engagements that benefit the personal growth of children and young adults (Turner-Henderson & Leary, 2021).

Othermothers and Pre-College Experiences

As our conversations continued, we shifted from a focus on family and home to a focus on school. As we discussed their education, pre-school through college, the participants spoke of other women and experiences that they would describe as othermothering. It is during this period that many of the othermothers are not members of the participants' immediate families. The experiences recounted by the participants with othermothers, and some men, in their schools or communities were described as or referred to as their "village." These village experiences with non-family adults were not limited to teachers at their school, but also referenced the support staff at the high schools they attended that also engaged with the participants like family.

A few of the participants spoke about othermothering experiences with school nurses, cafeteria workers, coaches and community leaders that occurred over periods of years that were important to them during high school. Mae described the engagements as similar to being with older family members with whom you maintained a long and close relationship.

During their high school years, a few of the participants described this period of time in their lives as pivotal because of significant changes they were undergoing in their personal lives. It was during these pivotal times that the participants relied on the support, attention, and guidance they received from these increasingly important othermothering relationships to ease them through their teen years. These othermothering relationships were also vital to their ability to transition into adulthood and then successfully attend college.

A truly impactful opportunity for Louise came from one of her othermothering relationships. This othermother was introduced to Louise by her very involved father. Louise was asked by an othermother in her life to participate in a city-wide commission that planned the annual Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. events. This othermother, also a leader in the community,

was integral in Louise's leadership development. As the youngest member on the commission, she was able to engage with community leaders and elected officials. She described this opportunity:

> It allowed me to really see myself in a space where I was a Black woman aspiring to be a leader. In a way, I don't know that I necessarily really realized that's what I was doing, but that was it. You know, I was walking in these shoes, the practice of being a leader.

The participants for this study referenced the othermothers in their lives who were influential in their decisions to attend college, their college selections, and even their decisions about academic majors. Three of the study participants were English majors in college because an othermother supported their love of reading and writing. The participants also referenced that most importantly, these othermothers affirmed their academic abilities that helped build their confidence. By sharing the same identities as their othermothers, this afforded the participants an opportunity to observe the lived experience of a professional African American woman. Anne shared how her academic major was decided during a meeting with her English teacher. As shared by Anne, her English teacher, an othermother that greatly influenced her life throughout high school said, "My dear, you are destined for English. If anything, follow that route because you are good at that."

Anne's relationship with her African American English teacher included a close and personal bond that developed over the four years she attended her predominantly White high school. In addition to the woman's duties as high school English teacher, Anne's teacher helped her with academic and college advising. Anne found in her English teacher someone with a similar interest in literature that also affirmed her abilities and was committed to her academic

success. Anne viewed her English teacher as a role model and an example of a professional African American woman.

Anne's English teacher, who attended an HBCU and was a member of an African American sorority, likely would have experienced othermothering during periods in her life, especially the college years. The English teacher, carrying the tradition forward into her work as a high school teacher, incorporated othermothering practices as a way to engage, support, and guide Anne. Anne acknowledged how she benefited from her English teacher's othermothering and why she is also committed to including the practice when working with African American students. Anne not only pursued the same major in college as her othermother but would eventually join the same sorority.

A consistent theme for all of the women was the expectation that they would be attending college. They all mentioned that attending college was talked about often in their homes. Most of the participants had parents who graduated from college or attended for a few years. Anne shared her mother's views on college choice:

> I wanted to go to school for hair (cosmetology), I loved doing hair. That was not an option for me; my mother said you were going to go to college and get a degree and you are going to be successful. So, her definition of success was not a trade it was that traditional college track.

Anne's mother was not a college graduate but understood the importance of a college degree for career development and financial security. Anne's mother and English teacher othermother recognized and supported Anne's academic ability. Both women worked together to keep Anne on track to enroll in college after graduating from high school. When sharing her

story, Anne often acknowledged the network of othermothers in her community that were present in her life from middle school through the challenging teen years of high school.

A vital aspect of othermothering relationships is the relationship between birth mothers and othermothers as evidenced by the relationship between Anne's mother and the othermothers in Anne's life. Othermothering relationships are not successful without the support and approval of birth mothers. As illustrated by the five women, many of their othermothering relationships were initiated through family relationships and neighborhood connections. The othermothering relationship focuses on raising and supporting young people, and not creating tension for young people or challenging their relationship with parents. These relationships are successful when birth mothers and othermothers exhibit a level of trust and respect for each other's role and purpose in the young person's life. Anne's mother was committed to her attending college. Not being a college graduate herself, Anne's mother relied upon and partnered with the more knowledgeable English teacher on most things related to applying and attending college. The othermother English teacher was an important influence in Anne's life and successfully encouraged Anne to attend college instead of cosmetology school. Anne's mother was able to leverage the influence of the English teacher to reach the ultimate goal, which was Anne attending college to pursue an academic degree and not a vocational/professional degree.

Interestingly enough, all five women attended predominantly White institutions for college. Even under the influence of othermothers who attended HBCUs, the participants selected to attend a PWI for a variety of reasons. In addition to financial reasons, another often cited reason was close proximity to family and home. Mae shared why she wanted to attend a large college: "well, if they had a lot of students that means they have a lot of things,

they would have a lot of clubs, organizations, resources, majors." It was important to Mae, and a few others, to attend what they described as a "well-resourced school." Louise started at the local community college under the advice of her father and also for financial reasons. The common denominator among all of the participants was the fact that they were expected to attend college, be academically successful, graduate from college and have a lucrative professional career.

Othermothering in Higher Education

As college students, the participants got involved in a variety of campus activities and community organizations. A few of the campus organizations they involved themselves in contributed to them gaining an understanding of their racial identity and somewhat their gender identity, to some extent, as well. For Anne and Louise, while many of the othermothers in their lives were members of African American sororities, the participants themselves did not join a Greek lettered organization while in college. One participant would join an African American sorority while attending graduate school pursuing a degree in higher education administration. When talking about their college experiences, their racial identity was first and foremost in their minds when they decided on campus activities. The focus on racial identity over gender was based upon what the participants were experiencing in their lives at the time. Anne describes her college experience in a rural town as:

> not very welcoming at the time to African American, Hispanic students, back in the day. I was introduced to a sense of belonging with the Black Student Union. They provided that space for you to feel welcomed, from study groups, parties, they helped you feel that you were part of a campus.

Being away at a PWI in a mid-sized city in the South and not near her community of othermothers, Louise saw the value of these Greek lettered organizations for their ability "to

broaden her sister circle" but instead opted to get involved in the campus Black Cultural Center. Louise decided to involve herself in the campus-based organization, with a focus on racial identity, because of her previous involvement in her local Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Planning Commission volunteer work. Membership in an African American sorority had the potential to connect Louise with other African American women on campus to create and broaden her sister circle, but she opted to focus on growing her campus connection with African American students, staff, and faculty through her involvement in the Black Cultural Center. As a college student, Louise involved herself in campus-based organizations that worked toward addressing racial injustice and inequity in the African American community. At the time the participants were attending college, there were a number of high-profile national and local events that motivated them to join organizations on campus and in their respective communities to address racial injustice.

Mae attended a large public state university in a rural community. She was also involved in her high school's Black Student Union and local community organizations. While away at college, Mae continued her involvement in organizations with a focus on racial identity, equity and justice on her college campus and the community. On reflection, Mae attributes her involvement in identity-based campus and community organizations, and her experience as an African American student at a PWI campus, as foundational in her leadership development. As she continued to reflect on this specific period in her life, Mae would credit her campus involvement and leadership development for *"*sparking a lot of my interest in higher education." Mae would revisit this theme when discussing the influence of her involvement in campus-based student organizations that allowed for her to develop as a leader and eventually put her on the path to find her professional career.

With Mae's involvement in campus-based programs, she was engaging with the African American women that advised these student groups. The participation in and leading student groups afforded these women opportunities to be involved in campus life that attributed to their academic success. The direct connection to African American women in student services roles opened up to the research participants the profession of higher education administration that prior to college they were not aware existed.

For these women, some of their selected college course work and campus activities helped them think through their dual identities as African Americans and women. The women of this study spoke about joining student groups that affirmed their racial identity, while also thinking through how gender also factors into their personal development. As young adults, this period of defining their identities of what it means to be both African American/Black and female was informed by their college experiences. Mae referenced her enrollment in a 16-week inner dialogue course taught by a White woman and an African American man. The course gave Mae the opportunity "to delve into my identity, different types of identities." She continued:

> And I think absolutely it helped lead me into the direction of how I can help change the system from within. Also realizing everybody's got a story.

As the women approached their college graduation, their identities as women and African Americans took on a central role as they navigated their chosen profession. The research participants had examples of professional African American women in their lives from their participation in campus and community activities. The participants were now embarking on starting their post-graduate professional lives with the understanding of how race and gender would factor into their professional presence and development.

As the women in this study progressed through college to graduation, many of them did not have a clearly defined career plan. What became apparent to Mae and Marie was an interest in higher education as career. A few of them relied on the support of their othermothers to help them through this transition. The academic major Mae pursued for four years was no longer of interest as a long-term career plan. While in college, as she became very involved in activities that affirmed her racial identity and leadership development, Mae considered other career options. The interest in student leadership development for Mae is a theme that continues to define her career choices and employment selections. It was through these campus activities and interest in the operation of higher education that she was encouraged to apply to graduate school by a White female staff member at her university and to pursue a degree in higher education administration. Mae did consider the White female staff member, that introduced her to a career in higher education, more of a mentor and not specifically an othermother. Mae found value in the relationship, but the racial difference was a barrier for Mae to view the woman as an othermother.

While Marie was working at the university, she worked with an African American woman, who was an academic advisor. The working relationship also afforded Marie the opportunity to have a professional role model, that served as a mentor, with shared identities. Because of Marie's interest in mentoring, she did not use the phrase othermother when speaking of these African American women that were integral in her education and professional development. Later in our conversation, Marie shared the deeply personal reason for not using the phrase othermother to describe these relationships and why she does not describe herself as an othermother. However, Marie expressed that the mentoring relationships with her students held personal value that was similar to the othermothering relationships that she experienced

Through the mentoring relationships Marie was encouraged to register for education courses for a possible career in teaching. Early in the required course work, Marie decided that being in the classroom teaching young children was not her ideal career. Shortly thereafter, Marie's campus mentor suggested she read a few copies of the periodical, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Marie stated:

> Oh my gosh, the lights are on. And I would just, you know, started to really consider the jobs that I saw people doing, the careers people pursued. So, by the fall of my senior year, I decided I was going to grad school to get a master's degree in higher education administration.

The first theme from the data points to the importance and influence of othermothering in the lives of the research participants. Othermothers were a consistent presence in the lives of the research participants. The participants shared stories of othermothers from early in their childhood through college. Othermothers were women who were directly related to the participants (Louise, Mae, and Marie) or who lived in close proximity to the participants (Anne and Gloria). A few of the women, for example, Gloria and Anne, vividly recall their very own mothers othermothering their friends. While growing up, the research participants were not familiar with the term othermothering to describe the relationships they had with women that acted as "second" moms in their communities. To acknowledge the presence of these women in their lives, they were often referred to by terms of endearment that illustrated the close bond between the two. The participants continued to recall fondly othermothering relationships through high school.

During their high school years, the research participants reframed the role of their othermothers from less of a caregiver to more of an advisor, role model or mentor. The

participants received guidance and support from their othermothers to help them navigate the challenges of high school. During these formative years, these othermothers became examples of what was possible as a professional African American woman. The research participants benefited from hearing real-life examples through storytelling and connections to professional networks through their campus-based othermothers. In research by Tinto (1993) the importance of a "like-person role model" affirms how it contributes to increased college retention and professional development. For African American students specifically, research suggests the value of exposure and interaction with African Americans who have been successful in higher education (Burrell, 1980). The story shared by Louise illustrates this shift in the othermothering relationship. Louise was able to take advantage of a unique opportunity as a high school student by participating in a city-wide commission to plan events in celebration of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King. As shared earlier, it was an othermother in Louise's life that encouraged her to participate in the city-wide commission. The othermother illustrated for Louise the importance of being involved in the community. For Louise, she was exposed to other African American professionals, which aided in her understanding of being African American and female while being in service to your community.

While the women did not have a name for these relationships, the presence of othermothers positively impacted the lives of the participants. Along with the birthmothers, the othermothers created a network of support, security, and guidance and served as role models that influenced the participants through college. The participants, successful women in their own careers, acknowledge the influence their othermothers had in their personal lives, professional development, and commitment to community service.

Interview Theme #2: The Research Participants' Commitment to the Practice of Othermothering as Part of their Student Engagement Practice

After completing their undergraduate degrees, Anne, Marie, and Mae started their professional careers in higher education. Within two years of working in admissions, financial aid or student advising roles, Anne, Marie, Gloria, and Mae enrolled in a graduate program pursuing a degree in higher education administration. Currently, Anne, Marie, Gloria, and Mae have graduate degrees in higher education administration, and one of the four is pursuing a doctoral degree in education.

It was mentioned more than once by the participants that they were motivated to pursue a career in higher education because of their involvement in campus activities and their relationships with staff and faculty that shaped their college experiences. The participants have undergraduate degrees that are useful in their higher education roles, but they also shared they were not aware that one could have a professional career working on a college campus. Mae, who was a resident assistant on her campus, shared how the housing director,

> opened my mind to higher education. She told me, if you like this,
>
> do you know you could do this, like you can major in this?

Gloria spoke about the university staff, mostly women, who helped her through college during a challenging time in her life. Gloria referenced female staff members who worked in multicultural student affairs, academic and career advising, and financial aid that were her support system throughout her enrollment in college. These women, who were extremely instrumental in her personal development, were also examples of professional African American women and women of color. Currently, with a career in higher education, Gloria acknowledges the influence of these early examples of working in higher education as an African American

woman on her own career. Gloria approaches her work in higher education with a similar commitment to student support and development that was afforded to her as a college student by African American women.

Similar to Mae, Gloria was no longer interested in pursuing a career in her selected college major in which she received a degree. After spending time determining her true interests, Gloria actively pursued a role that exemplified the influences of her engagement with the women who othermothered her while she was an undergraduate student. To the surprise of family and friends, Gloria accepted a role with a non-profit organization with a mission of helping first-generation high school students apply to college and secure funds for their college education.

After graduating from college, Marie worked at the campus library for a period of time before taking her first position in higher education as an admissions officer at a small liberal arts college in the Midwest. Marie accepted the position because of the focus on recruitment, admissions, and orientation. The position allowed her to work with students directly and through the entirety of their enrollment in college. The work allowed for Marie to build a relationship with students, especially students who were first in their family to attend college. Even though Marie was not a first-generation college student herself, she did find a connection between her personal experiences and those of the students she worked with on a daily basis. Marie's first manager was and continues to be a presence in her career. Marie described her manager as a "great person, a great leader and a mentor." From this experience, Marie decided,

> I wanted to be somebody's mentor, I wanted to be the person who supported people and encourage them to move on when it is time to move on.

This commitment to mentoring would be a theme of Marie's professional career in higher education. Because her role was split between admissions and student affairs, Marie was able to carry through on this commitment when she accepted a role of providing academic advising to students who were in academic trouble after their first semester in college.

A dual role of admissions and academic advising allowed her students to remain connected with a "familiar face" during a stressful time. A role such as this served the lifecycle of the students on campus, allowing Marie to have a more intentional relationship with her students. A student from that early job remains connected to Marie. Marie stated:

> I don't know how she finds me because I have moved around, but she finds me and you know she always starts with thanking me for being there when she was an undergraduate student.

Marie added more about the student engagements:

> I remember the students were like 'oh you're my mom,' and it is like, I'm only a few years older than you. I'm not your mom, you know, I really am not your mom. I never wanted to mother people.

As shared earlier, unlike the other participants, the type of engagement that Marie sought with students was based more on a mentoring model, and she preferred not to describe her relationship with students as othermothering. The mentoring model Marie used to engage with her students included elements of knowledge acquisition, emotional and psychosocial support, and academic and career advising (Grant, 2012). While she acknowledged the cultural tradition of othermothering and was familiar with the practice from her childhood experiences, Marie actively resisted in defining her relationships with students as othermothering. As our conversation progressed, Marie shared why she prefers not to name the way in which she

engages with students as othermothering. This preference was not something Marie took lightly and was based upon a deeply personal reason that Marie shared in our discussion:

> I never thought I was going to have kids, but that's another story. So, I never had this desire to mother people. I like people. I like training. I like supporting. I like nurturing people but mothering to me mothering is something. Like now, I'll be your big sister.

Marie's comment provides insight into why she preferred to describe her engagements with students as mentoring or providing training, and not othermothering. For Marie, it was a personal decision because at the time of Marie starting her career in higher education, she did not envision being a mother as part of her future. It is the researcher's assumption that if Marie did not see motherhood in her future, being engaged in othermothering relationships with her students was of no interest to her. Also, while the above statement explains Marie's disregard of the term othermother, she was comfortable with the use of another familial term, sister, when defining her role with students. While Marie declined not to define her relationship with students as othermothering, she was open to a different version of a fictive kin relationship with her students and being a part of their village on campus.

Similar to Marie, Anne initially decided to pursue a graduate degree in English after completing her undergraduate degree. When Anne met with an academic advisor to discuss their graduate program offerings, it was suggested by the graduate academic advisor that Anne apply for a position at the university. At this time, a career in higher education was not a consideration for Anne. She would share, "what could I possibly do at a university? In my mind, I only thought of professors." Marie and Anne both did not consider higher education as a career option. It was the suggestion of an academic advisor that put both women in a position to consider higher

education as a career. Even though both Marie and Anne engaged with othermothers during their college years, they both lacked the awareness of higher education as an actual profession.

At the suggestion of the graduate academic advisor, Anne submitted a general employment application for any open position at the university. Two weeks later Anne was called to interview for an available position and was hired to be an admissions recruiter. While in this entry level role, Anne's supervisor was committed to her professional development in higher education. After a few years at the college working as an admissions recruiter, Anne would marry, relocate to a larger city, and take on an admissions role at another university.

Part of her duties was to increase enrollment of African American students to a science, technology, engineering, and math-based private university. As this was a new role at the university with a specific commitment to increase diversity enrollment by the university, Anne relied on the expertise of her mentors in higher education to guide her in this important work. The importance of these mentoring relationships early in her career were extremely important to her professional development. Anne shared:

> so again, having those mentors. So yeah, probably I stand on the shoulders of those that showed us how to recruit.

She added:

> And it gave me hope that there would be a place for aspiring Black women to be in these vice president roles, once you master the art of recruiting students.

As she achieved a level of professional success in her role as an admissions recruiter, Anne's supervisor, seeing her potential as a leader in the area of admissions recruitment and enrollment management, encouraged her to pursue a graduate degree in higher education. Anne was also motivated to pursue a graduate degree because:

> A majority were White men that were in those leadership roles at the time. You did not see a lot of Black and not only just Black but female managers, vice presidents.

For Anne, it was not only about achieving a level of professional success for herself; she was committed to diversifying the industry of admissions and enrollment management to include Black women who work in the profession. Anne sought to develop as a leader within her institution but also within the realm of the profession.

Unlike the other research participants, Louise's first post-graduate job was not in higher education but in public relations. Because of the minimal salary, her father arranged for her to live with an aunt. After a few months, Louise would shift to another public relations position and her father again would arrange for another living arrangement with an older African American woman who was part of his extended network of friends. Both times when Louise secured employment in new cities, her father was able to rely on a network of othermothers to secure safe and financially feasible housing for his daughter. It was an othermother who taught Louise how to drive and encouraged her to enjoy the world around her. Louise benefited from ongoing othermothering relationships early in her career. These othermothers instilled in Louise independence and encouraged her to make more of her own life choices.

For these women, othermothering was a significant part of their formative years and continued through the early years of their professional careers. The commitment to the practice of othermothering is based in part on how those experiences shaped and supported these women during these formative years. Without knowing it at the time, the college years were pivotal moments for the participants in shaping their careers in higher education administration. These career plans were heavily influenced by their experiences with African American staff and

faculty specifically who used othermothering practices when engaging with the participants in and out of the classroom.

As they began to navigate their careers in higher education, for most of the participants, they found similarities in the ways they engaged with their students of color and more specifically, African American students. Concurrently, they are mindful how their identities of being female and African American impacted the ways in which their work is done and perceived by others. The ways in which they work with students, who share their identities, is also informed by higher education best practices.

Traditional higher education best practices tend to take a more prescribed advising approach when engaging with students. This approach to advising models is a one-way engagement where the advisor, as the subject matter specialist, dispenses course and curricula information to students (Grites & Gordon, 2000). This model, known for its efficiency, does not fit the needs of diverse students or encourage relationship-building between academic advisors and students (Lee, 2018). A prescribed advising model could increase African American and diverse students' feelings of isolation and not being heard by their advisors at their PWIs.

Othermothers who work in student services roles take a more holistic approach when meeting with and advising African American students. Othermothers at PWIs begin at building a relationship of care and trust with students. African American women practicing othermothering acknowledge the time and effort required to build a relationship of trust and care with students (Lee, 2018). In partnership with their African American students, othermothers engage in a more developmental approach when advising students. This developmental approach takes into consideration the student's articulated views on campus climate, course selections, student activities, career plans, and personal development. An advising format informed by

othermothering practices acknowledges a student's personal story while assisting the student's successful transition to college life, participation in the campus activities, and persistence to graduation. As an example of this, Louise shared an experience of advising and supporting graduate students:

> They were definitely my first-year kids, they were checking in throughout their first year a lot. You know, I was checking in with them to see how they were doing. And then, you know, as they progressed through the program, they still did their part to make sure they were staying connected, and I was looking out for them. I think the othermothering aspects were there. Later, even though they weren't necessarily coming to me for everything, and for all things, there was definitely an active effort to keep in touch.

This experience shared by Louise illustrates the intentional relationships she created over time with the graduate students on campus. As these students progressed through their graduate program, requiring less checking-in, there was an ongoing effort to maintain the relationship. Louise acknowledged the use of othermothering to connect with students to build a relationship that lasted throughout their period of enrollment. The students' active effort to keep in touch with Louise could be considered evidence of their respect for her and the othermothering they received while on campus.

The professional career of Marie took her from the Midwest, to the South and eventually to the West Coast, where she currently resides with her family. Her career includes working at mostly private universities, with undergraduate and graduate students, in variety of student engagement roles. In a very visible role at a PWI, Marie speaks to navigating her relationships with students who sought her out for othermothering by renaming it mentoring. She stated, "once

the students come to campus, I'm successful when they successfully integrate themselves into the university and graduate."

As stated previously, Marie preferred not to use the phrase othermothering to describe her interactions with students on campus. Marie was more comfortable with describing these mentoring relationships as fictive kin. Marie shared:

> And students love to come by the office, and we love students to come. So, you know, it was a time where there were not a lot of African American faculty or staff. We all knew each other so students, underrepresented students definitely found us and found a way to our offices, which was totally cool with me for them to come and hang out, again, I'm really comfortable with that as well. And these students were not necessarily the ones who found themselves in academic challenge.

What was apparent from this statement was the students' desire and comfort to frequent Marie's office regardless of her role and responsibilities for that specific student. Even if the students were not seeking the services of that specific office, the students sought out same race staff to connect with as a way to create a connection and build community on a predominantly White campus. While the students might not have had the awareness or the vocabulary to label this type of engagement as othermothering, they, like the research participants, probably had previous experience with the practice from their community. The students came to campus seeking out African American faculty and staff to build a community similar to the ones they just left. As evidenced by Marie's previous statement, students at PWIs are aware that there are a limited number of African American faculty and staff on campus. With a limited number of African Americans at their PWI, the students, faculty, and staff all knew or were familiar with

each other. Students intentionally sought out this small population of African American faculty and staff to create a community or village of support on a campus where they were underrepresented. It is not unreasonable to assume that when African American students transition to college-life, they have the expectation of and actively seek out othermothering as part of this campus community of support.

Marie's ongoing commitment to students is evidenced by her willingness, at this stage in her career as assistant dean, to participate in individual student appointments. She continues by saying, "I give people my name. I give people my business cards. I still make those connections and keep people around a while." When asked to explain why making these connections were important to her, Marie added, "to make connections with community, you have to be where the community is, and I don't see admissions as just an administrative task." Mae started her career interested in leadership development, student engagement, and diversity and inclusion. Her interest in working with Black students was influenced by her undergraduate experience being involved in the Black Student Union. When discussing what she enjoyed about some of her first few roles in higher education, she stated, "the students remind me a lot of myself." As her career developed, Mae began to reconsider her career path, stating:

> I began to think more broadly about the impact and about impacting students, not just students of color, but also White students who may not have interacted with a person of color that's in a position of power.

With that in mind, Mae sought career opportunities that aligned with her personal mission and vision. As she stated, "I did not want to work at a school that wasn't mission-driven." Mae wanted to work at an institution that shared her commitment to inclusion, equity, and diversity to support student leadership development. It was during a student leadership retreat at her home

that Mae understood the importance of working for an institution with a mission that closely aligns to your personal mission.

To provide a different setting for the student leadership group in which Mae served as a campus adviser, she hosted the team at her home for a retreat. At the close of the event, an African American woman shared her appreciation and experience of being welcomed into Mae's home. Mae surmises that in that moment the student was speaking for herself and on behalf of her fellow students of diverse racial backgrounds. They appreciated the opportunity to experience African American family life in a way not commonly shared in society. The young African American woman would further express an appreciation of having an example of a professional working African American woman in her life.

Mae clearly saw that what she was doing with her African American students was similar to the experiences she had with African American staff and faculty while she was a student on her PWI campus. The tradition of engaging with African American students through othermothering was coming through in the ways Mae was working with all of her students regardless of race. When asked to reflect on her work with students of color and how it fits in her personal mission, Mae said:

> You can affect change in a bunch of ways. I could absolutely still work with students of color, still be a part of Black student groups, and also, be in a role where I hope to represent, be a source of support for those who do not have any other, you know, Black folks to look to as a source of support.

Mae's reflection illustrates the ways her experiences with othermothering and her identities inform how she approaches her work in higher education. With a commitment to support and work with Black students, Mae understands how her presence also informs the ways other

students perceive her as a higher education professional and a campus leader. Mae's commitment to her students is evidenced by her going "above the call of duty".

Interview Theme #3. Research Participants' Awareness of How Their Identities Impact Their Professional Development at a PWI

With a significant number of years working in higher education, the research participants currently hold positions such as director to associate dean at community colleges and undergraduate and graduate programs at public and private universities. Regardless of the title of their positions, the women in this study continue to find ways to engage with students in profound and intentional ways. They value ongoing student engagement as a way to live out their commitment to students with whom they share a similar identity and history. Anne explains why it is important to her to maintain a connection with students:

> When you are out of that role when you are dealing with the day-to-day you lose sight of the focus and what's best for students versus what's best for my own philosophy of personal belief. And so that's where the students end up being at a disadvantage situation. I love to be able to stay connected.

This commitment to remain connected with students throughout their enrollment is an embedded characteristic of othermothering. Othermothers' do not consider their work with students tied to a specific period of time. Othermothers commitment to their students is based on how long the student feels the need for that othermothering relationship. Othermothers are known to make themselves available to their students throughout their enrollment in college. The purposeful intention by othermothers to remain connected with their students, as shared by Anne, illustrates the value and importance that othermothers placed on their relationship with students.

The commitment expressed by Anne to her students expands upon the idea of "going beyond the call of duty."

For Anne, as her career in higher education is advancing, she is actively finding ways to maintain an intentional relationship with students. Anne speaks to the challenges often faced by African American women in higher education when their role on campus reduces their accessibility to students. While these African American women seek to advance their career in higher education, they acknowledge that these new roles move them away from direct student engagement. As Anne shared above, when you are no longer in roles that keep you connected to students, you also lose direct knowledge of what is important to students. African American students enrolled at PWIs, in their attempt to identify and connect with African American women as othermothers, could be disadvantaged because of limited accessibility to African American women in student serving and professional roles. African American women in higher education understand the importance of creating community on campus, especially at PWIs, through staff being accessible and available to students (Palmer & Gasman, 2008).

This commitment to stay connected with students is also shared by Louise:

> You know, I pass students in the hall, and they know 'I can talk to you' and that makes me feel like, beyond just admitting students, I really do want to be part of their overall experience while they are at my school.

Louise's comments illustrate the ways in which African American women in higher education are committed to maintaining an ongoing relationship with the students on their campuses. If the students on her campus needed to speak with her, Louise would make herself available to them for a talk. Even though the initial connection between Louise and her students was through the admissions process, she was committed to extending the relationship throughout the student's

enrollment. Louise recruited and enrolled the student in her program and felt a sense of obligation and responsibility to the student in their academic success, personal development, and professional success. A way in which Louise stays connected to students is to be present at student-led events. Louise shared, “I pay particular attention to the Black student professional society. I’ve tried to be very front-facing and try to support their activities.”

As an extension of supporting students individually, othermothers are often times involved with their students through campus-based affinity groups. This support by othermothers is either through advising student groups or attending their programs. Students who involve themselves in affinity-based student groups are looking to connect and build community with other students that they share one or more identities. Students are looking to involve themselves with campus groups that affirm their identities and/or to engage in activities that address social justice issues. At a PWI, involvement in these types of student groups could be essential to a student’s acclimation to campus and academic success. Othermothers’ involvement in campus-based student groups acknowledges how, as college students, they also benefited from involving themselves in similar focused campus groups.

The women in this research expressed how their journey to these roles required them to make intentional and strategic career moves to advance professionally. While we acknowledge their professional successes, their journeys to these roles were not always smooth. The women shared stories about the professional challenges they faced in the workplace that they attribute to gendered and racial microaggressions in the workplace (Young, 2021). African American women described stories where race, gender, or both were used to question their competence and talents (Miller and Vaughn, 1997) to be successful in their campus role. The use of gender and race based microaggressions are used to ‘other’ or marginalize the presence and work of African

American women as they carry out their professional responsibilities. In a study by Miles (2012) regarding the lived experience of Black women student life administrators, the respondents shared feelings of being negatively impacted by gender and racial stereotypes. The sexism and racism experienced concurrently by African American women is the intersectionality that dominates Black Feminist Theory (Collins, 2000).

In research by Young (2021), the use of biased language in higher education for the purpose of devaluing a person and their work is referred to as hierarchical microaggressive intersectionalities (HMI). The meaning of the term HMI is as follow: (a) hierarchical refers to the importance of one's position in the overall institution, (b) microaggressive refers to the ways one experiences these types of interactions, and (c) intersectionalities acknowledge that more than one of the identities of African American women is impacted by the microaggressions. The use of Young's HMI aligns with the ways in which the African American women in this research describe their experiences with campus-based microaggressions.

In addition to impacting their work environment, HMI also impacts the ability of marginalized women to advance their career. The use of HMI as a way to study workplace microaggressions has evolved to identify three specific ways it disadvantages African American women: (a) deprofessionalization, (b) racial and or gender fatigue, and (c) invisibility (Hollings, 2019). The term deprofessionalization refers to how the work of African American women is viewed in the workplace or the how they are asked, more than their White colleagues, to mentor students and or serve as sponsors of student-led campus organizations. Microaggressions based in deprofessionalization are directed towards African American women who incorporate the practice of othermothering in their work with African American students. The lack of awareness of the cultural tradition of othermothering, that practitioners are African American women, and

that African American students benefit from the practice, results in African American women and their work being negatively referred to using deprofessionalizing microaggressions.

African American women in higher education express feelings of mental and physical exhaustion or fatigue as a result of experiencing microaggressions in the workplace and or having to hide their feelings of hurt and annoyance from their peers and colleagues to avoid reinforcing racial and gender-based stereotypes (Young, 2021). To avoid reinforcing negative stereotypes, African American women are challenged by how to address workplace microaggression. The research by Young expands upon earlier research conducted by Smith (2004) that refers to the physical and mental stresses related to microaggressions experienced by African American women as racial battle fatigue.

Research by (Lewis et al., 2016) defines invisibility as "feeling ignored and marginalized by peers" (p. 770). African American women experiencing feelings of invisibility leads to their work and their contributions not being validated by their peers or supervisors. For African American women to advance their career in higher education invisibility negatively impacts their career development. In the research by Sue (2007), invisibility also describes the unwillingness of the perpetrator to see or acknowledge their microaggression.

In the data for this study, there are examples from more than one of the women that illustrate their experiences with deprofessionalization, racial and or gender fatigue, and invisibility. Anne discussed her experience of working at an organization that did not align with her personal values. While working at a college preparatory school, Anne noticed the heavy focus on applying to only Ivy League colleges. To expand the college options for students at the school, she added posters and materials from HBCUs and state public and private universities. The principal of the school was not supportive of Anne's work of highlighting other college and

university options for the students. Anne shared, “and so, I said, ‘I gotta go.’ So, I knew that this was not going to work.” The response to Anne’s work by her supervisor illustrates deprofessionalization because of the assessment of her work and the fatigue that Anne felt in addressing the issue with her supervisor. The disregard for providing students with a full slate of college options Anne felt sent an inappropriate message to students. Anne felt the message carried racial and class overtones by devaluing Minority Serving Institutions and public universities.

Marie shared how she passed on a position at a large public university in the Midwest because of the director’s stated vision for the office. She shared:

> The director was very forward and saying that he did not want my office or the program to become kind of a hangout place for underrepresented students.

The ability to mentor students was important to Marie. She also acknowledged that, “students tend to gravitate where it is friendly.” To create a space for students who shared a similar racial identity or life story was important to Marie. When talking about the offered position, she added:

> That’s not anything I would want to do. So, I didn’t pursue that position. But I thought it was very interesting that a manager, White manager, would make it so clear the vision he had does not include being a safe space, even in the ’80s.

When speaking on the progression of their careers, the women expressed how their experiences in the workplace could not be separated from their identities. The women discussed their awareness of how African American women are perceived in the workplace and how it impacts how they lead and manage. A few of the participants spoke about the importance of their

being in their roles to affirm and represent a different idea of African American women in leadership roles and how they lead. The women in this research described their leadership style as one that encompasses inclusivity, builds consensus, and creates an atmosphere of collaboration (Jean-Marie, et al., 2009). Their leadership styles are very much informed by their identities as African American women. The women avoided replicating leadership styles that did not align with their identities. African American women in leadership roles are attempting to avoid replicating forms of leadership styles that hinder the professional development and advancement of staff that do not hold membership in the dominant culture. When speaking on the importance of representation in higher education, Mae said:

> To be in a role where I hope to represent, be a source of support for students in that major, in that school who don't have any other Black folks to look to for sources of support.

After a few years into her current role as a supervisor, Gloria reflected on how her identities informed how she leads her team:

> I think I've started to allow it, my identities to kind of take more of a forefront on how I lead. I would say in the last couple of years. At first, I didn't really address it unless it felt salient in the moment, but our team was always pretty diverse in terms of racial diversity, gender diversity.

When reflecting on her identities in the workplace, Gloria offered up this idea:

> of Black folks who, really feel strongly about identity and bringing our experiences, our practice into how we welcome students into our space. Right on, the othermothering is there.

Anne discussed the challenges she faced with her staff when starting her current role. In weekly meetings, the team "challenged me on everything." One of the areas of contention for the staff was their weekly work schedule. Prior to Anne being hired to lead the office of college recruiters, the staff was used to working a more informal work schedule that included a limited number of hours in the office or doing the actual work. In her new role, Anne was tasked with moving the team from an informal work schedule that lacked accountability to a schedule that included working full-time hours with demonstrated outcomes.

Taking a firm stance on a questioned office policy, a few members of Anne's team, who were White, reported her actions to the Office of Human Resources. The team that reported to Anne attempted to paint a picture of her as the 'angry Black woman.' Anne shared how she felt that the claims made against her were based on gender and racist stereotypes specifically attributed to African American women. Anne shared that her attempt to change a long-held office tradition of leaving work early after a recruitment event did not sit well with the staff. Anne felt that that the accusations made against her were automatically considered valid and she was never allowed to address the claims made against her. Even though the accusations against Anne ultimately resulted in no actions taken against her, it did alter the ways she engaged with colleagues individually and how she led her team. In response to the race and gender-based claims laid against Anne, she also adjusted the ways she communicated information to her supervisor, "I share these conversations with my bosses. I'm overly hyper now because this is what happens when these microaggressions happen to you."

She continued:

> So being in a leadership role when you are supervising predominantly White individuals, you always feel like you are on guard. You can't be

> too upset. You can't be too emotional. You can't be too excited because somehow, some way, they will always misconstrue that as where you take that label as being that angry Black woman.

As mentioned by Anne, her leadership style in the workplace is informed by her identities of being an African American woman. To avoid presenting stereotypes that negatively impact her leadership, Anne is mindful of how she engages with and manages her predominantly White staff. Stereotypes and microaggressions persist in higher education and impact African American women's ability to advance their careers and be seen as leaders within institutions.

Currently, Louise reports to a dean who is also an African American woman. Early in this new working relationship, Louise had an encounter with the dean that defines the experience of many African American women in the workplace.

Louise was told by her dean:

> She was like, put your face to the side. I don't need you to have your mask on. She referred to it as a mask. She was like, I don't need you to have your mask on.

What Louise's dean was describing by the use of the term 'mask' is a theme that appears in a poem "We Wear the Mask" by Paul Laurence Dunbar (1913). The poem states,

> We wear the mask that grins and lies,
> It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,—
> This debt we pay to human guile;
> With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
> And mouth with myriad subtleties.

Dunbar's poem was written to illustrate the lives of African Americans after the Civil War. The poem sought to bringing attention to the ways former enslaved people were coping after enduring the pain, suffering and trauma of slavery by masking their true feelings as content and happy. The mask worn by newly freed African Americans was used through the ongoing quest for racial equality while experiencing racial violence (Durr, 2016) that occurred post slavery and one could argue through today. The poem also addresses the harm and stress that comes along with masking one's true feelings because of the inability to comfortably share a true response to a negative situation.

Many African American women are challenged by the inability to be their authentic selves in the workplace. In attempts to be authentic there are concerns that their actions will be met with retaliation, rejection, loss and marginalization or isolation (Abrams, et al., 2018). As shared earlier, some African American women are also challenged by the appropriate way to respond to microaggressions so as not to affirm stereotypes. Self-silencing is related to masking in such a way that one is hiding, not sharing their true feelings, emotions, and response to a particular situation. Even in Dunbar's poem there is an acknowledgement that the mask used to provide "respectability, deference, and agreeability" does not protect the wearer from "humiliation, pain, and anger" (Durr, 2016, p. 152).

The Dean's invocation to Louise to remove her mask created a space for both women to bring their authentic selves into their shared space and not adhere to the dominant culture's social expectations (Dickens & Womack, 2020). African American women who work in higher education, specifically in student services roles, are familiar with donning the mask as a way to navigate an educational institution with origins predicated on White ideas and traditions. Through this exchange, Louise felt the Dean was creating an opportunity for both women to

remove their masks and be themselves in the privacy of her office for the duration of their meeting. At the conclusion of the meeting, both women would leave the protective space of the Dean's office, put their masks back on and venture back into campus.

The masking story told by Louise shares similarities with comments Anne articulated about the challenges of being authentic in the workplace. Anne shared,

> How we have to survive in these types of environments, and so, it has helped me, first of all, not to denounce, if you will, my Blackness. Yes, because I feel like it's one of those things where I do not have to turn off that Blackness.

The privilege of being authentic in the workplace is exampled in the ways African American women choose to speak, dress, wear their hair, and engage with peers in the workplace that speaks to their true being. African American women in leadership roles who are able to bring their authentic selves into the workplace have shown themselves to be effective in their roles and job satisfaction (Dickens & Womack, 2020). Anne described the predicament of leaders at PWIs when attempting to be their authentic selves:

> You know, I wore a relaxer in my hair so long because I thought my hair needed to be straight. So, I know that there's a different culture within corporate and higher education, but it was still my belief that nobody wanted somebody with a curly natural coming in. Leading, so that's even heightened itself, where I am a very proud Black woman. That I can wear my hair natural, I'm still the same leader that I am, and I'm not going to allow you to use my Blackness to undermine that.

Anne shared that the ways she dressed for work is a topic of conversation and judgment by her peers:

> You know when I go to work every day, I'm dressed professional every day. So that was a thing. When I first started working there, I wear heels, I wear suits. And they would say "well Anne, you know, you don't have to dress up every day, you know, we're very casual here. Thank you. But this is how I dresses every day. Don't tell me how to dress. Y'all do you, I'm going to do me. It's amazing how, you know, they'll say, "Oh my God, you always look so sharp." I don't need you to affirm that it's okay that I'm dressed. It's again it's those microaggressions that you're just kind of like smile at them and say "wow".

Comments directed to women regarding their form of dress, especially in the workplace, can be benign at times, but there are times when these comments are coming from a different motivation. In an attempt to not view all comments made about hair and clothing as negative, African American women will make the determination based upon their relationship with the person making the comment. In office settings where African American women experience support of their identity and acknowledgement of their contribution to the institution, comments about their hair and clothing are appreciated, benign and there is no negative impact for the women. When the environment is not supportive, comments made in reference to African American women's hair and clothing is carefully considered as suspect.

Women in the workplace must navigate the intention of comments directed to them regarding their hair and clothing. Women are oftentimes the recipients of comments made about hair and clothing compared to their White female and male colleagues. These comments are

often made as a form of gender-based harassment. When gender-based harassment occurs in the workplace, there are resources to address these issues, but many women decide to find ways to cope with the harassment. These coping mechanisms are created to limit the impact of the harassment on their careers. Dickens et al (2021) raise awareness of the concept of identity shifting strategies as a form of coping mechanism used by African American women in the workplace. The use of identity shifting includes "modifying a person's appearance, language and mannerism in an effort to neutralize the culturally-based assumptions associated with their gendered racial identity groups" (Dickens, et al., 2021, pg. 154)

For African American women, when gender-based comments are being made about their hair and clothing, there are underlying messages being expressed as well. For African American women these comments, in addition to being gender-based, oftentimes include a racial connotation as well. These racialized gendered statements or microaggressions do harm to African American women in the workplace. The message being sent about how they wear their hair or dress is that it does not fit within the dominant culture's idea of being professional. In addition to creating workplace stress for African American women, these types of comments are indicators of barriers to their professional development and career advancement (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003).

In the example shared by Anne, even though she dressed professionally every day for work, her wardrobe was open to commentary by some of her White colleagues. This is an example of being in a no-win situation for African American women in the workplace. In an attempt to adhere to dominant culture norms by dressing professionally, there was an opportunity for commentary. The commentary was not expressed in support of her professionalism but more of bringing attention to Anne's outsider status, that she does not fit in to dominant culture dress

codes. If African American women wore casual attire to the workplace, that could open the door to criticism over the lack of professionalism, their inability to fit-in, or questions whether they can financially afford professional clothing. These stories shared by Anne illustrate the BFT concept of the "outsider within" status discussed by Collins (1986) in which, as an African American woman, she is invited to have a role in the dominant culture's space but remains an outsider. The lack of belonging in spaces controlled by the dominant culture exists because of the lack of shared cultural fit with the experiences of African American women (Howard-Hamilton, 2003).

African American women are faced with these racialized gendered microaggressions in the workplace that undermine their ability to lead and manage their teams. To cope with the negative behaviors she was experiencing on campus, Anne said her response is to smile and acknowledge the comment or incident with an internalized "wow." Anne shared experiences that illustrate that the negative behaviors from her colleagues were either directed to her personally (clothes, hair, personality, etc.) or the way she carried out her duties as manager of a predominately White team.

African American women familiar with these direct or indirect slights by their colleagues utilize a number of mechanisms to address campus microaggressions. In addition to standing/speaking up for oneself to address the microaggression, many African American women participate in campus-based affinity groups and mentoring programs and rely on the support of family and friends (Shorter-Gooden, 2004).

As the research on African American women working at PWIs continues to evolve, workplace microaggression based upon gender and race needs to be a part of the conversation to create supportive and healthy work environments. If PWIs want to maintain and increase the

number of African American women working on their campuses, they need to focus on identifying and addressing workplace microaggressions. The feelings experienced by many African American women when they are the only one in an office includes loneliness and isolation (Warren-Gordon & Mayes, 2017). The coping mechanisms used by African American women to address workplace microaggressions cannot be the only solution to the problem if universities want to be an inclusive campus. The research that focuses on the resilience of African American women as a way to respond to workplace microaggressions (Chance, 2021) feeds into the strong black Woman concept and releases the aggressor from changing their behavior.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

Discussion of Research Questions and Findings

The research questions set forth for this study focus on the practice of othermothering in the lives of African American women. Through the use of narrative inquiry, the researcher sought detailed stories of othermothering in the lives of the research participants. The use of narrative inquiry allows for the telling of stories to inform and educate (Amoah, 1997). Storytelling is deeply connected to African American culture as a way to share traditions and wisdom.

The interview questions asked of the participants were seeking a deeper understanding of the presence of the tradition in their formative years, how othermothering has been used in their professional lives, and the effect of using othermothering in personal lives. As an ongoing tradition practiced by African American women, this research focused specifically on mid-career women who work in non-faculty roles at PWIs.

Research Question 1: Othermothering Experiences in Their Lives

The data from the interviews showed that all of the women had varying experiences with othermothering through relationships with women from their immediate families, in their communities and in classrooms. In a typical example, Marie spoke of the women in her extended family that became ever more present because of the death of her father. Being the only girl with four brothers, she credits her close relationship with her paternal grandmother for her love of literature and poetry. She also referenced the legacy of her paternal grandmother, who died when she was very young, but attended an HBCU and majored in English. In speaking of the impact of these women on preparing her for college, Marie said:

> And so, I really think my interest in literature and English was really nurtured by the one grandmother, who was in DC, but maybe it was innate that I was going to be interested in that because of my paternal grandmother.

These experiences were either formally arranged by a parent or naturally occurring because of the close proximity of the othermother. Othermothers were never seen as replacements to their moms but an extension of the mothering that was of benefit to the participants during pivotal times in their lives.

During her teen years, Louise, who was being raised by her father, spoke of the intentional approaches he took to guide her during those formative and stressful years. She shared, "but to daddy's credit, he looked around our community beyond just his mother and his grandmother." Louise's father relied on the village of non-blood family members in the raising and mentoring of his daughters. Her father was intentional with identifying women to be a part of their village. Equally important with these informal engagements was the willingness of these women to provide this type of support to a single father raising two young girls. Louise spoke in-depth of these othermothers who her father sought out and brought into her life to share wisdom and important life skills such as sewing and cooking from Mrs. Francis and Mrs. Green, respectively.

Othermothering relationships provided a network of care by women in the community who aided in their care, confidence building, and providing life lessons to children which reduce the stress on mother and daughter relationships. Rosalie Troester (1984) similarly describes this purposeful approach to othermothering as creating a barrier around young women to keep the dangers of the real world away until they are ready to face these challenges as adult women. An important aspect of these othermothering relationships was the names given to othermothers by

the research participants. The research participants addressed the women with formal titles such as Ms. or Mrs., and never by their first names. While the othermothers in their lives were not their mothers, they were shown respect similar to their birth mothers.

The participants shared stories of their othermothers they encountered in their classrooms, the neighborhood and through participation in community-based organizations. The research participants spoke of primary to high school teachers that were influential in their lives. These othermothers set expectations, like attending college, advising on academic majors and providing insight to the college experience to aid in their successful transition to college. As the participants furthered their formal education by attending university, new othermothers came into their lives. In research conducted by Strayhorn (2014) on othermothering at HBCUs, the relationships formed by women (and men) are more than formal and informal mentoring relationships. These campus othermothers provided students will real life examples of being a professional African American woman (Patitu & Hinton, 2003). As Anne shared, her high school English teacher was integral in her applying to college and selecting a major. The formal and informal relationship with her high school English teacher contributed to Anne's academic success and long-term interest in English literature. When speaking of her high school English teacher, Anne shared,

> Mrs. Smither was the honors English teacher who was phenomenal,
> I became an English major because of her. She was my complexion
> and she was a scholar.

While the care and nurturing by the othermothers remained constant in the lives of the participants, the teen years saw a shift in the focus of the relationships. As teenagers, the

participants benefited from othermothers who contributed to their ability to transition to college life.

The experiences with othermothering that the participants spoke of came at a time of pivotal or immense change in their lives. The participants acknowledge the contribution to their academic and professional lives by the othermothers who stepped into their lives when it was needed. The othermothers' involvement in the care and support of the participants during critical moments in their lives, created a space for positive mother/father and daughter relationships. The othermother relationships described by the participants reinforce earlier research on the importance of the tradition because of the ways it benefits the young people in the community. The community aspect of othermothering reinforces the village pedagogy ideology.

Research Question 2: Othermothering and the Effect on Their Professional Lives

In addition to serving as a resource for making college enrollment decisions, selecting an academic major, and engaging in campus activities, a number of the othermothers provided real-life examples of being a professional African American woman. Mae shared the influence of her residential hall director at the PWI she attended on her interest in campus leadership roles:

> When I first moved in as a freshman there was a Black woman named Francis, she was just an amazing mentor supervisor. Just someone like this was one of the very first in a leadership role that I saw. I think that also gave me the permission to join and to be in those leadership roles, you know. Obviously, I had already been involved person, involved student but you know seeing her, and that leadership role was like, okay, I can do this. And she was warm and welcoming.

In the various positions in higher education that Mae has had, they all include student leadership development as part of the stated job responsibility.

Gloria also pursued a career in higher education from her previous campus involvement. Similar to other participants, she shared:

> I was like, why it never occurred to me that student affairs *was* a thing
>
> when I was so heavily involved in Black student affairs when I was in college.
>
> Why did it never even occur to me that that's a profession?

For all of the women in this research, working in higher education was not a career they considered when they entered college. It was through their involvement in campus activities and student support services, positions traditionally held by mostly women, some of them African American, that the participants in this study decided to pursue a career in higher education and a graduate degree in the appropriate area of study. The research participants' involvement in student and campus activities created an environment where they directly engaged with African American women who oftentimes lead these specific offices. It could also be argued that the research participants engaged in student activities because of the presence of African American women in those offices. The opportunity for African American students to build community at PWIs relies on them connecting with African American staff. If African American staff at PWIs are based in student affairs and campus activities offices, African American students will avail themselves of those resources.

There is some evidence that the values and attributes that imbue the profession of student affairs are also inherent in the qualities of othermothering. As shared previously, four of the five women received graduate degrees in higher education administration and the other completed post-graduate course work. The career paths of these women allowed them to skillfully

incorporate their academic knowledge and a cultural tradition to benefit African Americans students.

In their current roles in higher education, most of the participants welcome the opportunity to engage in othermothering relationships with their students. In their roles, othermothering practices are coupled with higher education best practices to serve the unique needs of African American students. The participants acknowledged benefiting from othermothering relationships throughout their lives and welcomed the opportunity to continue the tradition in their professional roles. The cyclical nature of othermothering is ever present in the lives of these women.

African American women in leadership roles at PWIs are also sought out by students to build community based upon shared identities. One unique example is Marie, who intentionally refrained from traditional othermothering relationships with her students because of how she views her role as a mother to her own children. As shared earlier, Marie attempted to engage with students in a way that did not conflict with her views on mothering but aligned with her interest in mentoring. While this was Marie's intention with students, it was not accepted by the students. Students continue to seek out Marie for othermothering relationships, but she states, "I like training, I like supporting, I like nurturing people." Even though Marie viewed her efforts as something different from othermothering, her preference to support and nurture students are characteristics that align with the practice of othermothering.

In a more typical fashion, Gloria and Mae shared stories of students seeking them out because of their shared identities at PWIs. Through a casual conversation with a student, Gloria shared how a mundane conversation could lead to a connection with a student:

> It's like, oh, you do get something about my life, even though we went

> to high school at different times. You, get something about me, because you know where I'm from.

Mae shared a recent experience while leading a virtual orientation session with graduate students. Through the Zoom chat a student messaged her about meeting "I just enjoyed your spirit and just wanted to get to know you and share more about myself so that we could just build a relationship."

The women in this study, understanding the ways othermothering supports students' academic and psycho-social needs, welcome the opportunity to participate in the historical tradition (Patitu & Hinton. 2003). While othermothering is not a common practice at PWIs, these women see the value of the practice to support student academic success. At PWI campuses, where there tends to be a small number of African American faculty and staff, the ability to build community through a practice such as othermothering is integral to students feeling welcomed on campus, motivated to participate in student activities, and persisting to graduation.

Research Question 3: Othermothering and the Effect in Their Personal Lives

The women who participated in this research shared stories that illustrate how the practice of othermothering, as way to engage and connect with students, also affects them on a personal level. The research findings include experiencing feelings of isolation or being the "only one," microaggressions and how to respond to them, and professional development. Similar to the feelings conveyed in the research by Taylor (2005) which focused on the pressures African American women face while working at PWIs "while also attempting to balance the demands of life outside of the professional domain" (p. 202), the participants understood that multiple roles, increased responsibilities, and more requests for their time would be a part of their professional duties.

A career in higher education at a PWI comes with an acknowledgement that there will be a limited number of African American women to connect with professionally, to create a support system with, and to build community. With a limited number of women to connect with on campus, African American women express feelings of isolation because of being excluded from informal networks, being looked over for involvement in campus-based opportunities, and lack of access to senior university administrators. The lack of involvement and access by African American women has the potential for them to feel different and unappreciated (Cook, 2013) in addition to limiting their career development. Over time, the lack of access to and attention by leadership can result in harm to one's ability to advance their career, decreased job satisfaction, and earned salary remaining flat.

Being isolated or marginalized by peers and leadership has the potential to render one invisible and bring into question how the work of African American women at PWIs contributes to the goals of the institution. Invisibility or nonrecognition "relates to the power and privilege of the person who does not see another" (Young, 2021, p. 83). Mae shared the responsibilities that come with being the only one in an office on a PWI campus:

> I know there's times where I don't want to be the only or have to represent, and times where I feel like okay, I will do this so later on, maybe someone, else does not have or, you know, because right now I have the energy.

With dual marginalized identities, African American women experience race and gender based microaggressions and bias concurrently in the workplace. As mentioned earlier, a microaggression is a slight that is communicated to negatively impact a person based on their identities (Young, 2021). When African American women are confronted with a

microaggression in the workplace, they are faced with the challenge of how to respond to the slight and or the person. A direct response must be artfully crafted and delivered to address the offending comment but must not cause harm to oneself personally and professionally. A study on microaggressions by (Smith et al., 2008) made reference to members of marginalized groups having ways to address macro and microaggressions that does not create additional harm for themselves in the workplace. African American women in this situation are known to employ the theory of self-silencing (Jack & Dill 1992) which is to not address the microaggression for fear of bringing attention to oneself and to not negatively impact working relationships. In addition, African American women might express self-silencing through reducing the perceived impact of their identities to align more closely to the dominant culture (Abrams et al., 2018). As discussed previously, the use of masking by African American women is also a form of self-silencing. Masking is used in an attempt to disengage from the microaggression by not showing one's true feeling or response to the act perpetuated upon them. Research by Okello et al. (2020) reframes the discussion of masking to include the idea that this process also represents the ways African Americans are surviving and thriving at PWIs.

The result of prolonged exposure to microaggressions in the workplace is what researchers have referred to as Racial Battle Fatigue (RBF). RBF presents itself in a number of ways including mental, emotional, and physical strain (Smith et al., 2021). Fatigue from workplace microaggressions can also be gender based. When coupled together, African American women are enduring a level of fatigue that impacts them both personally and professionally.

As shared previously, Anne spoke about her workplace experiences that she sees as microaggressions. Anne shared,

> I'm overly hyper now because this is what happens when you know these microaggressions happen to you, we're always on guard. Yes, so being in a leadership role, where you are supervising predominately White individuals, you always feel like you're on a guard.

The impact of experiencing workplace microaggressions, as conveyed by Anne does makes one diligent and attentive to one's responses to these events. Anne's response to these workplace events are similar to what is stated in the research on racial battle fatigue. One example is a coping mechanism used by Anne:

> You can't be too upset. You can't be too emotional. You can't be too excited because somehow, some way, they will always misconstrue that as a we're putting you in a position where you take that label as being that angry Black woman.

While a few of the participants in this study have successfully advanced their career in higher education at PWIs, African American women tend to populate entry to mid-level positions. With a visible presence in entry to mid-level student affairs roles at PWIs, African American women on these campuses are aware that African American students will seek them out based upon their shared racial identity and ease of accessibility. The same familiarity, comfort and support that othermothering afforded the participants while growing up and when away from home at college is desired by African American students who seek them out for othermothering relationships. To illustrate this aspect of significant student engagement, Gloria shared this story:

> I was talking to Mrs. Daniel all the time, and I was still involved in the freshman emerging leadership program, and I was partnered with the

> director of orientation, so we spent a lot of time together as well. And those three women got me through the end of college for sure.

Gloria was so appreciative of the attention and support that Mrs. Daniel, and other women, gave her that Gloria asked her, "how do I become you, how do I help someone, the way that you have helped me?" Mrs. Daniel was extremely impactful in Gloria's life, and Gloria wanted to have a career that supported and helped others. Gloria's first job after college was working with high school students, more than half of whom were undocumented, who were applying for college and federal financial aid. Most of the students were first in their families to pursue college and their families were working class. While the job was low paying and required long hours, Gloria enjoyed the work because it was making a difference in the lives of the high school students. Gloria's career continues to be informed by those othermothering experiences early in her life through her college years. Because of her relationship with the students she supports, Gloria can be found having long informal conversations with students to helping them navigate complex student services on campus.

Implications of the Findings for Higher Education

As the women of this study continue the practice of othermothering, the interview data feature stories by the participants on the ways they navigate their professional environments where there is a lack of awareness of othermothering by their colleagues at their PWIs and the impact on them personally. The stories shared by the women about their experiences with their colleagues illustrate a diminished view on the ways African Americans approach their work with same race students. To the unaware, in-depth student engagement, an aspect of othermothering, could be viewed as just a casual conversation with a student. Those unfamiliar with othermothering practices could view these student interactions by African American women as

informal conversations or gatherings and not work. In addition, at PWIs where there is a lack of familiarity with othermothering by African American women, their work could be viewed as lacking professionalism. While the conversations could be informal in nature and held consistently, the support provided by African American women in these campus roles is of great benefit for students. While these unplanned student meetings could result in delays on other projects, those familiar with othermothering are aware that most student interactions are of benefit for the student and could outweigh the disruption in the traditional work schedule. To complete required work, African American women will end up working longer hours because they willingly choose to spend the working day supporting students.

A few of the participants shared stories on the ways their identities, African American/Black and female, shaped how they were viewed as a leader or manager. The intersection of race and gender informs and shapes the practice of othermothering. Even though othermothering is considered a tradition practiced by African American women, the presence of intersecting identities becomes salient to those unfamiliar with othermothering. If the observer is not familiar with the practice of othermothering, a mislabeling of the student interaction or the practitioner's approach to the interaction could occur and result in negative performance evaluation or limited professional advancement. The inability to advance one's career has a long-term financial impact and the ability to create self-doubt in one's professional abilities. In research conducted by Patitu and Hinton (2003), race over gender was considered the more influential factor for African American women to advance their careers, but that does not negate or diminish the influence of sexism in career advancement and offered salary.

The aspect of othermothering that reinforces traditional gender norms has the potential to devalue the work of African American women. Observers not familiar with othermothering

might devalue the practice as just an extension of African American women's natural ability as mothers and caregivers and not higher education professionals taking a different approach to engaging with African American students. While care ethic is present in othermothering practices, it also shares elements found in student advising practices. The approach by African American women who practice othermothering at PWIs is referred to as being student-centered or "going above and beyond the call of duty" (Strayhorn, 2014, p. 123) to support African American students. Campus colleagues not familiar with the practice of othermothering by their African American colleagues focus on the informal nature of the student engagement and reduce the practice as an extension of the natural abilities of African American women.

The data from this research also supports previous research on how African American women, who work in PWIs, contend with pressures of the profession in their personal lives (Taylor, 2005). When the work of African American women is incorrectly categorized by those unfamiliar with the practice of othermothering, it impacts how they and their work are viewed by their peers within the organization. Participants shared stories about having to endure workplace microaggressions to avoid reinforcing the stereotype of being the "angry Black woman." Louise shared a recent reaction to a meeting with peers when voicing her opinion:

> I've had to make sure it's clear that while I'm not getting riled up and I'm not getting excited and you're not seeing me scream and yell and, you know, become the angry Black woman, I do have a very strong opinion. I have a position.

Similarly, Anne said:

> As a confident Black woman with direct and very clear expectations and wanting accountability. It's always misconstrued as being aggressive and

> uncooperative. So, I've had to overcome a lot of obstacles to advocate for myself, and advocate for the support and resources.

These experiences shared by the women demonstrate the conscious efforts they employ almost on a daily basis to avoid the expectation of reinforcing racial and gender stereotypes in the workplace. African American women hold membership in two marginalized groups and experience feelings of isolation or being invisible at a PWI. Concurrently, African American women are underrepresented or lack a critical mass on their campuses. The lack of a critical mass, as defined by Henry and Glenn (2009), refers to the lack of sufficient numbers of a group in a defined space that results in their lack of involvement in a critical or substantial way. With a limited number of African American women on campuses, the opportunity to support and mentor each other is vital to their success. African American women are aware of the barriers and pitfalls that have the potential to delay or derail their professional careers.

Implications of the Findings for African American Women in Higher Education

The findings for this research highlights how othermothering was integral throughout the lives of the participants. Their shared stories illustrate the ways in which these relationships with othermothers while they were young shaped their personal and professional lives. The findings from this research illustrate an intentional approach to how they engage with students in their roles on campus based upon their previous experiences with the practice of othermothering. The findings from this research have the potential to affirm the ways African American women's utilization of the practice of othermothering comes from the cultural and historical tradition that they have benefited from and are now implementing in their own higher education practices.

The findings also show that African American women are also using higher education best practices, obtained through graduate programs or years of professional experiences, along

with othermothering practices when engaging with students. The findings also illustrate how students, perhaps as a result of being familiar with the practice of othermothering prior to attending college as undergraduates through graduate school, will seek opportunities for these types of experiences with African American women who are a part of their academic journey. What is apparent from this study is that representation on college campuses is also important. African American students at PWIs will identify staff members with whom they identify to build relationships that are welcoming and affirming, ultimately leading to their academic success.

African American women who work in higher education in positions that require significant student engagement see the value and the importance of incorporating othermothering in higher education best practices. The women in this study are aware of the positive impact of the practice on student academic success. While continuing the tradition of othermothering, these women are aware of how practicing othermothering has the potential to influence their professional development and personal lives. The women shared deeply felt stories that illustrated their experiences with othermothering while growing up and its impact during pivotal moments in their lives. The women acknowledge the benefit of historical tradition in their lives and when called up by African American students in their work as higher education professionals, will continue the practice.

African American women who practice othermothering at PWIs should do so being aware of how it could influence how their work is valued on campus and its ability to influence their professional development. Those unfamiliar with the ways African American women engage with similar-race students might infer biases that reinforce the “mammy” stereotype because of the nurturing nature of othermothering, while simultaneously applying the narrative of “angry Black woman” (Dickens & Womack, 2020).

There are ways to practice othermothering while minimizing any adverse effects on the personal lives and career development of those who practice it. It is important to share with colleagues the importance and value of othermothering practices to support the academic success and personal development of African American students or other minoritized students on campus. When speaking about othermothering with those unfamiliar with the practice at PWI campuses, it is important to provide a historical context and the significance of the practice. When discussing how African American students define student-centered faculty, Guiffrida (2005) anchors his research in the "long-held tradition of education within the African American community called othermothering."

As those unfamiliar with othermothering gain a deeper understanding of practice, its relevancy to higher education best practices becomes evident. The practice of othermothering has characteristics that are shared by higher education best practices such as ethics of care and mentoring to increase persistence (Tinto, 1993). The theme of care is present in the research of Fries-Britt and Griffin (2007) that focuses on successful students at PWIs. African American students in their study described how they experienced care from same race faculty that aided in their academic success. Similarly, in Tinto's research on student success "like-person role models" was important to students. For the women who incorporate othermothering with other student services practices, it benefits their professional development to document the ways they engage and support African American students. It is vitally important that othermothers document and show evidence of how the practice has facilitated students' academic success and personal development.

African American women in administrative roles at PWIs may lack a critical mass on campus which could lead to feelings of isolation and marginalization. When coupled with how

African American women engage and support students through othermothering practices, literature shows that these issues affect their professional lives in higher education (West, 2017). It is important for African American women at PWIs to connect with colleagues on campus to share their stories as a form of support. There are a number of ways African American women can build community on their campuses to provide support that speaks to their specific needs of working with dual-marginalized identities at PWIs.

To foster an environment of support, African American women should connect with colleagues through racial and/or gender-based affinity groups. Affinity group participation that supports the needs of African American women is an intentional approach to reducing the feelings of "outsider within" on campus. These campus-based affinity groups can provide support, celebrate accomplishments, provide a safe space to share counter-stories to reduce the impact of negative interactions in the workplace (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003), and work collectively to address workplace challenges (Warren-Gordon & Mayes, 2017). In addition, mentoring programs are able to support the specific needs of African American women, share knowledge of their experiences working on campus, and provide insight on how to utilize campus-based resources through a more focused engagement. Research conducted on mentoring shows a link to career advancement, increased job satisfaction and salary increases (Marina, 2016).

The findings from this research have the potential to educate leadership at PWIs on the ways African American women engage with African American students. African American women should be credited for the ways they contribute to creating a welcoming environment for students. At PWIs, African American students are generally faced with a small community of students who share their racial identity. Students with a desire to connect with same-race staff

will seek out these individuals on their campuses. Regardless of staff members' roles, students will seek them out to expand their campus community to create a network of support. Students are motivated to create a community of support that is similar to the community of othermothers that supported them from childhood through high school. African American students seek out African American women that are in campus leadership roles as a way to recreate the environments where othermothering was present in their lives.

These campus connections by African American students will add additional work hours to staff that are currently overworked, underpaid and overlooked by campus leadership. There is an opportunity for campus administrators to increase their awareness and knowledge of the ways African American women support African American students through the practice of othermothering. It is important that universities gain a greater awareness of the needs of all students but especially the minoritized students on their campus. Campus administrators need to gain awareness of these specific students' experiences because they will differ than students who are part of the majority population. African American students at PWIs face different challenges than majority students and campus leaders need to develop an awareness to these challenges that could negatively impact students' persistence and graduation rates. This is an opportunity for campus leaders at PWIs to engage in conversations with African American students regarding their campus experiences in and out of the classroom. These conversations between campus leaders and African American students on how they connect with resources and build community that supports their academic success will bring attention to the ways African American women connect with students through the practice of othermothering.

Campus leaders at PWIs should engage in conversations with African American women that incorporate othermothering practices with higher education practices to gain insight on how

they support and engage with students. Under the leadership and direction of African American women, there is an opportunity to educate administrators on the history of othermothering and amplify the ways it supports students' academic success and build campus community. The attention and support by campus leaders of the utilization of the cultural tradition of othermothering at PWIs has the potential to improve how the work of African American women is evaluated by campus colleagues. As the awareness of the practice of othermothering grows and is valued by campus leaders at PWIs, the work of African American women can be better accessed for appropriate financial compensation and evaluation of work performance.

There is an opportunity for campus administrators to acknowledge and support the cultural tradition of othermothering as practiced by African American women to engage with students that creates campus communities that affirm their identities. In addition, ongoing research on othermothering and the ways it supports students of color at PWIs and leads to their academic success should be referenced when speaking of other academic advising best practices taught in graduate-level higher education programs.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research sought to tell the stories of African American women who work in higher education that incorporate the practice of othermothering when engaging with students, specifically African American students. As a result of using the practice of othermothering, the research learned more about its effect on their professional development and personal lives. The study points to opportunities for future research that can bring attention to the work done by African American higher education professionals at PWIs.

Othermothering has historically described the ways African American women engaged with African American children and students. The women who engaged in the practice created a

familial environment to support the developmental needs of students (Griffin & Reddick, 2011). The data from this research and previous research on the topic of othermothering focus primarily on the experiences of African American women.

African American men may also be engaged with students in a manner that is similar to othermothering. More research on the experiences and practices of African American men would add more to our understanding of the practice of othermothering. African American men in student facing roles at PWIs, with a familiarity with fictive kin relationships and the concept of village pedagogy, may refer to the ways they engage and interact with students using those concepts. To better understand how African American women and men incorporate othermothering and fictive kin relationships within higher education, best practices to support the needs of African American students has the potential to advance research on ways to support student academic success and personal development. In addition, it could bring attention to the work that is being done by African American women who work in higher education.

More research in this area to better understand these practices may allow for broader application of the practice in higher education. Those observing African American women at PWIs engaging in the practice of othermothering and fictive kin relationships with same race students are able to also see the positive impact it has on students' academic success and psycho/social development. Research that continues to gain a deeper understanding of the ways othermothering supports student's success can continue to shape and inform higher education best practices. Lastly, it is important to conduct additional research on othermothering to differentiate the ways the practice is used with college-aged students as compared to younger students.

With an understanding of the intentionality of the relationship between African American women and their students, these engagements are not bound by a specific amount of time. These engagements between othermothers and their students could take time away from other duties and place demands on their personal lives (Griffin & Reddick, 2011). Additional research into how the practice impacts the personal and professional life of African American women could take the form of a longitudinal study. In comments shared by Louise, she refers to her ongoing relationships with students,

> I am still very close with some of them, and by close. I mean you know Facebook close; we keep in touch over LinkedIn or, check in if there's movement in their careers and they want to just make sure I have their most up to date information. I mean over the eight years, I probably have about 20 or 30 students that I am still super connected to.

The relationships that Louise created and fostered with her students shifted to a long-term relationship based upon that earlier connection. This type of long-term student engagements presents research opportunities regarding the impact of college-aged othermothering on career development. Future research opportunities could examine if othermothering during college years influences post-graduate career and professional outcomes. Even with the limited research that is available on othermothering, there is place and a need for the ongoing practice of othermothering by African American women at PWIs. African American women who practice othermothering are committed to the cultural tradition for its historical connection to racial uplift. It is important to bring attention to othermothering as a higher education best practice that aids in the academic success of African American students at PWIs while countering dominant culture narratives of African American women.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol and Questions

Research Question: How does the practice of othermothering by mid-career African American women, who work with African American students at Predominantly White Institutions, affect their professional careers and personal lives?

Before the Interview.

1. Thank them for participating in the research.
2. Explain my research focus.
3. Remind all research participants that their first and last names will be changed to protect their identities for the purpose of the research.
4. Remind all research participant that their interviews will be recorded.
5. Prior to interviews, will confirm their consent to record.
6. At the start of taping interviews, will ask participants to verbally provide consent for the recording.

Who will be interviewed?

For the proposed research, I interviewed five mid-career African American women, who work at Predominantly White Institutions, private and public. The women interviewed work in student services roles that require significant student engagement at the undergraduate or graduate school level. The research participants have professional positions within an academic department such as admissions, enrollment management, financial aid, academic advisor, career advisors, or student affairs roles.

What will you ask about in the interviews?

Biographical Information

1. Briefly tell me about your family and the community in which you were raised.
2. When making your college decision, did you seek advice from parents, family, high school counselors, teachers, or the community? Talk about those engagements.
3. Who did you seek out college advice from and why?
4. What is your family's history with attending college? If you were the first in your family to attend college, describe what that meant to you? Your family?

College Years

5. Tell me about your college experience.
6. How did campus life, both inside and outside of the classroom, affect your personal development?
7. Did you have a mentor(s) while in college? How did you identify your mentor? How would you describe the relationship you had with your mentor?

Professional Career

8. Tell me about your career path.
9. In what capacities do you currently work with college students?
10. Describe the relationship you have with students, specifically African American students as part of your work responsibilities.
11. How has your work with African American students shaped the development of your professional career?

12. In what ways have your peers or supervisors provided feedback to you with regards to your work with students, specifically African American students?
13. At any time, has your work with African American students had any bearing on your personal life?
14. When you hear the phrase othermother, what comes to mind? Would you describe the way you work with African American students as othermothering? Why or why not?
15. Has your PWI supported your work with African American students? If yes, how?
16. How can PWIs support the practice of othermothering? What might you suggest to the administration at your institution about this practice?
17. Is there anything that we did not discuss that you would like to add to our conversation?

Closing Remarks: At the End of Each Interview

1. Thank participants for their comments during the interviews.
2. If needed, speak with the participant about a follow-up conversation.
3. If participants have an emotional response to any of the interview questions, acknowledge their responses and talk through any concerns that they had with the research question or their response.

Appendix B: Adult Consent to Participate in Research

Othermothering by African American Women in Higher Education at Predominantly White Institutions: How the Practice Affects Their Professional and Personal Lives

Principle Investigator: Julie Collins, Ph.D. Candidate

Institution: DePaul University, Chicago, Illinois, USA

College: College of Education

Faculty Advisor: Professor R. Chennault, Ph.D. College of Education

Key Information:

What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose of the research is to learn more about othermothering as practiced by African American women, in non-faculty roles at Predominantly White Institutions and its effect on their professional and personal lives. This study is being conducted by Julie Collins, a graduate student at DePaul University, as a requirement to obtain her doctoral degree. This research is being supervised by her faculty advisor, Professor Ronald Chennault. For this research five women will be interviewed.

Why are you being asked to be in the research?

You are invited to participate in this study because you are a mid-career African American woman who work with in higher education, with students, at a Predominantly White Institution. The research seeks evidence of the practice of othermothering by African American women in their student engagement roles at this type of institution and the possible effect on the professional development and personal lives of those who incorporate othermothering practices

into existing higher education practices.

What is involved in being in the research study?

If you agree to participate in this study, the research involves sitting for three, 45-minute interviews about your experiences with othermothering. Any personal and professional identifiers will be removed from the data collection to protect your privacy. The interview questions will cover these categories:

- Biographical Information
- College Years
- Professional Career

For the biographical portion of the interview, it is important to learn the life stories of the individual research participants and how they might or might not influence their professional careers. The biographical questions will ask research participants about their families, communities, education, and college years. Interviewing is the only form of data collection to be used for this research study.

The proposed research does not include different experimental groups or utilize deception when engaging with research participants.

Each interview will be conducted using Zoom, an audio/video conferencing system. A Zoom recording saved to the cloud will automatically generate an interview transcript. The interview transcripts will go through a secondary manual review to ensure an accurate record of what the participants said during interviews.

Are there any risks involved in participating in this study?

Study participants might experience feelings of excitement, pride, and frustration during interviews as they talk about their personal and professional experiences as they relate to

othermothering. Study participants do not have to answer all questions and can stop the interview at any time. To protect the identities of study participants their names will be pseudonymized. To maintain the confidential identities of the selected study participants and their assigned pseudonyms, this information will be kept in a secure location different from the research data. In addition, the research will not use the actual names of their colleges, universities or current employers.

Are there any benefits to participating in this study?

While study participants will not personally benefit from being in this study, research hopes to raise awareness of the practice of othermothering by African American women at Predominantly White Institutions and its effect on their professional development and personal lives. The research findings could also inform higher education best practices for working with students of color at Predominantly White Institutions to achieve academic success.

How much time will this take?

This research study requires up to four months to complete. As the five participants were identified, the three-45-minute interviews were scheduled at a time that fits their professional and personal schedules. The interviews will be conducted via Zoom, a video conferencing platform. The review of participants' interview transcripts will take eight to ten hours, and a collective review of all data could take four to six weeks. It will take a month to write the findings.

Can you decide not to participate?

Your participation is voluntary, which means you can choose not to proceed. There will be no negative consequences, penalties, or loss of benefits if you decide not to participate or change your mind later and withdraw after the research process begins.

Who will see my study information and how will the confidentiality of the information collected for the research be protected?

The research data will be stored in a secured laptop. The data will also be kept on a secured external drive and saved in a secured location separate from the laptop. Your information will be combined with that of other study participants. When we write about the study or publish our findings for other researchers, we will discuss the information in a collective manner. The written study will not include any identifiable information about you or your institution. Some need-to-know individuals may review our records to ensure that we are following the required rules, laws, and regulations. Organizations or individuals who might review the data include the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at DePaul University or Professor Chennault, faculty advisor. If they review your records, they will keep your information confidential.

To prevent others from accessing our records or potentially identifying you, we have put some protections in place. These protections include using a code (identification number) for each person in the study, and keeping records separate from the research data and not on the same computer. The audio recordings from the study's interviews will be kept until accurate notes have been created and the study data has been submitted with the dissertation. After successful completion of the dissertation, the audio files and transcript will be destroyed.

Also, you should know that there are some circumstances in which we may be required to provide your information to other individuals. For example, the law may require us to show your information to a court or to tell authorities if you reported information about an abused or a neglected child or if you pose a danger to yourself or someone else.

Who should be contacted for more information about the research?

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that may come to mind now. Later, if you have any questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints about the study or if you want to get additional information or provide input about this research, you can contact the researcher, Julie Collins at 312.965.9231 or by email at, collins-julie@sbcglobal.net.

This research has been reviewed and approved by the DePaul University Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact Susan Loess-Perez, DePaul University's Director of Research Compliance, in the Office of Research Services at 312.362.7593 or by email at sloesspe@depaul.edu.

You may also contact DePaul's Office of Research Services if:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the researcher.
- You cannot reach the researcher.
- You want to talk to someone besides the researcher.

You will be given a print copy or emailed a copy of the Consent form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent from the Subject:

I have read the above information. I have had all my questions and concerns answered. By signing below, I indicate my consent to be in the research.

Signature:_____

Printed Name:_____