STRONG ENOUGH TO BEAR THE CHILDREN, THEN GET BACK TO BUSINESS: THE EXPERINCES OF BLACK MOTHERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION DOCTORAL PROGRAMS AT PREDOMINATELY WHITE INSTUTIONS

by

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(Under the Direction of Diane Cooper)

ABSTRACT

Very little literature informs our knowledge regarding the experiences of Black mother doctoral students at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) as it relates to race and gender. Researchers have identified that Black women doctoral studies report different experience due to their race and gender (Gardner, 2008; Patton, 2009; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Winkle-Wagner, 2009). The experiences of Black mothers and their educational experiences in doctoral programs in higher education at PWIs is often unnoticed. This research explored the lived experiences of Black mothers enrolled in higher education programs at PWIs. Situated in Black feminist thought (Collins, 2009) and a non-deficit approach (Harper, 2010), this study illustrated how the experiences of Black mother doctoral students successfully navigated and persisted through doctoral study. Using semi-structured interviews the author identified three themes that influences the persistence and success of Black mothers in doctoral programs in higher education. The three core themes identified were: 1) Socialization, 2) Development of resiliency and self-worth, and 3) Utilization of familial, personal, and academic supports.

INDEX WORDS: Black mothers, Black Feminist Thought, Black women, Doctoral student, Predominantly White institutions, Resiliency, Support system, Socialization

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DEDICATION

My dissertation is dedicated to my Lord and Savior. I have found so much strength during this process by leaning and depending on your everlasting strength. By your grace and mercy, I was able to make it thought this journey. Without you, I would have not made it through this process-thank you and I love you.

My dissertation is also dedicated to my children, Aiden, Jaden and Kalen. Coming home to you every day reminded me why I was completing doctoral study. You all motivated me to persist through this doctoral journey and not give up-thank you and mommy loves you!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Journal Entry: Day 2650

It is 1:00 a.m. on Sunday morning. On Saturday, the kids had martial arts at 9:30 a.m., a birthday party at 11:00 a.m. (where the only food Jaden could eat was fruit), and a church event at 4:30 p.m. We finally made it home around 8:00 p.m. It was a day filled with activities and time commitments, one of our longer days. It was also a day filled with anxious questions for me: Will we make it to martial arts on time? Will the party have food for Jaden to eat? How will I ever get all this writing done?

All of these questions crossed my mind at some point during the day. But--I had a plan. I had a plan to get the kids to all their activities; to engage with Mr. David, the karate coach, and the other parents at the birthday party; and to learn something from the church event. I also planned to get at least two hours of writing done.

However, like most days, life had different plans for me that day. When I sat down to write, my five-year-old daughter Kalen came into the room. She said, "Mom, are you doing your work? I want to do work like you. Can you buy me a laptop so I can be like you and work all the time?"

My first thought was, "Wow. She is very insightful about the importance of work, and maybe I am doing a good job of being a role model for how to be a hard worker." Then came my second thought. "What did she mean by 'all the time'"? I began to have more questions. Was she asking for a laptop because she felt neglected and thought the only way she could spend time

with me was to work like me? Was my work creating a traumatic experience for Kalen and her brothers? Was I doing something wrong?

Questions, so many questions.

As a Black mother, admittedly I have uncertainties about mothering wrong, particularly in a society that perceives my children differently based on the color of their skin. Unfortunately, this is a lived experience for my children. For example, my kids and I took my mom to a doctor's appointment for a procedure. While in the waiting area, Jaden (the youngest twin by 13 minutes, very long in twin time) began doing multiplication problems by counting the squares on a windowpane. Aiden, the older twin, then joined him. There was an older White couple in the waiting area as well; I noticed her watching and smiling, and I smiled back whenever our eyes met. The woman asked, "Are you a teacher?" I answered, "No, but I work in education." She replied, "You have smart kids, and they are so well behaved." I responded, "Thank you. We work hard with them, and my mom is a retired elementary teacher, so they get a triple dose."

We both laughed, although my laughter was a little forced. I felt an internal tug at her comments. Most parents would take them as compliments, but while I wanted to embrace them as such entirely, part of me felt the comments were insensitive and oppressive. Maybe that's because the *well-behaved* part of the comment is something my husband, my mother, and I hear from White people all the time when we are out with the children, whether at a restaurant, dropping the kids off at summer camp, or in a doctor's office waiting area. The constant commenting on my kids' good behavior comes across to us as insensitive and oppressive. My skepticism comes from a place of the constant fight against stereotypical views that have been placed on Black families.

In another example of my children's lived experience, when my twin boys were only three years old, their White Prekindergarten teacher commented that they were athletes. How can anyone determine that a child is an athlete at three years old? Most three-year-olds run, jump, and play, but my boys were considered athletes. My internal reflection on these comments is a constant battle. I feel like these comments are coming from a good place, with no intention to be harmful or hurtful. But I often wonder if my White friends and colleagues with children of similar ages get these same comments.

Society stereotypes Black children—especially three young children around the same age—as undisciplined and poorly behaved. These messages are reinforced by the national trend of the school-to-prison pipeline, in which children of color are funneled into juvenile and criminal justice systems because of (mis)behavior that is more often criminalized than that of other students (American Civil Liberties Union, 2014). Additionally, Black boys are almost three times more likely to be suspended from school than White boys, and Black girls are four times more likely to be suspended than White girls (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2010). Even Black children who are not (mis)behaving are unquestionably impacted by these messages.

Despite my fears about the impact of these societal messages and stereotypes on my children, I have decided not to operate within those fears. I will not spend time and energy worrying about whether other people are going to oppress them. Instead, I will spend my time loving them, nurturing them, and valuing their lives. My goal is to raise liberated, kind, resilient, wise children. This can be accomplished by showing them that their lives matter and that they are equal to everyone else in the world, while also educating them about what oppression looks like and how it may impact their lives. By having an understanding of self through my

worldview and assumptions will allow me to teach them how to show up in this world, and how to be liberated and luminous without allowing others to take away their shine.

Researcher Positionality

This study explored the experiences of Black mothers in doctoral programs in higher education with a focus on student affairs and how as it relates to race and gender. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) observed that researcher positionality allows researchers to reflect on their worldview, assumptions, and theoretical orientation to better understand their relationship to the study and how they may impact it. For example, I have a fundamental belief that Black women are strong and have endured numerous injustices in the U.S., as a result of their race and their gender, from the era of slavery to the present day. Additionally, from my perspective motherhood is not an easy task and comes with its own set of challenges.

These assumptions and beliefs are based on my lived experiences as a Black mother, a doctoral student, and a working professional. I often hear the comment, "You are insane, working full time and being a wife, a mother, and a doctoral student!" My response is, Yes, these are not easy tasks, individually or collectively. But this is my *beautiful mess*. It is a *beautiful mess* to be a woman, Black, a mother, a working professional, and a doctoral student. As a group that operates on the margins of the dominant society, Black women struggle to find their voice. Black mothers who do not fit into the framework of societal expectations face an even greater struggle. For Black mothers, dominant images of motherhood do not account for the injustices they face at the intersections of race and gender.

Black mothers who are doctoral students confront many complexities; it is essential for the field of higher education to understand these experiences to identify the resources, support, and services that are essential to the success of this student population. Understanding the

beautiful mess of Black mothers who are doctoral students can give the field of higher education insight into their strengths and the determination they possess as mothers and doctoral students. This qualitative study elicited the narratives of eight Black mothers enrolled as doctoral students in higher education. Through these stories, the study explored their experiences as mothers and doctoral students through the lens of race and gender.

Background

In the early 19th century, educational opportunities progressed differently for Black men and Black women (Hamilton, 2004). During this time, education was a tool for the Black community to uplift the race; gender issues were not a focus (Hamilton, 2004). Because of this, it was not until the late 19th and 20th centuries, when it was believed that education was a tool that could be utilized to elevate Black women (Tucker, 2016).

In the 20th century, as a follow up to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the 1972 Title IX of the Education Amendment Act of 1972 was enacted. Title IX had a direct impact on women's enrollment into colleges and universities (Tucker, 2016). Title IX prohibits sex discrimination in educational programs and activities for all entities that receive federal financial assistance. With this act, women have made great strides in their educational attainment from its protections. Specifically, Black women have made tremendous strides in higher education. While federal legislation and policy changes helped increase access for Black women in higher education, they still faced many challenges related to race and gender (Tucker, 2016).

Lucy Slowe, a Black woman, who served as Howard University's dean of women in the 1930s, found that Black women faced many challenges when entering college (Hamilton, 2004). She provided insight from professional and personal experience. For example, Black women were entering college with little to no experience in public or community affairs, they

internalized the traditional beliefs about women's role due to their gender-bound upbringing, and adopted a self-defeating perspective on life (Howard-Hamilton, 2004). Over the past two centuries, stereotypes and inequalities continue to exist for Black women and create barriers for them as they attempt to education attainment (Howard-Hamilton, 2004).

Statement of the Problem

To best support Black women who are mothers in doctoral prorams, they must be considered within the context of higher education. Creating an environment where Black women feel included in the institutions' mission (Clemons, Miles, Golay, & Bertrand Jones, 2011) is essential to their growth and development. Students' feelings of acceptance, sense of belonging, and freedom to be themselves are essential to their learning and development (Strayhorn, 2012). Black mothers by definition operate at the margins within predominantly White institutions. Thus, in any discussion of how to support Black students' success in higher education, it is crucial to incorporate Black mothers' voices.

Black mothers are constantly negotiating and maneuvering at the margins of society (Collins, 2004). Black mothers pursuing doctoral degrees possess multiple and intersecting identities (i.e., women of color, mothers, and doctoral students). On the one hand, as women and people of color, they are positioned as subordinate in predominantly White society and educational institutions. At the same time, as doctoral students, they possess considerable ambition and demonstrate significant achievement and success (Collins, 2004).

Because of these complexities, Black mothers who are doctoral students have distinct needs for programs and services from their institutions. For example, doctoral program representatives, administration, and faculty that recruit Black mother doctoral students to predominatly White institutions; must provide prospective Black mother doctoral students with a

chance to meet and see other Black mothers similarly situated in their experiences (Tucker, 2016). Additionally, new student orientation should provide an opportunity to dialogue with other Black mothers about the experiences and strategies of persistence (Tucker, 2016). Administrators who are committed to student success must be responsive to the challenges of all students (Clemons et al., 2011). Additionally, incorporating the narratives of Black mothers into scholarly literature and pursuing more research studies that focus on the experiences of Black mothers who are graduate students will provide a greater understanding of the specificity of this population. It will give higher education administrators, policymakers, higher education researchers and Black mothers understanding into Black mothers who are doctoral students experiences. It will assist with recruitment efforts for graduate schools. It will assist in developing policies that support this group of students. Lastly, it will provide Black mothers awareness of strategies of persistence from other Black mothers with similar experiences.

The research regarding Black mothers in doctoral programs is virtually nonexistent. Investigating the lived experiences of Black women who are mothers and doctoral students in higher education will provide insight into the kinds of resources, programs, and other forms of support institutions and policymakers can provide for Black mothers who are doctoral students.

Deficit Model

Most of the literature on Black motherhood is focused on single mothers and lower-class families. This narrative supports a deficit model that reinforces stereotypical images of Black motherhood, in which poverty-stricken single mothers raise children who cause trouble in society (Jenkins, 2005). Jenkins (2005) noted the two greatest misconceptions about Black mothers relate to the image of the Black matriarch and the prevalence of female-headed Black families.

The dominant White society has flawed the representation of the Black family. The two misconceptions of Black mothers are rooted in deficit models, such as the cultural deviant approach and the culture of poverty thesis (Jenkins, 2005). White families (particularly White mothers) are considered the standard or the normal; all others are less valid (Jenkins, 2005).

Oppressive hegemonic forces have produced a flawed and misleading master narrative of who Black mothers are. The stereotype that all Black mothers are single, loud, unruly and aggressive led New York Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan to argue in 1965 that African American female-headed families are dysfunctional, nonproductive, inferior, and pathological (Dickerson, 1995). He published a study called *The Negro Family: A Case for National Action,* where he claimed that Black families caused the difficulties that they faced in systems, such as education and employment (Jenkins, 2005). He argued "The white family has achieved a high degree of stability and is maintaining that stability. By contrast, the family structure of lower class Negroes is highly unstable, and in many urban centers is approaching complete breakdown" (Jenkins, 2005). Additionally, he assumed that Black cultures are a pathological version of White-American culture (Jenkins, 2005*).* Many researchers have continued to study Black motherhood from that frame.

This study sought to understand the experiences of Black mothers who are doctoral students through the lenses of both race and gender. Deficit thinking paradigms persist in the contemporary educational and legal systems. For example, Sakho (2017) found that Black mothers are often viewed as uninvolved in their children's educational experiences and as failing to advocate for them. The participants in her study were Black women community workers in an urban school district. One participant reported that their children's school system did not provide welcoming spaces for Black single mothers. This response came from a Black women

in the role of the table facilitator, who distanced herself from urban Black single mothers. (Sakho, 2017). Another participant, a Black mother, said that young Black mothers do not care about their children's education. Master narratives are a clear example of how deficit thinking has created negative images of Black motherhood.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study explored the experiences of Black mothers who are doctoral students in student affairs/higher education through the lenses of race and gender. Black women in higher education confront many challenges related to their racial and gender identities (Clemons et al., 2011). Malveaux (2009) described the intersection of race and gender within the dominant society as “the third burden.” Similarly, hooks (1994) referred to the interaction of race, class, and gender as “the triple jeopardy.”

Clemons et al. (2011) noted that the duality of being a Black woman adds a layer of complexity for Black women who are students. For example, Black women in higher education may be excluded from groups at work due to their race and gender. While Black women may anticipate facing such challenges at predominantly White institutions, however, they may also encounter isolation at historically Black colleges and universities due to sexism (Paititu & Hinton, 2003).

Eliciting the narrative of Black mothers who are doctoral students is critical to understanding the unique experiences of this group. This study sought to understand, through the lenses of race and gender, the frameworks within which Black mothers who are doctoral students navigate their everyday lives. Furthermore, it aims to overcome deficit thinking about these women by identifying and exploring the strengths of Black mothers who are doctoral students in higher education.

Guiding Research Question

This study has one guiding research question: How do race and gender impact the experiences of Black mothers who are doctoral students in student affairs/higher education programs?

Black Feminist Thought

During the 1970s, Black women began to make their voices heard within an intersectional frame by telling their stories through poetry, essays, art, and other creative outlets (Collins & Bilge, 2016). Through these forms of expression, the women began to share the multifaceted challenges they encountered at the intersection of race and gender (Clemons et al., 2011).

The socially constructed dynamics that influence Black women's lives come together to create unique challenges for this group. Black feminist thought (BFT) is a theoretical framework that places Black women at the center of the analyses (Collins, 1990). It involves theoretical interpretations of Black women's lived experiences. Black women in higher education are impacted by race, gender and sometimes by class, placing them on the margins of the educational institution.

For this study, the participants are women who can discuss the phenomenon of the Black mother in doctoral programs based on personal experience, and who are therefore will begin with the "connected knowers," as (Collins, 2000) defines them. Additionally, I drew on Collins' (2000) Black feminist epistemology to provide insight into the lived experiences of Black women who are doctoral students in higher education. Collins (2000) identified five core dimensions of Black feminist epistemology: (1) a legacy of struggle, (2) the interaction or interlocking of race, gender, and class oppression, (3) the replacement of denigrated images with

self-defined images of Black womanhood, (4) Black women as activists, teachers, and educators, and (5) sensitivity to sexual politics. The core dimensions that relate most directly to the present study are the legacy of struggle; the interlocking of race, gender, and class oppression, and the replacement of belittling images with self-defined images of Black womanhood.

The *legacy of struggle* refers to Black women's struggle to operate in two different worlds, one that is White and oppressive and the other is Black and oppressed (Cannon, 1984). *Race and gender* shape the social system of motherhood and graduate student identity; it is essential to recognize that all Black women who are graduate students nevertheless have their own experiences related to race and gender. *Disrupting the negative stereotypes of Black motherhood* created and perpetuated by the White majority requires replacing these stereotypes with more accurate, self-defined images.

The Significance of the Study

Examining the historical context of Black motherhood allows more investigation into the narratives society has created regarding Black mothers. For example, slave owners found it economically advantageous to encourage Black Americans to reproduce, as this produced more slave labor (Collins, 2004). During the time of slavery, the majority of families were separated as they were often sold to different masters or they were separated by death (Collins, 2004). Black women were denied the protection of their roles as mothers, as their children were taken away from them and had to switch gender roles and become the role of the mother and father (Collins, 2004). Black mothers today are still faced with switching roles and operating on the margins. Black mothers who experience a tension between being a doctoral student and being a mother often try to minimize whichever identity is less salient in a particular environment.

A *superstar storyteller* refers to a Black person who recounts the history and stories of Africa across the diaspora. Stories of Black mothering date back to Africa. For Black mothers, the art of storytelling provides a medium through which they can share their stories with their community as well as with dominant groups. These stories will begin a dialogue in higher education about Black mothers who are graduate students. They will give voice to the unique challenges Black mothers face and highlight the strengths and qualities they possess to be successful doctoral students.

Summary

Historically, when Black mothers have been studied at all, they have been viewed in the context of a deficit model. More importantly, Black mothers operate on the margins of the dominant society when moving through dominate spaces. The study drew on Black feminist thought as a way to examine the intersections of race and gender and as a tool for replacing the denigrated images of Black motherhood.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Stereotypes of Black women shaped over many years in the larger societal context influence perceptions of Black women in U.S. higher education (Donovan, 2011). This chapter examines previous research related to Black mothers who are graduate students and their socially constructed racial, gender, maternal, and student identities. First, this review provides a brief overview of graduate education and women in graduate programs, with focus on Black women. Next, it contextualizes the experiences of Black mothers generally, and Black mothers who are graduate students specifically, based on previous research. Lastly, the chapter explores how societal perceptions, internal and external supports, and the various challenges confronting Black mothers frame their experiences of racial and gender constructs within the context of their doctoral education.

Graduate Education

Since the 1970s, the demand for graduate education has continued to rise, with graduate students accounting for about 11% of overall student enrollment in higher education today (Collier, 2017). Students of color are enrolling in college as undergraduates and graduates more now than ever (Renn & Reason, 2013.) In 2016, the percentage of students who were Black attending colleges and universities was 13.7%, which is higher than the year 2000 when the percentage was 11.7% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017b). More specifically the percentage of Black students from the ages of 18 to 24 enrollment increased from 30.5% in 2000 to 36.2% in 2016 (National Center for Statistics, 2017b). Additionally, between 2000-2016

Black students enrollment in post-baccalaureate programs (master's and doctoral programs) doubled (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017a). From a gender perspective, women are earning doctoral degrees at an increasing rate. It is predicted that women will be the highest number of students enrolling in colleges and universities in fall 2018 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017b). In 2016, 59% of women were enrolled in post-baccalaureate degree programs as compared to 41% of men (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017c). With women increasing in numbers in graduate school, their academic success and persistence must be a focal point for the field of higher education.

Women in Graduate Programs

Historically, societal perceptions of the most appropriate gender roles for women included those of wife, mother, and teacher of young children (Tucker, 2016). There was no need for women to attend college to fulfill these roles. In 1837, Oberlin College in Oberlin, Ohio became the first institution to open its doors to women, allowing them to study in teacher education programs (Graham, 1978). Over time, more colleges allowed women to enroll and the field of higher education gained a better understanding of the needs of this group of students.

Admission of women in graduate programs in the United States, historically has been in three phases. The first phase from 1868-1890 was when women were admitted in doctoral programs as special students but were not given degrees (Rossiter, 1982). The second phase was from 1891-1892 women were officially admitted to six graduate schools and the final phase 1893-1907 was when several institutions accepted women and awarded them doctoral degrees (Rossiter, 1982). In 1921, three Black women carried the distinction of being the first Black women to earn doctoral degrees, Georgina Simpson from University of Chicago, Saddie Mossell Alexander from University of Pennsylvania and Eva Dykes from Radcliffe (Gates, 2015).

Today, women are enrolling in increasing numbers in higher education, and these increases have been particularly rapid in graduate programs that already award the majority of their degrees to women (Tucker, 2016). Yet despite their growing numbers, women graduate students continue to confront a unique set of challenges. Brus (2006) have cautioned that women in graduate programs encounter stressors such as finding employment, financial hardships that are interwoven with issues with the ability to support children and family. Additionally, Mehta, Keener, and Shrier (2013) found that women who enroll in graduate programs feel disadvantaged because of beliefs that men have higher status positions, being viewed in stereotypical gender roles and receiving unwanted sexual attention. The challenges are even greater when multiple constructs interact. For example, Black women in graduate programs deal with societal constructs of being a woman and being Black in addition to other intersecting identities, such as those surrounding motherhood, that impact their experience in higher education.

Black Women in Graduate Programs

Mary Jane Patterson was the first Black women to earn a B.A. degree, which she received in 1862 from Oberlin College (Anderson, 2002). It is important to note that demographically, the Black women admitted to Oberlin College were more likely to have been born free, to live in wealthy urban areas, to be lighter skinned due to mixed-race heritage, and to come from two-parent households (Miles, 2012). Oberlin College played a significant role in making higher education accessible to Black women.

Historically, education has been a way to increase social mobility for many marginalized groups, including Black women. Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia is a historically Black women's college that is well-known for graduating high-achieving Black women (Miles, 2012). Founded in 1881 as the Atlanta Baptist Female Seminary, Spelman was later named after Laura

Spelman, the wife of J.D. Rockefeller (Miles, 2012). To this day, the Rockefeller family contributes millions of dollars to Spelman College (Miles, 2012). A former Spelman College president noted that the reason Black women were so successful at Spelman was because their basic needs were met (Miles, 2012). While Black women at predominantly white institutions often struggled with feelings of isolation and self-doubt (Bailey, 2004), at Spelman, the race and gender challenges were minimized.

Most literature that centers Black women in graduate programs highlights the challenges and struggles they face as opposed to illuminating their voices and narratives of Black women themselves. Very little research has examined the experiences of Black mothers who are graduate students. The study of Black mothers who are graduate students will provide the field with more information about this group of students. It will reveal the unique stories of Black mothers in doctoral programs. It will also provide higher education tools needed to support Black mothers. Lastly, it will give voice to their strengths which administrators, faculty and staff can understand and utilize when supporting them.

Experiences of Black Women in Graduate Programs

Racism and sexism on predominantly White campuses are common realities for Black women graduate students. It was not until after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954 and the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that Black women were afforded access to predominantly White institutions of higher education (Miles, 2012). However, when Black women enrolled in these institutions, they were faced with myriad struggles and challenges. Research has revealed the persistence of some of those challenges in areas such as socialization, micro- and macroaggressions, invisibility, and the lack of mentoring (Gardner, 2008; Patton, 2009; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Winkle-Wagner, 2009).

Socialization

Socialization into doctoral education is usually transmitted through the organizational culture (Gardner, 2008). Students' ability to feel that they are part of an organization depends on the culture. Many underrepresented students in doctoral programs have a difficult time feeling that they "fit the mold" of their program (Gardner, 2008). This is mostly due to the way in which doctoral programs are designed and the framework of culture in which it operates. Underrepresented students may have a difficult time with their program's culture because it has normative socialization patterns or assumptions and behaviors for students to be socialized that do not align with their experience (Gardner, 2008). These students often have difficulty with becoming part of the larger graduate program community (Williams, Brewley, Reed, White, & Davis-Haley, 2005).

Black women constitute an underrepresented group in higher education. Administrators, faculty, staff, and students must understand and gain knowledge of the characteristics that Black women possess, as it will assist them with providing support and resources for Black women. Furthermore, to assist with socialization in higher education, administrators, faculty and staff must put practices in place to support marginalized students, as racial identity has a significant impact on the graduate school experiences of students from underrepresented groups (Gildersleeve, Croom, & Vasquez, 2011). Administrators, faculty, and staff in higher education need to become aware of all students' backgrounds while creating a pedagogical practice that encompasses the whole student and creates an environment that is conducive to and supportive of student learning.

Micro- and Macroaggressions

Students of color often experience oppression and discrimination in the form of micro- and macroaggressions. *Microaggressions* are the verbal and nonverbal "unconscious, subtle forms of racism" (Solórzano et al., 2000, p. 60) that occur at the interpersonal level. *Macroaggressions*, which occur at the structural level, take on the same characteristics as microaggressions, including the racial marginalization of groups of students at a systems level. This systems-level or racial marginalization can show up in policies and procedures that perpetuate social inequality. For example, a comment such as, *you don't act like a normal black person* is a considered a microaggression.

Many Black students face racial microaggressions in the context of higher education (Solórzano et al., 2000). Microaggressions can be verbal or nonverbal, but are typically subtle. Solórzano et al. (2000) found that college students reported experiencing microaggressions in the classroom that made them feel isolated, created negative interactions with faculty, and fostered self-doubt.

In this same study (Solórzano et al., 2000), students also reported experiencing microaggressions outside of the classroom, in the form of racial tensions, stereotypes, double standards, and perceived unwanted or uncomfortable environments (Solórzano et al., 2000). One student in this study noted feeling their presence in non-classroom campus settings was unwanted. For example, one student in the study reported feeling uncomfortable going to the library to study during finals because the White students in the library were looking as if they never saw Black students study (Solórzano et al., 2000). Students described encountering racial microaggressions in social spaces on campus that were almost identical to what they experienced

inside and outside the classroom, referring to areas other than social spaces. Solórzano et al. observed:

> Racial microaggressions in both academic and social spaces have real consequences, the most obvious of which are the resulting negative racial climate and African American students' struggles with feelings of self-doubt and frustration as well as isolation. This means that the African American students on the campuses studied must strive to maintain good academic standing while negotiating the conflicts arising from disparaging perceptions of them and their group of origin. (2000, p. 69)

Williams and Nichols (2012) examined Black women students' experiences with microaggressions at predominantly White institutions. The Black women in the study reported that others often viewed them as criminals, treated them as second-class citizens, assumed that they lacked intelligence, and pathologized their cultural values (Williams & Nichols, 2012). The participants observed that certain microaggressions aligned with gender identity while others aligned with racial identity (Williams & Nichols, 2012). For example, they noted that the perception of them as criminals aligned primarily with their racial rather than gender identity.

Micro- and macroaggressions impact Black women's college experiences in many ways. Black women must learn how to navigate and cope with the micro- and macroaggression they experience on a daily basis. Henry, West, and Jackson (2010) have suggested using Helms' (1990) womanist identity development model and Collins' (2004) Black feminist thought as a way for higher education administrators, faculty, and practitioners to support Black women faced with microaggressions on college campuses and in the larger society. Additionally, it provides an understanding of the interconnectedness of factors that psychologically impact Black women college students (Henry, West & Jackson, 2010). By acquiring this knowledge, college

administrators, faculty and staff will be able to assist this group with not only navigating college but the development of a positive self-identity (Henry, West & Jackson, 2010). The challenges confronting Black women students are intertwined and complex. Higher education administrators must consider these complexities as they seek to address these challenges.

Invisibility

Another challenge Black women face in higher education is being visible in spaces of the dominant culture. Winkle-Wagner (2009) found that Black women students were often perceived by the White majority on campus as "less than" based on the color of their skin. As a result, the study found, Black students were often invisible in White spaces (Winkle-Wagner, 2009). Additionally, Harley, 2008; Hunter, Hilderson & Hidreth, 2010, found Black women faced challenges of intellectual credibility from their White colleagues due to the stereotypes that lessen the perception of the intellectual ability of Black women. Moreover, this invisibility influenced the self-identity of Black women college students and affected the ways they viewed themselves. Black women's multifaceted, marginalized identities in this way can lead them to view themselves as "less than" their peers.

Mentoring

One way to counter these challenges and support Black women in developing a positive self-image is to provide them with mentors. Black women in higher education have an overall need for mentors (Patton, 2009; Reddick, 2011; Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2015). Patton (2009) found there is a lack of mentors and mentoring available for Black women in higher education. She encouraged Black women to build coalitions with other women of color to foster support, especially when navigating the oppression and discrimination encountered in an academic environment.

Having a mentor help Black women navigate higher education and mentoring is most helpful when the role of the mentor is clearly defined (Reddick, 2012). Black women mentors serve as role models who can provide insight or advice that may not be provided in other relationships (Patton, 2009). “Mentors for African American women are critical to ensuring that they cannot only ‘interpret’ the social environment of academia, but that they also pass down knowledge about ways to navigate…” (Tucker, 2016, p. 57).

Identities and Graduate Experiences

Black women played key roles in both the feminist and the civil rights movements of the 1960’s. Although Black women could identify with both the civil rights movement’s call for racial equality and the feminist movement’s call for gender equality, they often had a difficult time finding a balance between supporting both movements (Tucker, 2016). One issue was Black women often found themselves marginalized by White women in the feminist movement and marginalized by Black men in the civil rights movement (Collins, 1986; hooks, 1984). However, gender still played an important role for Black women in those movements while the interest of gender equality and the interests of racial equality often led to opposing political views for Black women.

Outsiders Within

Collins (1986) used the phrase *outsider within* to describe the status of Black women in higher education. Collins (1986) indicated that Black women exist in the margins on the outside of White spaces. For Black women, the *outsider within* status shows up in a variety of spaces within higher education.

Based on the experience of socialization in academic settings many Black women are marginalized. Wilkins (2012) study of storytelling found that members of a group identified

more with stories that were about groups that seemed the most like them, and distanced themselves from stories about groups that seemed least like them. The Black women in Wilkins' (2012) study reported that race was not salient to them before going to college. However, they reported that after they entered college, they were faced with their Blackness and this changed the way in which they showed up or presented themselves in spaces (Wilkins, 2012). For example, the students in the study reported in high school they were associated with peers primarily by socioeconomic status, which included many races, however, when they entered college the socioeconomic status identity did not matter, they were just viewed as the Black kids Wilkins, 2012).

Black Women in Academia

Beale (2008) contended that Black women encounter racial and gender biases throughout academia. Black women's college experience is different through the lens of race and gender from that of traditional White and male students. Black and White researchers alike often perceive Black women in academia through a deficit model, viewing them as financially and socially underprivileged, academically underprepared, and more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviors than white students (Henry, West, & Jackson, 2010).

Racial Trauma

Mullings (2005) noted that "The usual roles historically assumed by African American women have allowed African Americans to survive through four hundred years of slavery, Jim Crow segregation, discrimination, and postindustrial redundancy" (p. 87). The qualities of strength, determination, and fortitude Black women possess not only allowed Black women to endure but they enabled the entire race to endure. During the time of slavery, Black couples

were forbidden from forming families that led to Black women's assumption of motherhood as responsible for rearing and raising children (Mullings, 2005).

Presently, scholars are turning their attention to the racial trauma of Black mother's fear of losing their children. For example, (Barnes, 2016) reports the deaths of Trayvon Martin, Michal Brown and Renisha McBride's dealing with the violent deaths of their Black children, have prompted fear amongst Black mothers of losing the children violently because of racism. Moreover, (Jackson, Phillips, Hogue, Curry-Owens, 2001) explain that Black women's fears of bringing a child into this world, especially a Black Boy, have a negative impact on pregnancy and birth outcomes.

Hardy (2013) describes racial oppression as "a traumatic form of interpersonal violence which can lacerate the spirit, scar the soul, and puncture the psyche" (p. 25). Internalized devaluation, an assaulted sense of self, and internalized voicelessness are direct byproducts of racial trauma (Hardy, 2013). *Internalized devaluation* refers to the dissemination of the dominant narratives of race throughout society (Hardy, 2013). For example, the message that all Black women are lazy or "welfare queens" is reinforced throughout society and internalized by members of that group. The *assaulted sense of self* describes a recurring experience that results from internal devaluation (Hardy, 2013). Individuals who repeatedly hear that they are not good at something may begin to believe those messages and incorporate them into their sense of self. Lastly, *internalized voicelessness* is the inability to speak out against wrong, unjustified, debilitating messages (Hardy, 2013).

Weathering Hypothesis

The oppressive practices that result in systemic inequalities and the microaggressions Black women face daily cause "weathering" (Shird, 2016), also called "Sojourner Syndrome"

(Mullings, 2005). The weathering hypothesis essentiality states that Black women face health disparities in comparison to other groups because they bear a large allostatic load, or wear and tear on the body (Carpenter, 2017) as a result of the burden of racial and gender discrimination (Carpenter, 2017). Another way having an allostatic load impacts Black women is infant mortality. Black women in America are three times more likely than White women to experience infant mortality (Villarosa, 2018). In fact, black women with advanced degrees are more likely to lose their baby than white women with less than an eighth-grade education (Villarosa, 2018). Recent research indicated that the stress and trauma of racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination have caused Black women to experience these and other health disparities (Carpenter, 2017).

Similar to the weathering hypothesis, the Sojourner Syndrome provides a frame of reference for understanding why Black women die younger as compared to white Women and have higher rates of morbidity and mortality for most diseases (Mullings, 2005). For example, the Sojourner Syndrome is named for Sojourner Truth, a Black woman born into slavery. Sojourner Truth was sold away from her parents and enslaved for almost 30 years until 1827 when she escaped with her infant daughter. During slavery, she was sexually and physically assaulted (Mullings, 2005). She later worked closely with abolitionists and became involved in women's rights movement (Mullings, 2005). Due to her strength and resilience, she became a symbol of activism centered around the interaction of race, class, and gender (Mullings, 2005).

Mothers in Academia

The number of all mothers who participate in the U.S. workforce has increased over the last 25 years. Castañeda and Isgro (2013) noted as of 2010, women composed 47 percent of the total workforce, and 73 percent of women work full time; this number has risen over the last 25

years. More specifically, in the United States, women in academics composed nearly 50 percent of the workforce, and it is estimated that 65 percent are working mothers (Castañeda & Isgro, 2013). As a result, working mothers enrolled in graduate school now have to deal with such issues as timing when to have children, resolving the tensions between the identities of the mother/professional/graduate student, maintaining a work-life balance, and other challenges.

Black Mothers As Graduate Students

Education has long been perceived as a vehicle for Black women's advancement out of domestic service and as a means for Black people to move, however gradually, out of abject poverty (Sealey-Ruiz, 2012). Additionally, Black women have found ways to cope with and heal from their marginalization. Tucker's (2016) study of Black mothers enrolled in graduate school found that "the struggle for a self-defined identity was most visible when interactions were invalidating, discriminatory, or traumatizing and part of their healing and empowerment was finding ways to overcome challenges as doctoral students and be efficacious as mothers" (p. 223).

Tucker (2016) found that Black women develop strategies to cope with negative micro- and macroaggressions and to manage the identities of being Black and a mother while in their doctoral programs. Black mothers reported encountering microaggressions in the form of invisibility, hypervisibility, and stigmatization (Tucker, 2016). Moreover, Black mothers' identity development included negotiating intersectionality across time and space (Tucker 2016). Meaning, Black mothers have difficulty isolating race, gender, and class as an isolated dimension of their identities (Tucker, 2016). Additionally, Tucker (2016) found that Black mothers in graduate school who experience isolation, loneliness, or trauma related to their race and gender

identities found healing in their doctoral study, and engaged in meaning making about themselves through their doctoral journey.

Black Mothers

> W*e move back and forth between the margins and privileged (center) spaces, I often hideout in liminal spaces sometimes with my "plus one" to gather intelligence on the ways in which the oppressive forces are at play, and I stand in the gap, as acts of resistance and transformation.* (Sakho, 2017, pp. 6-7)

Black mothers occupy space around the margins of dominant structures at the intersection of race and gender. For women of color, becoming a mother challenges the dominant view of motherhood. Institutional policies encourage middle-class White women to reproduce and discourage low-income women of color from becoming mothers (Collins, 1994). Furthermore, Black women are more likely than any other racial group to be single mothers. Thistle (2006) found that between the ages of 22 and 44, 25 percent of Black women were raising children alone, compared to nine percent of White women. In 2016, only 38 percent of Black children lived with both parents as compared to 74.3 percent of White children (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). The intersection of race and gender impacts not only Black mothers themselves but also how they raise their Black children.

When raising children, Black mothers deal with oppressive societal perceptions of what a Black girl is and what a Black boy is. It is within these oppressive perceptions that Black mothers learn to navigate mothering. Despite society's often-negative stereotypical views, Black mothers are resilient and determined to protect their children from the impact of racism and sexism and empower them to survive (Collins, 2005; Suizzo, Robinson, & Pahlke, 2008).

Mattingly (2014) argued that new Black mothers often believe they must be *super strong* to overcome barriers and appear capable of being good mothers. Gilkes (1983) characterized Black mothers who have to navigate between marginality and the dominant society as *mobile mothers*. A *mobile mother* is a concept in which Black mothers have to learn how to perform between the margins of society (Sakho, 2017). Similarly, Sakho (2017) described the concept of the *sixth sense*, which is a tool. Black women use it to pass through the "isms" and be able to translate, facilitate, and navigate their truths.

Stereotypes. Race and gender are social constructs that affect many Black women on a daily basis. These social constructs have produced a variety of stereotypes of Black women. For example, throughout history, Black women have dealt with socially constructed identities such as jezebels, mammies, matriarchs, welfare queens, and the strong Black woman (Donovan, 2011).

The depiction of the *jezebel*, which portrays Black women as promiscuous, lustful, and hypersexual, was used to justify slave owners' sexual assaults on Black women (Donovan, 2011). The *mammy* stereotype, the "Aunt Jemima" image that characterized Black women as overweight, nurturing, asexual, self-sacrificing, and working-class provided another personification for slavery as it was used to rationalize the exploitation of Black women as house-slaves during slavery and underpaid domestic servants after slavery (Donovan, 2011). The *matriarch* image implied strained familial and romantic relationships between Black women and Black men through its depiction of an overbearing, emasculating, single Black mother (Donovan, 2011).

The characteristics that give the stereotypes its name is the perception that single Black mothers abuse the system, collect excessive welfare payments, or have more children to increase their welfare payment. The sapphire or *welfare queen*, similar to the matriarch stereotype, depicts

Black women as loud, angry, and hostile and is situated in single parenthood, working-class position (Donovan, 2011). The contemporary *strong Black woman* is depicted as caring, tough, educated, intelligent, and upper- or middle-class (Donovan, 2011). The image of a strong Black woman, which views these women as independent, hardworking, and caring, often refers to women who are mothers and full-time professionals, students, or breadwinners.

The media has played a key role in constructing and perpetuating societal stereotypes of Black women. Emerson (2002) noted that music videos and other forms of popular culture are often criticized for objectifying Black women with stereotypes such as the hypersexualized "hot momma" or "jezebel," the asexual "mammy," the emasculating "matriarch," or the "welfare recipient" or "baby mama" (p. 117). Furthermore, Rousseau (2013) found that images of Black motherhood are manipulated by popular film to construct negative social reterohic that informal social policy disproportianly impacts Black women from one policy period to another. From drawing on historical womanist theory (HWT), Rousseau developed a theory, in which the image of Black motherhood is manipulated from one policy period to the next depending on the needs of the economy (Rousseau, 2013, p.469). She explored the rhetoric of welfare reform in three different policy periods: 1990-1995 (the period of welfare reform debate), 1996-2008 (the period of welfare reform), and 2009-present (the so-called *postracial* period) (Rousseau, 2013). Rousseau (2013) argues that political policy inexplicably influences Black women, social rhetoric is often used as a tool of oppression, and Black women experience unique forms of oppression due to the intersections of race, class, and gender.

Intensive mothering. Hayes (1996) coined the term *intensive mothering* to refer to a style of mothering in which the mother consistently chooses to put her children's needs above her own (Lynch, 2008). Mothers who are in this model must be aware and consistently

responsive to the child's needs and desires at every stage of child development. To do this, a mother must be able to acquire the knowledge the experts deem necessary during child development (Lynch, 208). In sum, “intensive mothering is child-centered, expert guiding emotionally absorable, labor intensive and a financially expensive enterprise” (Lunch, 2008, p. 586).

However, Elliott, Powell, and Brenton (2013) found that for Black single mothers, intensive mothering is a different concept. The mothers in their study engaged in intensive mothering in different ways, despite the systematic, structural barriers that made it difficult to show society that they were good mothers by societal definitions (Elliott et al., 2013). This study found the “ideology of intensive mothering reflects a version of privatized mothering that is not conducive with the constraints placed on low-income, Black single mothers, and instead increases their burdens, stresses, and hardships even while providing a convenient explanation for these very difficulties: mothers are to blame” (Elliot et al., 2013, p. 367).

It is important to note the mothers in this study had to fight off dangers, such as violence, for themselves, as well as to their children, and that they experienced various levels of poverty, as well as confronting racism and sexism (Elliott et al., 2013). They nevertheless practiced intensive mothering using the resources available to them (Elliot et al., 2013). Moreover, the study found that these mothers felt they did not “fit the mold” of being good mothers because they were not able to provide extracurricular activities such as music lessons or private tutoring for their children. This left them feeling as though they did not do enough for their children (Elliott et al., 2013).

Barriers for mothers in academia

Timing. Mothers in academia must contend with determining the best timing for pursuing tenure-track jobs, accepting upper administrative jobs, and even choosing motherhood itself and timing on when to go to graduate school. Tenure-track professors commonly experience concerns about when to have children (Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006). Societal views of women who pursue academic careers often suggest that their careers will suffer if they marry and have children (Brown & Watson, 2010). Kuperberg (2009) found that family might interrupt a women's path to graduate student and likely deter mothers with doctoral degrees from prospective faculty careers.

Tensions. Authentically showing up in spaces is vital to doctoral students' growth and development. However, women who are mothers may experience tension in their efforts to show up authentically because of their multifaceted identity roles. What is a successful parent? What is a successful graduate student? The elements necessary to be a successful parent and those required to become a successful graduate student are incongruent based on predominant cultural and societal norms and ideals (Estes, 2011). Often, mothers who are doctoral students experience tension between being a good mother and being a good scholar (Estes, 2011). They also experience inner conflict between spending time with their children and spending time on their graduate work (Gardner, 2008).

Work-life-balance. "The second shift" is a phrase by Hochchild (1989) refers to the responsibilities placed on working mothers when they leave their "day job" and go to the second shift at home. The second shift is essentially the daily burden of paid and unpaid work experienced by women (Hochschild, 1989). The second shift is more apparent for mothers, particularly those with preschool age children (Hochchild, 1989). Our culture tells us that if mothers are not putting the needs of their children first, they should feel guilty (Gilbert, 2008).

The phenomenon of the second shift can cause women undue stress as they try to balance being a mother, a professional, and a student (Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006).

Women experience stress when trying to balance and care for others. Carol Gilligan's theory of women's moral development argues that women seek to establish a balance between caring for self and caring for others (Renn & Reason, 2013). Gilligan's theory states that moral development occurs in three stages, through which women come to perceive care and responsibility as their highest moral functions (Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quaye, 2016). The stages include Level 1: orientation to individual survival, Level 2: goodness as self-sacrifice, and Level 3: the morality of nonviolence. Also, Gilligan's identifies two transitions in women's sense of self: the transition from selfishness to responsibility that occurs between Levels 1 and 2, and the transition from goodness to truth that takes place between Levels 2 and 3 (Patton et al., 2016).

Level 1 is the orientation to individual survival. The goal at this level is to fulfill desires and needs for the purpose of survival (Patton et al., 2016). During the first level, there is a transition from selfishness to responsibility, where doing the right thing is considered (Patton et al., 2016). Next, level 2, goodness as self-sacrifice, the individual moves from a self-centered view of the world to a more engaged view (Patton et al., 2016). During level 2 transition, from the induvial questions why they put others first at their own expense (Patton et al., 2016). Finally, in level 3, morality of nonviolence, the individual is able to recognize her power and keep her needs within the mix of moral alternatives (Patton et al., 2016). For Black mothers who are doctoral students, being marginalized, finding balance, and shifting identities, this framework provides an understanding of their moral development. It ties in nicely with Black mothers who are doctoral students as it illuminates the development of complex identities through the lens of moral development.

Challenges. Graduate students who are mothers face a variety of challenges associated with their multiple roles. Women, more than men, are often expected to care for children. Thus, one of their challenges is finding affordable and reliable childcare (Anaya, 2011; Lynch, 2008) Mothers who are graduate students often find that the hours of operation at many childcare facilities do not match their scheduling needs. Finally, they face financial challenges, as the financial support available for doctoral students tends to be designed for those who are single and childless (Lynch, 2008).

To cope with some of these challenges and maintain their positions as good students, graduate student mothers may downplay their identity as mothers (Lynch, 2008). Graduate student mothers may rely on their partners to provide support, as well as on validation from peers and colleagues (Anaya, 2011). Additionally, they can benefit from inclusive practices on campuses that address the marginalization of graduate student mothers in academia (Anaya, 2011). Finally, providing on-campus daycare and making breastfeeding, pumping, and change stations available are physical changes institutions can make that help remove barriers for these students (Anaya, 2011).

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) was developed by legal experts to explain the role of race from a legal perspective (Clemons et al., 2011). CRT builds on two movements, critical legal studies and radical feminism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). It draws from the ideas of leaders such as Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. Du Bois, Cesar Chavez, and Martin Luther King, Jr., and from the Black Power and Chicano movements of the early 1960s to 1970s (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001, p. 5).

Critical race theory is comprised of a number of basic tenets; however, not all of these tenets will apply to every experience. The first tenet is that racism is prevalent in society, and serves essential psychic and material purposes that support the oppression of minoritized groups (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). A second tenet of CRT is interest convergence, which notes that in the interest of Blacks achieving racial equality will only be when it converges with the interest of Whites (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). A third tenet of CRT is social construction, the idea that race and races are not biologically based but are instead constructed by society based on common traits, such as skin color, hair texture, and physical appearance (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

A fourth CRT tenet is the concept of differential racialization, which is the idea that society racializes various minoritized groups in different ways, depending on the shifting needs of the labor market (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). A final tenet is an emphasis on giving voice as essential for critical race scholars, a goal they accomplish through critical storytelling or counterstories. Critical storytelling refers to challenging the master narrative to create a new narrative (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Illuminating the everyday experiences and perspectives of the oppressed through counterstorytelling provides a way for CRT scholars to achieve a deeper understanding of minoritized groups.

Counterstorytelling. Storytelling can give a voice to those who historically have been silenced. Through stories, these groups can appeal to others who share similar experiences (Delgado & Stefanic, 2012). Stories give power to one's experience by naming it, and such narratives can begin to deconstruct the social construction of race and gender (Delgado & Stefanic, 2012). Inviting Black women to tell stories of their experiences of motherhood, race, gender, and doctoral studies will empower them to have a voice and to name the racism and

prejudice they confront. Black women's interacting identities grounded in race, gender and class all have a purpose in telling their story.

Intersectionality. Crenshaw (2016) notes that "Communication experts tell us that when facts do not fit within the available frames, people have a difficult time incorporating new facts into their way of thinking about a problem" frames or perspective allow others to have a different viewpoint. However, if there are no frames or perspective, then marginalized groups are not recognized. They are not seen by policymakers and university administrators which results in invisibility. We must have frames that allow us to see the overlapping injustices that occur at the intersections of race and gender. More importantly, intersectionality's critical praxis or critical awareness of one's condition can occur inside or outside the academy (Collins & Bilge, 2016), wherever Black women's challenges can be seen. Intersectionality exposes the racial and gender discrimination Black women face and provides a framework through which Black women can tell their stories.

Black Activist Mothering

Black activist mothering is an emerging theoretical framework designed to help conceptualize and give voice to Black mothers' experiences in society and within higher education. The hashtag #BlackMamaMagic was coined by Black mothers who seek to educate other Black mothers on how to raise free Black children in an unfree world while simultaneously pursuing their dreams (Irby, Killings & Monyee, 2018). Black activist mothering as a theoretical framework bridges the gap between Black mothering, leadership, and narrative while naming injustices (Sakho, 2017). Additionally, it is a way of making meaning, creating and showing new knowledge (Sakho, 2017).

Black activist mothering demonstrates how Black mothers acquire knowledge and where this knowledge comes from, and provides space for an oppositional stance toward and interruption of traditional, master narratives of oppression (Sakho, 2017). By interrupting the master narrative internally while simultaneously responding to external challenges, Black activist mothering seeks to create a new narrative for themselves and their children (Sakho, 2017). Moreover, Black mothers must navigate the master narrative and engage in their activist work while operating on the margins (Sakho, 2017).

The motherline in Black activist mothering involves storytelling and knowledge building. The motherline is where knowledge is gathered from elders. The motherline has a cultural epithet to storytelling that embodies the various cultural worldviews of Black women as mothers; it intersects with stories and provides a frame through which Black mothers view the world (Sakho, 2017). This critical storytelling provides an emancipatory tool to counteract stereotypes and interrupt systems of oppression.

As a conceptual framework, Black activist mothering is described by (Sakho, 2017) as *Her Pocketbook* symbolizing a place where Black women keep all the tools needed for life (Sakho, 2017). *Her Pocketbook* begins as a system of inquiry that consists of individual stories connected with the stories of community(ies) (Sakho, 2017). Black activist mothering is a political and cultural standpoint that provides a frame through which Black mothers can examine systems (Sakho, 2017). Informed by CRT and Black feminist thought, it offers “a way of analyzing narratives about Black mothers as a political community that communicates across space, place and time” (Sakho, 2017, p.11).

Black activist mothering promotes community work (Sakho, 2017) based on personal and political experiences. This community work empowers Black mothers by reclaiming space in the

oppressive system for themselves, their children, and their communities (Sakho, 2017). Such efforts reveal how race, gender, power, and privilege impact identity. Lastly, Black activist mothering allows a deeper understanding of counternarratives by illuminating why master narratives were created and where they came from. It allows researchers to "map the roots of the stories, by the connection to the community and historical narratives" (Sakho, 2017, p. 16).

Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and Politics of Empowerment

Black feminist thought is "a specialized knowledge created by African-American women, which clarifies a standpoint of and for Black women" (Collins, 2000, p.243). Having feminist view of mothering provides an understanding of mothering within a broad frame. It shifts to a more contextualized view of how social structures such as socioeconomic status and lack of access to resources can impact mothers' lives and the lives of their children (Collins, 2000).

Black feminist thought will be used throughout this study to guide the research and demonstrate the agent of knowledge for Black mothers who are doctoral students. Utilizing this framework will allow the study participants to name the forms of oppression they confront as Black mothers and doctoral students and to conceptualize their identities as Black mothers who are graduate students. It will place the Black mothers' experiences at the center of the analysis and offer insights into the concepts, paradigms, and epistemologies that comprise their worldview.

Anti-deficit Reframing

Currently, most of this work focuses on Black mothers who are poor or a single mom, which misses a wide variety of other perspectives. Harper (2010) found anti-deficit reframing allows students of color a voice on how they persist and successfully navigate their educational careers. Additionally, it gives practitioners and researchers a better understanding of how

students of color persist through education. An anti-deficit inquiry to the stereotype threat theory (Steele, 1997; Steele and Aronson, 1995) pursues insights and strategies of how students of color employ to resist the internalization of misconceptions about their racial group and how they respond productively and positively to the stereotypes they encounter on campus (Harper, 2010). An anti-deficit approach to theories on college retention (Swail, Redd and Perna, 2003; Tinto, 1993) explores retention and the factors that keep students of color enrolled in their degree program instead of focusing on the barriers to persistence Harper, 2010). This research study will take a strengths-based approach to explore the experiences of Black mothers who are doctoral students through the lenses of race and gender, examining the positive qualities, unique strengths, passions, and interests they possess.

Heritage Knowledge in Action

A new and emerging framework that provides safe space for exploring and affirming identity, cultural and African heritage that is also liberation and places value of scholarly work and contributes through rigorous social science inquiry is heritage knowledge in action (HeKA) King et al., 2019). This framework affirms African identity and resists stereotypical, master narratives that have perpetuated in society about Black people as a whole (King et al., 2019). Lastly, HeKA gives a voice to Black people by allowing their experiences and ways of being be validated and affirmed.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the research on Black mothers who are enrolled in graduate education. A brief history of Black women and working mothers in higher education provided context for understanding their experiences and the societal perceptions and stereotypes of this group. Black mothers who are graduate students confront many challenges and their

experiences in academia are shaped by numerous factors. Black mothers must navigate marginality as a result of both their race and their gender.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study investigated the experiences of Black mothers who are doctoral students in higher education or student affairs programs. This research is grounded in a critical paradigm that allowed exploration of the influence of race and gender on Black mothers enrolled in doctoral programs. A critical paradigm critiques systems of oppression including racism and genderism (Abes, 2016). Racism and genderism interact with one another and represent a form of power that privileges those with dominate identities and oppresses those with marginalized identities (Abes, 2016). More specifically, this study used Black feminist thought (BFT) as a theoretical construct that will be applied to understand and explain the experiences of Black mothers in doctoral programs. This study drew on an anti-deficit approach to obtain knowledge and increase understanding of the lived experiences of Black doctoral students who are mothers. These approaches allowed the participants, who have varying experiences of the complexities related to race, gender, motherhood and doctoral study to share the truth of their lived experience.

Epistemological Stance

In qualitative research, philosophical positions help create a better understanding of the subject under study that is guided by ontology, or what one believes about the nature of reality, and epistemology, the nature of knowledge (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). An epistemological stance questions how we come to know what we know (Johnson & Parry, 2015). Epistemology investigates the “standards used to assess knowledge or why we believe what we believe to be

true" (Collins, 2000, p. 252). It provides a view in which power help shapes whose story is told and why (Collins, 2000).

As a member of a marginalized group, I am interested in the study of marginalized groups and the power, privilege, and oppression that impact those groups, and my ideological beliefs appear to be closely related to a critical epistemology. I recognize that for Black mothers, knowledge is acquired through lived experiences that differ from the experiences of mothers of other races and Black women who are not mothers. Scholars of Black feminist thought (BFT) have noted that Black women's knowledge comes from lived experiences and is a self-defined way of knowing (Patterson, Kinloch, Burkhard, Randall, & Howard, 2016).

The nature of qualitative research is interpretive; Black feminist thought provides the researcher's interpretive lens (Shavers, 2010). Black women experience drawn from both Afrocentric and feminist standpoints, which to rearticulate Black women's viewpoints both elements must be used (Collins, 1989). An Afrocentric epistemology is the similarities in conditions of oppression for Black people in varying parts of Africa, the Caribbean, South America and North America (Collins, 1989). A feminist epistemology asserts that women share experiences of oppression through the political economy (Collins, 1989). An Afrocentric feminist epistemology demonstrates elements that are unique to Black women. "Black women may find more closely resembles Black men, on other, White women, and on still others, Black women may stand apart from both groups" (Collins, 1989, p.757). Black women are more likely to assess their knowledge claims that are consistent with their criteria for knowledge (Collins, 1989). Black women's epistemological view is manifested through Black Feminist thought because of their unique perspective of oppression and experience (Shavers, 2010). Drawing on a

Black feminist epistemology or how we know what we know, Black feminist thought theoretical framework will be used for the design, analysis, and interpretation (Collins, 2000) for this study.

Black women's marginalization and oppression by dominant society are relevant to this study. Therefore Black feminism is important to share and validate the experience and creation of knowledge from Black women. Black feminist thought gives voice to the unique experiences of Black women from their perspective. Four core themes provide interpretative frameworks in Black feminist thought (Collins, 2000). The core themes are: (a) lived experience as a criterion of meaning; (b) the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims; (c) the ethics of caring; and (d) the ethics of personal accountability (Shavers, 2010).

For a Black feminist epistemology, the theme of *lived experiences as a criterion for meaning* explains the knowledge and wisdom Black women have as a result of their lived experiences (Collins, 2000). The *use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims* for Black women is the development of new knowledge with members of their community group. The primary epistemology in this theme is the assumption of connectedness rather than separation, which is essential to the knowledge validation process (Collins, 2000). Moreover, the use of dialogue helps establish bonds, relationships, and sharing of experiences within the group (Shavers, 2010). T*he ethic of caring* demands that the researcher develops an ability to empathize with the speaker (Collins, 2000) as it will allow the speaker to be more comfortable sharing her story (Shavers, 20010). It emphasizes the importance of emotions, expressiveness, and empathy as a way for Black women's knowledge validation process to have a greater understanding (Collins, 2000). Finally, *the ethics of personal accountability* explains that individuals not only develop their knowledge claims through dialogue, but they are expected to be accountable for their knowledge claims (Collins, 2000). It furthers suggest that "knowledge

claims must simultaneously value an individual's character values and ethics" (Collins, 2000, p.265).

Qualitative Research

Most research designs exploring the lives of Black women utilize a qualitative methodology (Cloud, 2013; Collier, 2017; Patterson et al., 2016; Patton, 2009; Tucker, 2016). These scholars have used qualitative research as a way to give voice to Black women. Qualitative research, which was derived from sociological and anthropological studies of people's lives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), allows researchers to understand how individuals make meaning of their own lives and experiences. In this study, I seek to understand how the participants make meaning of their own experiences as Black mothers who are doctoral students in these programs. I used a critical qualitative research stance to elicit the participants' narratives, which provides a way for the participants to have a voice and to define for themselves the lens through which their experiences can be understood.

Qualitative research requires specific competencies, such as the ability to look at the research with a questioning eye, trust in the ambiguity of the data analysis process, be a careful observer, and ask intentional questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To make a qualitative research study congruent or making sure all of the components of the study mesh, the theoretical perspective should align with the research design. Theoretical perspectives offer a deeper understanding of the data and highlight issues and richness that emerge from the data (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014). Simply put, the epistemological stance and theoretical perspective should be highlighted in all aspects of the research (Jones et al., 2014).

This research is congruent with the components of Black feminist thought (BFT). I drew from a Black feminist epistemology and anti-deficit achievement framework. This study

examined the experiences of Black mothers who are doctoral students in higher education or student affairs programs through the lens of race and gender constructs as they align with Black feminist scholarship. Black feminist scholarship stands in opposition to the dominant narrative of Black women, a narrative that keeps black women oppressed and on the margins of society (Patterson et al., 2016). By combining a qualitative approach, BFT, and an anti-deficit stance, this study offered a deep understanding of the experiences of Black mothers who are doctoral students in student affairs and higher education.

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is the study of experiences as stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), by examining the phenomenon as the *story* and inquiry as a mean of eliciting the *narrative*. It focuses on human experiences and provides an understanding of analysis through experiences between the researcher and participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Narrative inquiry can incorporate many different types of data collection, including interviews, field notes, observations, journal records, and biographical or autobiographical writing (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), among others.

Studies using narrative inquiry seek to understand how individuals shape and inform their practice or field of study (Bell, 2002). Narrative inquiry examines how individuals make meaning in the process of building their lives (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). It elicits the stories through which we make sense of and communicate our experiences, and make meaning from the world around us (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Thus, by sharing their experiences, the participants in this study conveyed how they make meaning of the world around them.

In this study, I employed a critical narrative approach to the narratives of Black mothers who are doctoral students within the lens of race and gender constructs. Black feminist thought

provided a theoretical lens to analyze the participant's narratives. I employed this approach because it is grounded in the experiences and knowledge of people of color (Cloud, 2013).

Storytelling represents one form of narrative, and the Black community has a history of passing down stories from generation to generation. Storytelling allows participants to share their experiences and critiques systems or practices that erect barriers for Black mothers who are doctoral students.

This study sought to interrupt the deficit narratives about Black mothers who are doctoral students. Employing an anti-deficit framework (Harper, 2010) that is customized for Black mothers in doctoral higher education or student affairs programs allowed me to explore and understand Black mothers' persistence and successful navigation of doctoral study.

Site

Participants were recruited from public and private, predominately White institutions throughout the United States. Recruiting participants from more than one site provided greater confidentiality for the participants.

Procedure

Individual narrative interviews were used to elicit the participants' stories. Interviews allowed for exploration of the influence of race and gender in Black mothers' experiences as doctoral students in higher education or student affairs at predominantly White institutions. A narrative interview approach provided an effective way to examine the influence of race and gender. For Black mothers, race and gender cannot be untangled, as their intersection impacts their standpoints, views of the world, and experiences with truths. I interviewed six Black mothers who are currently enrolled in doctoral programs in higher education or student affairs program at predominantly White institutions.

Recruitment

Participants for this study were recruited through the use of email and social media. A flyer (see Appendix A) was distributed to a variety of graduate programs, professional associations, and social media groups. More specifically, I sent an email to graduate programs representatives (for recruitment) of various higher education or student affairs programs at predominately White institutions. I contacted social media groups Student Affairs Moms Group (SAMS) and Black Student Affairs Professionals (BLKSAP), to ask for their help in referring and recruiting participants.

Participant Sample

In the *purposeful sampling* method, participants are selected based on their potential to provide the information the researcher most wants to learn (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I utilized a purposeful sampling method as I seeked to discover, understand, and gain insight into the participants' experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Purposeful sampling allowed me to select participants who meet the desired criteria (Creswell, 2014), based on a pre-screening survey (Appendix B). A criterion-based selection process in purposeful sampling allowed the researcher to identify which attributes of the sample are crucial to the study and find the people or sites that meet those criteria (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

To meet the criteria for this study, participants must (a) identify as a mother, (b) self-identify as Black or African American, (c) be currently enrolled in a doctoral program in higher education or student affairs, (d) be employed full-time or part-time, (e) be involved in a romantic partnership, and (f) be raising at least one child 5 years of age or younger who lives in their home full-time (Appendix C). The first five years of a child's life are critical for development, and during these first five years of life, the brain develops more and faster. (Raising Children

Network, 2018). Moreover, during these years, children require more direct attention. This is critical to the time and attention the child requires from their mother.

Data Collection Methods

In this study, I employed narrative interviews. Research questions were guided by Black feminist thought and Harper's (2010) anti-deficit achievement framework. Using an anti-deficit achievement framework allowed me to explore and gain a better understanding of the success and persistence of Black mothers who are doctoral students in higher education or student affairs programs in predominantly White institutions (Harper, 2010). An anti-deficit inquiry understands and recognizes that students of color and those from other marginalized groups are the experts on their lived experiences and offers them to counternarrative the dominant deficit narratives that society has created regarding their success (Harper, 2010).

Using the framework of Black feminist thought (BFT) allowed the participants to express their experiences, and the interpretations of those experiences, from their viewpoint. With self-definition as a core theme of BFT, this approach allowed each of the Black mothers to narrate her own unique experiences. BFT offers a way for Black women to resist the dominant narrative of oppression by fostering self-empowerment.

Interviews. An interview protocol (Appendix D) and a particpants' overview handout (Appendix E) was emailed to each participant for review one week before the interview. The interview's main purpose is to obtain a particular kind of information, for this study I looked to obtain information about the experiences of Black mothers in doctoral programs (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Additionally, in-depth interviews provide an understanding of individuals' lived experience and the meaning they make of that experience (Seidman, 2006). I explored the complexities of being a Black mother who is also a doctoral student in higher education or

student affairs program by eliciting the participants' experiences and examining the meaning of those experiences from the women's perspectives.

I conducted semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews allowed the participants to share their story more organically as the questions will be a guide. Semistructured interviews allowed more flexibility with wording, as neither exact wording nor the order of questions are determined ahead of time (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This format allowed me to respond to the worldview of the participant (Marriam & Tisdell, 2016). Utilizing the anti-deficit framing (Harper, 2010), I had a list of semi-structured questions as a guide for the participants to share their stories. However, the interviews remained flexible to allow participants to express their worldviews naturally. Participants were able to be interviewed by visual media such as Skype, Google Hangout, or over the phone (facetime). Field notes was made after each interview to identify any themes that emerged during the interviews.

Data Analysis

Data analysis began the moment the first piece of data is collected (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In a narrative analysis, the researcher assumes the role of the narrator of the participant's stories and experiences (Jones et al., 2014). In qualitative research, data collection and data analysis are done at the same time. The narrative analysis involves identifying an overall meaning and then breaking down parts of it (Jones et al., 2014). The four activities employed to analyze the narratives are (a) developed general themes while continuously reading over parts to develop an overall meaning; (b) re-read each journal entry and interview to see how they relate to one another through field notes; (c) developed a story that captures the whole and the patterns; and (d) to understand the meaning of the stories, aligned the themes with theoretical literature to deepen the findings (Jones et al., 2014).

Each interview was recorded and transcribed. Recording each interview benefited me as the researcher, as this captures the participants' actual words (Seidman, 2006). It also provided a benefit to the participants as a way to check for accuracy. To make sense of the data, I reviewed each interview multiple times by listening to the recording. I listened carefully to each participant's words, and I made notes as I transcribe each interview.

After I transcribed each interview, I made notes, comments, observations, and queries in the margins (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The first review of the transcription occurred after each recording is transcribed, in which the fieldnotes will remind me of events, activities, conversations, reflections, and notes about themes. These fieldnotes informed the entire process of data analysis. Specifically, a reflexive journal format allowed me to record my thoughts and observations. (Glesne, 2010). After the review of the transcribed data, any data that strikes me as interesting or relevant to the study was notated and coded (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016)

I approached the data with open coding or identifying segments of the data that might be useful (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Open coding allowed me to explore the participants' experiences and to identify questions that arise as I review the transcripts. Once I coded the data, I began to construct categories, grouping the codes that appear to go together, or analytical coding. Employing an analytical coding approach allowed me to go deeper into the interpretation of and reflection on the meaning of the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Next, coding of the transcribed data focused on patterns and insights related to the research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Then the categories, themes, and findings were named. The names were derived from (1) me, as the researcher, (2) the participants' exact words, or (3) outside sources that may influence the topic of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Additionally, a qualitative database, NVivo, was used to assist with data management, including organizing and categorizing the data.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research are strategies for promoting validity and reliability in the research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Trustworthiness in qualitative research is defined as a research study that has findings that are noteworthy and informative (Shavers, 2010). It is important to note that there are many different strategies, and there is no one-size-fits-all approach to trustworthiness and rigor in qualitative data. A way to show trustworthiness is through confirmability. Confirmability encourages the researcher to present clear, discernable data (Shavers, 2010). I practiced reflexive journaling and conducted member checks/respondent validation as methods to ensure that the interpretations I derived are valid.

Reflexive Journaling

Journaling is a powerful way to engage in learning and knowing. I used reflexive journaling throughout the interview process to document my thoughts, feelings, and opinions. Through this practice, my lived experiences allowed me to understand myself better and have a better understanding of others' experiences. It allowed the researcher to understand the experiences, power, and privileges associated with the research. It will allowed me as the researcher to interact with and influence research participants (Cloud, 2013).

Member Checks

After transcribing the interviews, I sent each participant a copy of their transcript via email. This allowed the participant the opportunity review what they have said, add more information and make any edits. I asked the participants to use Track Changes if they wish to make any edits in the document. If edits were made, I then made changes and send a clean

version back to the participants via email for their review. This process increased trustworthiness.

Protection of Subjects

I approached all aspects of this study with honesty and integrity, employing all available strategies to minimize any risks to the participants.

Ethics

To ensure ethical consideration throughout the study, I explained to the participants the purpose of the study and the methods used. Informed consent was explained to each participant to minimize risk. The participants did not receive any compensation. I used pseudonyms to maintain the participants' confidentiality. Additionally, because some painful or debilitating memories may surface during an interview (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), I had referrals to various resources available to hand out or email to participants.

Chapter Summary

In this study, my approach to a narrative inquiry through a critical paradigm helped provide a better understanding the experiences of how Black mothers who are doctoral students in higher education or student affairs at predominantly White institutions, and explored how these women successfully navigated this context and persisted in their doctoral programs. The participants were recruited from public or private, predominantly White institutions of higher education in the United States. Participants met specific criteria to participate in the study. The method of data collection and the use of member checks, researcher reflexivity of the context of the study increased trustworthiness.

CHAPTER 4

PARTICIPANT NARRATIVES AND FINDINGS

Introduction

Using Black feminist thought as its methodology, this qualitative study utilizes personal narratives to explore the experiences of Black mothers who are doctoral students and identify the strengths, skills, and attributes that enable them to persist through doctoral study. It aims to give voice to Black mothers and illuminate their stories both of motherhood and of their experience in a doctoral program. The following research question guided this study:

> How do race and gender impact the experiences of Black mothers who are students in student affairs/higher education doctoral programs?

Based on individual interviews with the six study participants, this chapter aims to highlight each participant's distinct experiences. All participants were given pseudonyms to protect their anonymity and the confidentiality of their responses. All six participants were currently pursuing a doctoral degree at the time of their interview. Each participants had a partner and at least one child under the age of five. The stories that follow provide additional details about their individual circumstances and backgrounds.

Susan

Susan grew up in a middle-class family. Her mother is an attorney and her father had an accounting business. She has one sister. Born in New York, she is a first-generation American. She describes her childhood as privileged, with frequent family trips to Antigua. She attended a

private Catholic elementary school and later a public, predominantly Black high school, where the principal was a renowned educator.

During her childhood, one of the messages she received from her mother about race was "you're a Black child in America, and you need to do as much as possible within your means to be able to get where you want to get." Susan later interpreted this to mean that she needed to work hard and get a degree because it would earn her a level of respect, and she would face fewer questions about her competence and capability. Pro-Blackness was passed down to Susan by her family. Susan's mother gave her and her sister books about Black Americans who were considered well off and accomplished, and taught them about African culture. Her mother was very intentional about instilling in Susan and her sister both the belief in the greatness of who they are and the goal of becoming successful Black Americans.

Susan's parents were huge on education. During her childhood, from her earliest years, her parents instilled in her the expectation that she would take the next step after high school and attend college. Susan describes her parents as being different from many traditional Caribbean parents in that they did not force her to study a particular discipline, but instead allowed her to study whatever she wanted to.

Susan attended Emory University for her undergraduate degree. She went to college with every intention of majoring in business, but this quickly changed once she understood the types of prerequisite courses that were required to major in business. She also felt like business was not a good fit for her. She eventually took a sociology class and fell in love with it. Sociology was in some ways the opposite of the subjects she enjoyed most in high school, which were chemistry and math.

Later, while working as a graduate assistant during her master's program in higher education, Susan's director (supervisor) reaffirmed what she had been taught by her mother. Susan's assistantship director, a Black woman, told her on the first day that she was preparing Susan to earn a doctoral degree. Susan was shocked because she had never considered pursuing a doctorate. Her director advised her, "You're going to get a doctorate, so they can't tell you nothing." Susan reflected that, like her mother, her supervisor was telling her that earning academic degrees would provide others with proof of her capabilities.

Becoming a Mother

Susan has always believed that race played a role in shaping who she is within the context of education. However, she never really thought about whether being a woman also helped shape her identity. She always thought Black women just made things happen, and never questioned her ability to do something based on being a woman. However, becoming a mother allowed her to step into her woman-ness and understand what it means to be a woman in today's society.

Susan has one child, a two-year-old son she describes as "super smart." She has many fears about raising a Black boy in today's society. She is concerned that when he goes to school, teachers who do not know how amazing he is or who hold negative stereotypes of Black boys will diminish her son's eagerness to learn. To combat this, Susan really wants to teach her son to value himself, with the help of others who are like minded.

Susan has no interest in obtaining a position in the upper administration within higher education. She is happy "being a worker," which will give her the ability to work from 9-5, then go home and be a mommy. The doctoral degree will provide her with the means to support her

family, but she has no interest in moving up the ranks. She wants to be able to own her time and believes the further you advance, the more other people own your time.

It took a while for Susan to recognize what she wants out of life, in terms of both career and family, and she describes this realization as her "happy place." Another reason she does not want to move up higher in her career is that she values the ability to do more of her own "stuff." She believes if she were in a higher position she would spend her days in meetings dealing with other people's issues, and she prefers not having to do that.

Susan had the privilege of staying home with her son for a year after he was born. She reflected on her family's life now that she has returned to work:

> A typical day for me is to get up, get myself ready and my son ready for school, drop him off at daycare, and head to work. I leave work around 4:30 and my husband picks up my son on his way home from work. While at home, I cook and clean while waiting on them to arrive, which is around 6 p.m. After dinner, they all get ready for bed. This is a typical day, Monday through Friday. On weekends we like to engage in some type of enrichment for our son, such as story time at the library or swimming lessons. We also enjoy fun time, like movie time.

Susan is also involved in a sorority, for which she attends meetings and participates in community service. However, most of her weekend time is spent with family, and she intentionally tries to reserve as much family time as possible. When she was taking courses, she was able to stay late at school to work because her husband picked up their son from daycare.

For Susan, being a Black mother means being conscious of all the elements that can affect and influence her child. She values the ability to protect her child and teach him how to handle and work through whatever challenges or issues they may face. She described her role as

that of a shield in certain situations. Susan noted that the circumstances Black people face in the U.S. today are no different from those they've confronted in the past, but the information about those circumstances is just more accessible. The flow of information is much quicker today than it was in the past, as people can take videos of what is happening and text or email the information to others before it makes the mainstream news.

Susan wants her son to know that he is great boy, super smart, and amazing. She feels that she has to start instilling in him now the belief that he is a great person, so whoever decides to tell him the opposite will not be able to impact him, because he will already know the truth. Susan's style of mothering is to allow her son to be who he wants to be. She wants him to become the best version of himself.

Susan and her partner have different parenting styles. Her partner is a veteran, and she describes him as more authoritative. "He is very structured, and I'm the total opposite of it. I'm less structured. I'm more fly, like, 'Oh, just let him.' I don't care if he's climbing up stuff." She wants her son to be able to be curious, play, and learn from things.

Becoming a Doctor

Susan credits her assistantship supervisor from her master's program for placing the idea in her head that she was going to complete her doctoral degree. When she started her doctoral degree, she described herself as "very single," living in an apartment with only her dog. She decided that would be a good time to start the degree, so she applied and was accepted to a doctoral program. She chose that program because it had an intensive education concentration that addressed interests she developed through her previous jobs and her experience volunteering at global agencies.

Susan describes her doctoral program experience as “really blessed.” Her program is cohort-based and as a result, “everybody was going through the same struggle together, and we kind of bonded over the struggle of being in grad school.” Although the students in her program are diverse in terms of race and gender, the faculty members are all White men, with the exception of one Black man who taught the diversity course in the program.

Susan was very excited about the diversity course, which sparked her to write a paper about Black immigrants; her professor was very inspiring and encouraged her to do more work in this area. However, after her first year that professor left the department, which Susan believed was because he did not fit in. Later, she reported, he wrote a book exposing all the “shit he been going through working in the department.”

Susan went to her advisor with a copy of the book. She stated that if this was how this professor felt about the department, there might be other people feeling the same way. Susan told her advisor, “You need to work on whatever you need to so this doesn’t happen again, because we do need Black faculty members to work here in this department.” However, she reported:

> The advisor did not seem to take that suggestion. I felt it was because that side of me was never shown. Because I do not wear my Blackness on my sleeve, but will stand up for injustice.

Another faculty member, a Black woman who had taught in an adjunct position before Susan entered the program, was still at the university but in a different position in the President’s Office. This woman attempted to start a mentorship program. Through that mentorship program, Susan learned about all the obstacles her former professor had confronted in his effort to earn tenure, details Susan reported were eye-opening.

Susan gave birth to her son at the end of her doctoral program, while she was finishing her course work. She submitted her dissertation proposal the night she was admitted to the hospital. She recalls:

> Everything for the most part was written. I think the only thing that wasn't written was my bibliography, which I was like, whatever. I sent it the day I was in the hospital; I got admitted, and I sent it . . . I did the epidural, so by that time, I'm not feeling anything. So, it doesn't matter. So I'm just sitting there. With the epi, you can't move or anything, so I'm there stuck with my computer. Might as well do some work.

After her son was born, Susan planned to stay home with him and write, yet very little writing happened that year. Susan said she just did not want to write; she wanted to enjoy her son.

After a year of being out of work with her son, Susan started back at work. She describes the quality of her support team while working as "pretty good." Her dissertation chair and her supervisor both have two young kids, which is helpful to her. Seeing her advisor with her own kids provided inspiration and gave Susan hope that she will be able to complete her degree.

Susan's partner is also part of her support system. She states that her partner allows her space and time to get writing done. Her mother, who lives upstairs from her, is also supportive and has been a great resource, helping with editing and reading. Susan's godmother has a doctoral degree in higher education and has been a great help with revisions and designing her study. Susan also observed:

> My sister is a support because she gives me the guilt-trip; she said to me, "No, you can't stop." She's like boo-hooing, too. "You can't stop. We're all depending on you. If you can't do it, I can't do it." I'm like, "Oh, damn," so everybody's crying.

Currently, Susan is at the data collection stage of her dissertation and she describes herself as "over it." She says she just wants to have her life back. She wants to be done because the work takes a lot of mental energy, and she wants to be able to use that mental energy to focus on her family.

Susan describes her strengths as being adaptable in terms of space and time, with the ability to mold herself to whatever situation she encounters. She is passionate about education and about her community. More specifically, she has a passion for educating her community. She describes herself as a really good mom, saying it took her a while to understand what that means to her. In three words, she described herself as loving, deliberate, and well-rounded.

Sankofa: Reaching Back and Giving Advice

When asked what advice she would give Black mothers who are considering enrolling in a doctoral program in higher education at a predominantly White institution, Susan stated:

> Just be you. I struggle with code-switching, and I am not very good at that. I believe that being you, in whatever space, will make you happy and if something comes down to a negative or a positive, it is because the person is being them and not a facade. Black moms, too, should find a space in majority spaces where you can be you.

Developing Trend from Susan's Story: Being Authentic

Throughout Susan's life she has received many pro-Black messages. She was taught that to be Black and successful in America requires hard work and dedication. As a child, she was encouraged to emulate accomplished, well-off Black people.

Through her educational career, Susan always believed race played a role in her identity. However, she never really thought about being a woman until she became a mother. As a mother she expressed many concerns about raising a Black boy in today's society and fears that negative

stereotypes may hinder her son's drive to learn. She stays true to teaching her son about his race and gender. For example, she makes sure to buy books that feature Black characters and to talk with her son about successful Black people.

Susan has no interest in climbing the career ladder. She prioritizes her commitment to her family and her work, with family first. Additionally, she believes that if a Black mother is considering pursuing a doctoral degree it's important for her to remain her authentic self. She believes in being the real you. Susan struggles with code switching, and believes that in every space a person inhabits, they should be who they are and not pretend to be someone else.

Denise

Denise grew up in a single-parent household with her mother and one brother. Her parents were married, but her father left the family when she was about five years old. Denise is very close to her brother. She is 30 and he is 28, so they grew up together. She described her brother, her mother, and herself as "the three amigos." Her mother's parents lived right next door and were very visible in her life growing up. Her mother worked a lot to keep a roof over their heads. Because her mother worked so much, she and her brother spent a lot of time with their grandparents.

Denise described her childhood as never going without, explaining:

> I mean, cable lines got cut off every now and then, but we always had stuff. My mom stayed at Walmart for us; she put our clothes on layaway. We never had the latest fashions, but we had food, clothing, and shelter.

Even though Denise's father was not in her life, her grandfather was much like a father to her, and became a role model for her. She described him as a loving, quiet, funny man and said

family was super important to him. He was supposed to walk her down the aisle at her wedding. However, he passed away a month before her wedding day.

Denise did not have many negative things to say about her childhood, which she depicts as very blessed and for which she feels very grateful. She grew up in a Baptist church that was a big part of her life. She went to church about three times a week; attended Bible study, Sunday school, and Sunday services; and participated in plays on Easter and Christmas.

For Denise, being a Black girl from the south suburbs of Chicago meant that she grew up around many other Black people. Her grandmother went to the Mennonite church, and it was there that she first saw people of different races. She grew up and went to school with people who looked just like her. She recalled that there was maybe only one White kid in her class growing up.

It was not until high school that Denise felt there was a difference between her and her classmates. She went to a public high school in what she described as a rich part of town. Some of the Black kids from her neighborhood were bused to a different neighborhood to attend this high school. Growing up as a Black girl, she recalled:

> My mom would always tell me how beautiful I was and how special I was. Also, growing up with a single Black mother, I feel like it made me too strong. But just growing up as a Black girl, always seeing from my grandma and my cousins the women do everything; we are the nurturers and keep things afloat. Where the Black men in my family were either in jail or players or not taking care of their kids and just leaving.

Denise's mother instilled a great deal of strength in her at an early age. She was always told that she had to stand on her own two feet because one never knows what can happen, with or without a man. Her mother also instilled in her the importance of being a good mother. Denise

stated, “I knew that Black women are often targeted, Black women go through the toughest things, but they always come out on top. If you work hard, you will be okay.”

The messages Denise received about being strong and working hard impacted who she is today. She describes this feeling as having to be “too strong.” She reflected:

> Like I am married, and I have a wonderful husband, but at times it’s hard. I’ll be honest, when I first got pregnant, I was like, he is gonna leave me, he’s gonna lie, he’s gonna leave, something is going to happen, and I’ll be raising this child by myself. So that was hard for me because I’m like, you know, I had to retrain my mind to be open to my partner, be accepting of him because he was there every step. He was there, but I was still thinking when I’m going to have to do this by myself.

Becoming a Mother

Denise has a very emotional story about becoming a mother. After waiting until she got married to have sex, she explains what happened next:

> I had a plan of getting married after I got a career started. So the first year of marriage I got pregnant, and I found it to be weird and I was very confused and didn’t understand. I was on birth control. I questioned God and was like, I did not want this to happen. This is not what I wanted; this was not my plan. My husband was very excited and happy about it, but it created a lot of turmoil in the marriage because I didn’t want to get pregnant.
>
> I had a lot of complications during my pregnancy. I developed terrible infections; I was in the hospital for like a month, the first month of my child’s life. My mother, being the superwoman she is and being so loving, when I was away from my family, my mom, she took off work and was with my son every day. I was in the hospital, my husband was in the hospital with me, and my mom cared for my son. At my home. She would bring

him to visit, which was so tough. Because I'm in the hospital, having all these different procedures, and in so much pain. I spent my first Mother's Day in the hospital, which was horrible; I was not really in a good place emotionally.

When Denise was finally able to return home from the hospital, she had a home nurse for medical care. Her husband stayed home with her for about two weeks, then he had to go back to work. Her mother also left around the same time, so it was just Denise and the baby. She stated:

I wasn't prepared to take care of the baby and didn't know what to do, and it was hard. I felt like the baby didn't like me, I didn't like the baby. I understood what was going on a little bit and I loved him, but it was hard. So I went to counseling.

Around the time Denise's son turned two, she perceived that their relationship was changing for the better and moving in a positive direction. She recalled:

But it was a lot for me, too, when I came home from work. When I had to go back to work, I wasn't fully healed either, so it was tough. I should've been home with my child. My vacation time, it ran out, so I needed to go back to work. We put our son in day care, and that was hard. I would come home and cry. I couldn't handle it; I would go to my room and close the door. My mom, my husband, would take care of our child. Dealing will what I was dealing with at work and coming home to a crying baby was just not ideal for me. I felt like I was being punished by God; here he blessed me with this gift, and I didn't even want it at first, you know, I wasn't grateful. So that was difficult for me to deal with, but I got there.

Now Denise describes being a mother as a beautiful thing: tiring, but beautiful. She focuses a lot on her son and they do a lot of things together. Her son has peanut and egg

allergies, so there's a lot of planning. She has to plan which restaurants, theme parks, and other places they can go that can accommodate her child's dietary restrictions.

Denise believes being a mother means being a protector. She explained, "I just want to protect him, I just want to love him, and I just want him to know that he's smart. I just want him to know that he can do anything he puts his mind to, but being in this world, in this country, scares me."

When asked to share more about that statement, she expanded:

> Like, people are dying for no reason. Our black brothers and sisters. The police brutality. The kids, like I see in our neighborhood being mean to him or just little stuff like that. How do you prepare your child for that? He's three, and I want him not to grow up too fast. I don't want him to be naïve to this world. So it's constant. It's constant on my mind because I have those moments with my husband, to just be scared if we're not together. But I try to redirect my mind to not live in fear, because that's exhausting.

The media's representations of Black men and boys getting killed causes Denise to think that those men could be her son, her brother, or her husband, which scares her. She described this as both sad and heartbreaking. She feels that it does not matter how much she tries to prepare her son; she cannot control how other people react to him, which is frightening and nerve-racking for her. She hopes her son will never be put in a situation in which he does not have control of his life.

When asked how it feels to be a Black mother, Denise responded:

> I have felt like I have to prepare my son. I have to work harder. I'm getting a doctorate so I can make sure that he has opportunities that I necessarily didn't. Even picking his name was important. So to prepare him, we decided to start a college fund. We make sure

> we have life insurance; this came from looking and learning from other family members that are passing away without insurance. I have fears about being a Black mother to a Black boy, but I don't want my son to sense or see the fears. I want my son to be humble and respectful.

Denise described her style of mothering as what she would see from her own mother. She said, "part of me did not want to be my mother, but that's what I have become." She describes her mother's style as, "her world is her kids." Additionally, Denise describes her style of mothering as open, explaining:

> I like how much love and support and guidance my mom gave me, and I'm instilling that. But also, my son, if he's gay, he's going to be my loving son where he chooses that's what it is. I'm gonna love him and his partner.

Although this situation would not be accepted by Denise's family, she says she refuses to oppress her son in any way; she wants her son to be able to express who he is.

While Denise's husband grew up in a two-parent household, Denise saw her own mother carry the full responsibility of raising her and her brother:

> My mom did everything. She made the decisions, she paid the bills, she was at parent-teacher conferences, and she was at my brother's football game. She did all that, so that I have to stop and be like, okay, no, I do not have to make all the decisions.

Becoming a Doctor

Denise is five years removed from her master's degree. After she finished her master's degree, she began to think about getting a doctoral degree. Many people around her encouraged her to pursue a program they felt would fit the format of her life, a year-round, hybrid program that is supposed to take three years from start to finish. Denise looked into the program and

decided it was the best fit for her life. She takes one class every eight weeks. Most of the classes are online and she takes two intensive classes over the summer.

When I asked Denise what motivates her to persist in pursuing a doctoral degree, she responded:

> Being a Black woman, to have a doctoral degree, I feel like that will open up so many doors for me. It will put me in a better position where I can save up money for my son's college. I remember my mom not having enough money for my college tuition. One of my White friends in college, these people had college trust funds, and I couldn't understand it. I felt so disrespectful, but I questioned my mom, like why don't I have money for college? I know she was hurt, and she was like, because you have this roof over your head. And I didn't get it at 17, but I sure got it from my late twenties.

Denise described her one of her biggest motivators as wanting her son to be able to graduate from college debt-free. She stated, "I don't want him to take out student loans for nothing, never in his life. I want his credit to be good, and I want to teach them those skills."

Denise's mother did not teach her about credit when she was growing up, but she wants to be able to teach her son. Additionally, Denise wants to be able to provide for her family financially and give her son more than what she had:

> I just want to be able to provide for my family and be able to give my son a down payment on his house, wedding, or something. You know, just like the little shit that we couldn't even imagine. I just want to be able to do that. If I am financially stable, it will allow my son to be on the playing field with other people from different races who don't have to worry about having money. It decreases some of the stress that some people in

the Black community face. I just want my son to be able to focus on school and not have to worry about finances.

Denise is in the second cohort of her doctoral program. She is still in the process of forming relationships with the faculty because the program is online. She said there is one Black woman in the cohort before her who is supportive of her. The woman will often remind her that while it will not be easy, she can do it. They often get together to talk about how to increase the positive messages from Black women and how to elevate and support each other.

When I asked Denise about her support system, she indicated that her mother and her husband are her support system. Denise also receives support from other Black women who work at the same university she does but are enrolled in different doctoral programs:

> They were in different programs, but they were just encouraging me and supporting me to do it. Even when I was scared. I got accepted but I was scared to start, and they were just there. They reminded me how this degree is such a great accomplishment and how it's going to be so worth it. They spoke greatness into me.

When I asked Denise to describe her experience of being a Black mother in a doctoral program, she replied:

> What comes to my mind is overwhelming, exhausted. So sometimes, like on Saturdays and Sundays, I'm literally at the coffee shop from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., or the library. Sometimes I take days off from work to focus on homework, but it is just not possible for me. I mean, anything is possible, but it's very difficult for me at night to do homework after work.

Denise schedules time to be with her family and even to do things like clean the house. She often feels that she is missing time with her son, but she knows this is only temporary. She

does get some family time in and eventually will be able to get more after she completes her doctoral work.

Denise is a big planner, but she realizes that sometimes things do not go as planned:

> I have to plan sometimes, but sometimes my plans don't go according to how I planned it. It all depends on what's happening with my son. He could not be feeling well, and he can react, he could be tired, he could be sick. And damn, but I got to take care of him.

Denise's husband works at the same university where she works. An example of how Denise attempts to balance her work and family life occurred during the holidays, when she bought tickets for she and her husband to see a show at their work. She said it was very intentional because it was time they could get together to make sure there was balance in their relationship. She recognizes that there will not always be a fair balance, but there are times when she feels like trying to balance the relationship. She describes it as give-and-take.

At times in Denise's doctoral program she has questioned whether she was smart enough to be in a doctoral program, and if she should even have a seat at the table. I asked Denise where she was getting those messages from. She replied:

> That's a good question. I even watch myself now. Okay, so growing up where I grew up . . . I don't know if you know but people, Black people, talk a certain way. I code switch a lot. Somebody, I caught it yesterday, I was talking to a student, and I said, "Go get yo paper" or something, and I'm like, shit. And I don't type like that, but my emails don't reflect that, or my papers. But my dialect, it comes out a lot. And I'm like, I mostly have to think about what I'm saying. Even in class, I like to be a good listener because I feel like I don't want my ghetto-ness or my ratchet-ness to come out. I feel like I can control it, but sometimes it's just me.

Denise describes being in a battle with herself, which she characterizes as a "mask on/mask off" type of thing. She described being a different person at work than she is at home. She feels she has to mask who she really is at work because she believes she would not be accepted. She is more comfortable in smaller settings than in bigger ones. She is afraid of being in a large group and coming across as incompetent. She is more comfortable with people whom she is familiar with. When I asked Denise to describe herself in three words, she chose, "loving, hardworking, and positive."

Sankofa: Reaching Back and Giving Advice

When I asked Denise what advice she would give to Black mothers considering enrolling in a doctoral program at a predominantly White institution, she responded:

> It would be . . . get you a support system. Know that you are enough. When I got accepted into the program, I'm like, Okay, it's go time. No matter how hard and challenging it is. If you got accepted then it's up to you to finish. So know if you are blessed with the opportunity, you're enough. Whatever you bring to the table. You're going to conduct some research that's going to resonate with somebody. You're going to add something to the field that's not there or that you can enhance. Being a Black mother and working on a doctorate is very emotional. It is, it feels like there's so much weight on my back. Like everything I explained to you; I feel like I'm sitting here reflecting. I feel like I'm doing it for the culture. Like I'm doing it for my family, my friends.

Developing Theme from Denise's Story: Operating with Fear

Denise's story identifies many fears she has experienced in her life, both as a Black mother and as a doctoral student. Growing up in a single parent home, raised by her mother, Denise received a lot of messages centered on the need for Black women to manage everything:

raise the family, clean the house, and pay the bills. Denise explains that this experience made her "too strong," to the point that she was unable to share responsibilities with her partner.

Denise also had many fears when she became a mother. She became seriously ill after delivering her baby, which created emotional detachment from her son. She became fearful about what her life would be like and how her son's life would be. Eventually, after going to counseling, she was able to become attached to her son. Now, however, she has many fears for him as a Black boy in this country. She does not know how to prepare her son for the difficult situations he may confront because of the color of his skin. For the same reason, she also has fears for her husband, as a Black man in today's society.

In addition, Denise also has fears related to her doctoral experience. She does not want her peers in her doctoral cohort to think that she is not competent. To combat this, she wears a mask at work and take it off at home, where she can relax and be who she really is. However, she fears that the person she is at home may accidentally slip out at work or school, causing others to judge her negatively.

Lauren

Lauren was born and raised on the south side of Chicago. Her mother's family is from Belize and came to the states in the mid-1980s. She describes her dad as African American, as he is Black and from the United States. Her parents were married; however, she grew up mostly around her mother's Belizean side of the family. Being a Black girl was not something she really thought about when she was growing up because it was something she was always around. Her family often traveled to Belize over the summer to visit her grandmother, which helped shaped what she learned about her Blackness.

However, Lauren still had to learn about America and African-American culture. She described her home environment as a very homogeneous Black environment. Most of her friends looked like her but did not think like her, which she believes was the result of her Belizean identity. She reflects, “I think that a defining moment for me, growing up Black and then being a woman, you learn, born being a girl, very early.” Lauren described a defining moment of realization of being a girl.

In high school Lauren was considered a high-achieving student. She would often question what it meant to be both Black and high achieving. Her brother was high achieving as well, and he enrolled in the International Baccalaureate program, where he took a lot of computer science classes and was tracked in that way. He is now an engineer. Although Lauren’s mother advised her to take STEM classes like her brother, she wanted to take art classes instead. For her mother it was very important for women to have high-paying careers. From that perspective, Lauren began seeing herself as a woman who needed to *show up and show out* more than her male counterparts had to.

Becoming a Mother

Being a mother has made Lauren very reflective. She related:

> As the mother to a two-year-old little boy, a typical morning is this. One morning, as a residence hall director, I had a 7:30 am meeting to discuss a student’s employment. My husband got my son up and in the high chair ready for breakfast. However, my son had a different plan in mind, other than eating breakfast; he had a temper tantrum. He did not want to eat in the high chair. It was very difficult to understand what was going on with him, but I finally figured it out and we took him out of the high chair. My husband took

> our son to daycare that morning, and as soon as he took him to daycare he pushed another child. So I got a call while I was in a meeting with the student.

At that moment, Lauren began to reflect on why her son was exhibiting these behaviors. She wondered, what had she done wrong? Had he seen her push people? Had he seen her put her hands on someone else?

As a residence hall director, Lauren has a lot of evening commitments. She and her husband have been able to work out a plan to care for their son. As a result of becoming a mother, Lauren feels that she needs to navigate the world very differently from other people who have children from other races. I asked Lauren to delve a little deeper into that statement and describe how it feels to be a Black mother. She responded:

> It's something I think about a lot because I live in Ohio. I live outside of Cincinnati, and it is a very rural environment. And I work at a predominantly White institution in a highly affluent area. It has been very hard and I'm very conscious about it. It's been very hard to build community around being a mother first, but there are moms, there are groups, there are Facebook groups in the community and things like that. But a lot of them are tailored to stay-at-home moms, which is okay. But I think being a Black mom is hard because people don't always get when I say, "Don't pet my son." Because he has a lot of hair, people will like to touch his hair [which resembles petting].

Additionally, Lauren described being a Black mother as difficult in terms of navigating how to talk to your child. She feels that immersing her son in different cultural experiences and talking to him as a human being are the most important aspects of being a Black mother. She reflects:

> So a prime example: I'm around White people. And there's beauty in that, right? Everyone who has children needs to create community. And we have the Freedom Center, which is a museum that focuses on the former site of the Underground Railroad. And that site and that museum present African-American history told through our arts in word and display, and it's a beautiful place. It is also a hard place. You go there to have conversations to really learn and educate yourself. And I was talking with my colleagues and I was like, When are you gonna take your kids? And my colleagues was like, No, they are way too young. And I said to myself, Way too young? There's no right or wrong age, but everyone has different lifestyles.

Lauren reflected further on how Black mothers have to choose who enters their children's lives and discussed the importance of placing children in certain environments for learning. However, she also feels that it's important for others who are not Black to immerse their children in similar education about equal rights, equity, equitable environments, and social justice. Lauren will question non-Black parents who choose not to educate their children about people who are different from them. She noted:

> To learn about different colors and people from different countries and doing that in an age-appropriate way, versus, I think about my little brown boy and how he's not gonna have that ability to learn about those things until grad school. It is important for him to learn who he is regarding race and gender before he goes to college, because it will be beneficial for him [when] navigating college.

Lauren describes her style of mothering as very reflective. However, she is still in the process of figuring out her style because her son is only two years old. Her style of mothering is in unison with her husband's style of fathering. They both love adventures; they love taking trips

to the museum, going to parks, attending sporting events, and finding new things to do and places to go with their family. Lauren believes that having lots of fun is very important for her son's development.

In sum, Lauren describes her style of mothering as "immersion," explaining:

> I want [my son] to be able to see what is out there and to know that he can truly be anything and the options are endless and here are the options. I am going to make sure that he is presented with the ability to be social, the ability to be fun and engaging.

As a mother, Lauren says that if her son wants to explore different religions or different lifestyles, she is all for it.

Becoming a Doctor

Lauren described her doctoral program as "shifting." She stated, "The foundation is still there, but some of the big picture folks in the program that are retiring." Lauren entered the program with hopes of becoming a dean of students or vice president for student affairs, but she is also interested in teaching, or in doing both.

Currently, Lauren is working on a book chapter on ageism, sexism, and racism in education. She believes her doctoral program will help her build the skills she needs to do the kind of work she wants to do. Her program, which is cohort-based, has a social justice and transformational learning focus and emphasizes the role of reflection in student development.

Lauren chose this program because of its notable faculty as well as the option it provided to choose from two different routes. One route focuses more on learning culture and curricula, while the other is a student affairs higher education program. Her program also offers a research practicum that helps with the dissertation. Lastly, her program focuses a lot on identity. Lauren reflected:

> My cohort is six people and we focus a lot on bringing ourselves to the classroom. So I always joke around with my cohort and when we get to class and if they ask for check in: Get ready, because Lauren is going to kind of let it out all day. It's a place where we come in the space and it becomes an affirmation and support for me.

The program has a faculty member who is a very strong advocate for family life and makes this very clear. For example, the faculty members let the students out early for Halloween so those who were parents could take their children trick-or-treating. In addition, Lauren recalled:

> Two days before the election, our son was sick, so my husband stayed home with my child and I went to work and had a long day. Everyone in the class needed to go vote. The class time ends at 7:30 and the polls closed at 7:30. Our professor let us out of class at 6:30 so we could go vote.

As a Black woman, Lauren feels very welcomed in the space (class), and she is happy not to be the only Black woman in her cohort. There is another Black woman and a third woman of color, which makes it a good experience; one of these women is also a mother.

Lauren identified the hardest part of being a mother and a doctoral student as trying to juggle everything. She wants to give her child her full attention; however, she also has to do homework. She stated that the desire to finish her program is the source of her motivation to persist. She explains, "It is like when you really start a program, you're really excited about it and you will hopefully put some things in place to maintain your excitement." Now, however, she is at a point where she's ready to be done.

From Lauren's perspective, being a doctoral student is not the hardest thing she has ever done in her life, but it is challenging to find a place where she is able to fit it into her life. She

works to be able to manage various aspects of her life successfully while still focusing on taking care of herself. She identifies taking care of herself as her number one priority, and notes that having people check in and constantly ask how she is doing helps her persist. Her partner is instrumental in keeping her motivated and she has amazing staff members who are also very supportive. Her excitement about her topic also helps her persist through her program.

Sankofa: Reaching Back and Giving Advice

When I asked Lauren what advice she would give Black mothers considering enrolling in a doctoral program at a predominantly White institution, she stated:

> To know what journey they are on. Know that if you decide to pursue a doctoral degree then you can do it. There are not many Black women with doctoral degrees. So you will need to know where your support comes from and also know that support may not come the same way for you as it might for others.

Lauren would also tell potential mothers to "suck it up" and know that pursuing a doctoral degree is an individualized process. She also states that your advisor, your dissertation chair, and your committee can only get you so far, and *you* have to finish. She believes in the importance of having tough conversations with your partner so you can recognize any limitations that may hinder you from persisting through your doctoral program. Additionally, Lauren believes that if you have to let go of some professional development opportunities in order to finish the degree, you should do so, and know that it is only temporary. Finally, she says to know yourself and know how to check in with yourself when you need to.

Developing Theme from Lauren's Story: High-Achieving Black Mama

Most of Lauren's story centers being Black and high achieving. She often talked about her experiences of being Black and high achieving through the lens of being a girl. She was

considered high achieving throughout her secondary and post-secondary experiences. As a mother, Lauren believes it is important to place her children in certain environments for learning. She believes that immersing children in many different activities will help them to develop holistically, which will ultimately lead to high achievement.

Kimberly

Kimberly grew up in a two-parent household. Her father was in the military and her mother also worked full-time. She considered her family to be working class. She described her father as an alcoholic who was abusive, and whose drinking resulted in a lot of traumatic experiences for her.

Kimberly has only one brother but her extended family is huge; her mother is one of 15 children, and as a child she was always surrounded by family. Kimberly grew up in predominantly White communities. She moved around a lot due to her father being in the military, which she says helped her learn how to adapt.

Kimberly grew up in the church. In her community, after church they often had a Black educator speak to them about the importance of education. Those talks helped Kimberly decide to go to college; she is the first in her family to attend college.

Kimberly went to college immediately after high school. After arriving she experienced significant health issues that led to her leaving after the first semester. As a first-generation college student, she did not know how to navigate the college system, specifically the withdrawal process. She recalled:

> I mean, I was like legit did not know how to navigate the college system. So I got sick, and I told my parents, like, I don't know how to do a medical withdrawal. And they couldn't help me. I didn't do any of the required stuff that you're supposed to do.

After Kimberly left school, she returned home to what she described as “dramatic circumstances.” She became pregnant with her first child at the age of 19. After she got pregnant, she told herself she needed to figure out a way to get an education so she could take care of her child. She went to a vocational college and became a medical assistant, a career she worked in for about three years.

While working as a medical assistant, one of the doctors, who was also a professor at the local medical school, often talked to her about going back to college. The doctor convinced her to attend community college while she was still working as a medical assistant. Because she was a single parent, she had to keep working full time, and had to take classes during her lunch break and in the evening. When her son was about four years old she decided to transfer to a four-year university. By that time she was able to understand how to navigate the system, and she completed her undergraduate degree.

Kimberly’s family had strong values around work. Her mother worked at the post office for 20 years, and after her father got out of the military he always had a job. She stated:

> So there’s a huge push and emphasis on you have to do good work. Anywhere you go, leave it better than when you came. So that was what really pushed me, and even some of the religious understandings, like if you don’t work you don’t deserve to eat, so that type of idea.

Kimberly reported that the mentality of hard work was ingrained in her and helped her persist through her education. Her mother did not have a college education but received various promotions at the post office, demonstrating that she knew the value of hard work and persistence.

Becoming a Mother

Kimberly describes her family as having strong gender roles. She notes:

> Women in my family are like, you cook. You do cleaning. You are very nurturing. You take care of everybody's kids. When I was in middle school, I was taking care of everybody kids. So they were very gendered roles and a huge emphasis on hospitality from a very gendered perspective. Blackness, being a woman, my family are all very matriarchal.

Despite these gender roles, however, Kimberly described her mother, grandmother, and aunts as strong, independent Black women. She reported that her mother always emphasized the need to be very independent, strong, and self-reliant. This message was often contrasted with the expectations for White women. From her mother's perspective, White women needed men and based every decision on what men wanted. Her mother would often tell her, "Black women don't have that privilege, so Black women have to make sure that they can take care of themselves and make sure that they can take care of the kids they are responsible for."

Kimberly describes how her family took care of all the kids in the extended family. For example, she stated:

> So even like within our family, one of my cousins went to prison for about 13 years, and she had several kids. And we said our little cousins are not going to the foster care system, because we take care of our own.

The role of the Black women whom Kimberly grew up with was governed by very traditional gendered norms. It took her a long time to learn that not everyone grew up accepting these norms, and to recognize that other Black women held different views.

Being a mother is one of Kimberly's favorite things, and she identifies motherhood as a high priority and a huge part of her identity. Her son is now 14 and she also has a three-year-old daughter. She gave birth to her daughter right before her qualifying exams and is currently expecting her third child.

Kimberly says she loves children and loves being a mother. She also loves to watch her children grow and develop, and she is determined to invest in them and nurture them the same way her mother and grandmother nurtured her. She reported that when she was younger, she had stated, "I'm going to have a big family with seven kids or whatever, but I'll be satisfied with three." Kimberly took in one of her nieces when a family member got into trouble and was unable to care for her child, and the niece is staying with her temporarily.

For Kimberly, being a Black mother means both having high expectations and providing strong support. She reflected:

> I think that like for my kids sometimes, I see them go to other spaces where their identities and values and things are really not affirmed, or even people just have low expectations in general. So I feel like it is my duty and my responsibility to keep those expectations really high for my kids, but also be there to support [them].

Being a Black mother gives Kimberly a sense of urgency about the importance of teaching her kids life skills. She has deviated from some of the gender norms with her son and is teaching him how to cook, clean, and sew. Additionally, Kimberly believes that as a Black mother she is responsible for making sure her children, and particularly her son, understand the dynamics at play in their identities with regard to race, gender, and class and also as whole people.

Kimberly describes her style of mothering as one of high expectations and a lot of nurturing and support. She believes being present in her children's lives is very important:

> My mom was very nurturing, but she also wasn't as present as I preferred her to be. My mom had to work multiple jobs. She worked the night job, and she worked the day job, so that limited her engagement in my life.

Kimberly is very intentional about being involved in her children's lives. She loves talking to her son about everything that happened to him that day. Kimberly interacts differently with her two children because of their age difference. With her son, she is very engaged, but she does not force her views on him. She wants him to be able to form his own thoughts. She often gives her son books about famous Black people, and will follow up by asking him for his thoughts about what he read. She wants him to have the freedom to think differently from the way she thinks, which is something she did not have growing up. Kimberly describes her mothering style as very proactive and resourceful, characteristics she believes came from her own mother. She did not discuss her daughter as much, as she is only three and developmentally she requires different kinds of interactions.

Becoming a Doctor

Kimberly became interested in teaching because of her professors. Her professors were role models for her, they talked with her about the benefits of becoming a professor. Additionally, she recalls reading a newspaper article in high school in which the author had additional letter after their last name. That motivated her to want to go to college to earn letters after her name, even though she had no idea what they meant.

When Kimberly went back to college the second time, she considered the various careers that would fit the lifestyle she wanted to have. It is very important to her to be able to take care

of her kids. She does not like the idea of working a 9 to 5, Monday through Friday schedule; she wants more flexibility, with the ability to miss work or check on her kids if she needs to.

One of the professors who helped her become interested in teaching also talked to Kimberly about her own schedule as a faculty member:

> The professor was like, Oh, I come to campus three days a week. I'm here a half a day. Sometimes I have to go pick up my kids. Do different things [similar] or like that. I was like, Oh, so this is like a flexible schedule. I can do research, and I can get paid to think about the things I care about--it's a win.

Kimberly characterizes her experience in her doctoral program as being Black in White spaces, and being a mom in a space where there are not many moms. She describes the experience as isolating in many different ways. A challenge for her is that her cohort members often think she is separating herself on purpose, but that is not how she sees it. For Kimberly, this is the result of the dynamic of being a mother and being Black. She tried to explain to her cohort that it is not that she is not interested in attending events with them or that she is just not showing up; it is that she can only show up at limited times because of her other priorities.

Kimberly has the support of a scholar circle for Black women who are pursuing doctoral degrees. The scholar circle is not in her department, but the members support each other and many of them have kids. It helps her feel a sense of belonging because the women in the scholar circle understand what it is like to be a Black mother in an academic space. Kimberly reflected on the value of the scholar circle:

> So, in that space, it was a counterspace for me because of White people. In my doctoral program they did not understand me or how I was functioning. But in my sister circle,

> they understood me and they would be like, well, bring your daughter or bring your son, that sort of thing.

Kimberly is also involved in professional associations where she is with other Black women who also have children. This engagement helps her normalize her life. She states, "seeing those other black women in other spaces helped me to see the future" of where she could be in 10 to 15 years.

Kimberly identifies her support system as her husband and the scholar circle for Black women. She is also active in her sorority, which was the first place she was able to meet a Black professor. Her sorority sisters have been a great support for her and will show up for things. For example, she stated, "If I get a flat tire [and] my husband isn't available, I will call my sorority."

Kimberly's husband is her primary support; he honors her time and gives her the space to do her doctoral work. She explained:

> For example, if our daughter is sick and can't go to daycare, we will split the time between who is going to be home with her. So for him, he knows I don't have anywhere to be because I am working on my dissertation, he still takes half a day off, and then I will have a half a day to work on my dissertation. He's very intentional about supporting me and making sure that I can still pursue a lot of professional opportunities.

Kimberly identified resourcefulness as one of her strengths. She believes that this comes from her experience as a single mother, and says she has been able to apply it across her life. Kimberly also considers herself a connector who likes to help people along the way. She's very keen on taking care of her physical and mental health, and will visit a therapist if she needs to. She reports, "I take advantage of the counseling thing on campus, and I always tell people, if

they need to go talk to somebody, do it, because it's great." Kimberly describes herself in three words as resourceful, resilient, and a giver.

Sankofa: Reaching Back and Giving Advice

When I asked Kimberly what advice she would give Black mothers considering enrolling in a doctoral program at a predominantly White institution, she responded:

> Find that counterspace. Find a group of Black moms; I think it needs to be specific to your race. Find a space of people that get you and understand you, and you don't have to explain, you don't have to give people books so they can have a conversation with you. Also, see your time as valuable. Be strategic on how your time is being used; it can put you at an advantage that some of your peers may not have to think about. And I think it's set up for success. Time management and being productive is what I think about as an identity of a mother. Think about being a mother as you're a force [to be reckoned with], and being that makes it an advantage rather than an obstacle.

Developing Theme for Kimberly's Story: The Matriarch

Throughout Kimberly's story she reflected on how fulfilling it is for her to take care of others. Growing up with her extended family, Kimberly would often care for many of her family members. She saw her mother and grandmother take care of other family members' children, so to her that was the right thing to do.

Kimberly described becoming a mother as one of the best things that ever happened to her. She lists motherhood as one of her favorite things. Currently, she is caring for a family member's child because the parent is in prison, and her family does not believe in letting family members go into the foster care system. She believes as a Black mother she is responsible to

make sure her children understand all of their identities. She describes her style of mothering as nurturing and supportive.

As a doctoral student Kimberly believes it is important to find space where people understand you. She believes being at a predominantly White institution you have to find counterspace. She finds her counterspace in a sister circle and her sorority, among women who themselves take on the characteristics of matriarchs, and who are very nurturing and supportive of Kimberly.

Alexis

Alexis, an only child from Pensacola, Florida, grew up in a multi-generational household with her mother, grandmother, and grandfather. Her mother worked as a certified nurse's assistant and always stressed to Alexis the importance of education. Alexis was enrolled in private school from grades two to seven, then switched to public school when her family could no longer afford the cost of private school.

Alexis received many messages from her mother and grandmother when she was growing up that centered on being Black, but fewer about what it meant to be a Black girl or Black woman. She felt as though her mother and grandmother tried to protect her from feeling different about being a Black girl in white space. Alexis explained:

> I feel like I didn't get those messages a lot. It was almost as if they kind of wanted to tell me that I was different, but didn't really want burst my bubble because I was at a private school where there were not a lot of black people there, and I feel like my mom tried to do a good job with me.

Alexis recalled how one of her uncles, whom she described as always getting in trouble and constantly being arrested, was instrumental in a different way in helping her recognize how others looked at her differently in terms of race. She noted:

> He picked on me because all I had was White friends, because I went to a White school. He called me "the Black girl in the Limited Two catalogue" because there was always one Black girl. And he would be like, that's you, the Black girl in the Limited Two catalog. He picked on me about that.

As Alexis got older, the messages she received about race became the familiar ones within the Black community about the need to work twice as hard and be twice as good to achieve the same success as White people. She reflected:

> So my mom, now that I look back, it was an interesting perspective because she worked to put me in White spaces, because in her experience White spaces were the spaces with resources. I went to a predominantly White private school, and then I was switched to a public school that was majority White.

Although Alexis's mother stressed the importance of going to a four-year college, Alexis wanted instead to go to a community college and work for a telemarketing company that paid about $15 an hour, as most of her friends were doing. Eventually, however, she applied to Florida State University and was initially denied admission. She also applied to the University of South Florida. As a first-generation college student, she didn't understand the college application process. Alexis stated, "USF did all of their communications electronically, so like I never realize I was accepted [into school] for basically a long time."

After waiting for so long to see if she was accepted into college, her mother called Florida State University. She was connected to a man who spoke with Alexis over the phone

about an alternative admissions program for first-generation, low-income students. After speaking with him, Alexis decided to apply and was accepted into the program.

Although Alexis did not receive many messages about being a Black woman while she was growing up, during her undergraduate years she learned a lot about being a Black woman. At Florida State she had mentors and joined organizations that focused on Black women and learning about Blackness. The information she learned from these sources helped shaped her understanding of what it means to be a Black woman in today's society.

Becoming a Mother

Alexis, who has a four-year-old daughter and is expecting a baby boy, describes being a mother as very stressful. For Alexis, being a mother is a big deal because of the example her own mother set. The message Alexis received from her mother, which is imprinted on her way of mothering, is that being a mother requires giving your life to that role.

Because of this message, when she first found out she was pregnant with her daughter, Alexis recalls:

> I was freaking out. I talked to my best friend, and she was like, you are acting like you're 16 and you are 25 with a master's degree. You have a whole job, and you need to simmer down. I was like, oh, yeah, you're right. It was just, just being a mom was such a big thing, like a big responsibility.

In addition to the responsibilities all mothers face, being a Black mother carries additional responsibilities. For Alexis, being a Black mother adds another layer to motherhood. She explained:

> I was speaking with my advisor the other day, and I was telling her, I was like, you know, I was like, she's a White woman, and I am like, you try to get your kids to school and . . .

> there are so many things that I have to think about. I'm like, when I drop my daughter off at daycare, I have to think about, is she going to be the only Black girl? Like there are just all these extra things I have to think about, and I feel like White moms roll up to the daycare and be like, let me enroll my daughter here because the teachers are going to look like her.

Alexis does not want her daughter to have to figure out who she is as a Black girl/woman later in life, when she goes off to college. She teaches her daughter about Black leaders because she wants her daughter to realize the greatness of her Blackness early. Alexis traveled to Ghana last year and had a great experience. As a result of this experience, she is teaching her daughter an alphabet in a different language. She wants her daughter to know that it is okay to be a girl, and it is beautiful to be a Black girl. She is very intentional about purchasing dolls. She wants the dolls to be representative of what her daughter looks like. Additionally, she is very intentional about how her daughter wears her hair. She wants her daughter to wear hairstyles that are primarily considered Black hairstyles.

In addition to reflecting on the challenges she faces raising a Black daughter, Alexis describes how the violence against Black boys portrayed in the media affects her as a mother-to-be of a Black son. This reality hit her when her university brought Anthony Ray Hinton to campus for a program:

> Anthony Ray Hinton served 28 years on death row for a crime he didn't commit. He talked about [how] the police didn't care if he did it or not, but it was because he was Black, he was picked to take the rap for somebody else. So it wasn't that he did anything wrong or it wasn't even that he was in the wrong place at the wrong time; he was just Black. At that moment it hit [me] that I am carrying a Black son who will face those

> realities, but not so much for my daughter because I don't see Black girls as prevalent in the media; it also seems like it is safer for her.

When I asked Alexis to describe her style of mothering, she responded, "a lot of my mom." She feels that within the Black community, kids are taught not to ask questions, but noted that her mother always tried to answer her questions. Doing so peaked her curiosity, which later in life allowed her to think critically. She described her mother as being there for every single thing and being very supportive. Alexis has adopted all of these characteristics in her own style of mothering.

Becoming a Doctor

When asked why she decided to enter a doctoral program, Alexis replied:

> I had a mentor in undergrad and grad school that had two daughters and was married. She always would talk about going wanting to go back and get her doctoral degree but was unable to do so because she could not fit it in her life. She spoke about the balancing act and how she could not do the fourth job (doctoral study). She encouraged me to start a doctoral degree before I had children.

Although Alexis planned to heed the advice of her mentor, life happened. She was working full time when she found out she was pregnant. As soon as she found out, she began strategizing about her next steps. She recalls reading an article about not making rash decisions within the first month or so after having a baby and she decided to take that advice. She waited until her baby was older and decided to look into doctoral programs.

Alexis decided to apply to a few different programs. One day, Alexis was in a Facebook group in which a faculty member posted about a program she had applied to. Alexis decided to apply, and the next thing she knew, she was invited for an interview. She went to the interview

having given herself *the* pep talk to prepare for being the only Black woman in the interview, and she arrived ready to be treated as the token Black woman. To her surprise, when she entered the room she saw three other Black women who were also there for interviews, and half the people in the room were Black!

Alexis didn't know what was going on or what to think about the situation because it was very different from what she had experienced in the past. Moreover, she learned that seven of the 10 current students in the program were Black women. The interview was a great experience for her. She stated, "it was just that experience and the interactions with Black women at the visiting day weekend made me say, okay, this is something that I could do. And if I'm going to do this—this seems like the place that I need to be." To see so many Black women in that space affirmed for Alexis that she was making the right choice, and that she had what it takes to earn a doctorate.

Alexis identifies her goal of finishing her doctoral degree as the source of her motivation to persist through her program, and notes that she is ready to be done. She also stated that because she is a first-generation college student who is about to receive a doctoral degree, she is setting a great example for her children and other family members.

Alexis reports that she has never encountered any negative experiences related to race or gender in her doctoral program. Most of the spaces she is in are Black spaces populated predominantly by Black women, which is very different from her undergraduate and previous graduate experience. Alexis is very intentional about reaching out to and making connections with Black women outside of her department as well. Overall, she describes the environment of her doctoral program as very supportive.

Additionally, Alexis has a strong support system that helps her persist through her doctoral program. She identifies her support system as her cohort and the other Black women in her program, as well as her advisor. Her advisor also has children, which has helped them establish a close connection.

I asked Alexis to describe the strengths, skills, and other attributes she possesses that she believes have helped her persist through her doctoral program. In response, she referenced her ability to balance and organize all the numerous things that are happening in her life. Additionally, Alexis is perceptive about how she shows up in different spaces. She understands what it means for everyone to have their own journey. Finally, Alexis describes herself in three words as a mother, scholar, and educator.

Sankofa: Reaching Back and Giving Advice

The advice Alexis would give to Black mothers considering enrolling in a doctoral program at a predominantly White institution would be to evaluate the support system. Support can come from faculty, classmates, or one's home tribe (family). Alexis explains that having help present is beneficial to success as both a mother and a doctoral student.

Developing Theme for Alexis's Story: Token Black Girl

Much of Alexis's story focuses on how she was intentionally placed in White spaces and often tokenized as a Black girl. Growing up with a single mother and her grandmother, she was placed in white schools and socialized in white spaces. Her mother equated whiteness with the availability of better resources. In college, Alexis attended a predominantly White institution, where she learned what it meant to be Black and what it means to be a woman in today's society.

When Alexis became a mother, much of her mothering style was similar to her own mother's approach. However, as a result of her experiences growing up, she decided to teach her

kids about their Blackness before they got older. She does not want her kids to have to learn about their Blackness in college, like she did.

When she applied to her doctoral program at a predominantly White institution, Alexis was prepared to be the token Black girl. She made up in her mind that she was going to have to play that role, but to her surprise she did not. Alexis was delighted to discover how many other Black women are enrolled in her program.

Carla

Born to a single mother after her father passed away several months before she was born, Carla grew up in Dayton, Ohio. Carla has a younger brother who grew up in the same household. During her childhood her family moved around a little, but other than that she described her childhood as "pretty stable."

Carla was involved in numerous school and community activities at an early age. She describes a pivotal example of her community engagement:

> I was involved in the community center growing up, and that's where I got my first job. In our city, there was a program, a youth program funded by a grant. If you signed up for this kind of program, even at the age of 13 or 14, and completed about 20 hours a week you got a stipend at the end of the summer. I was assigned to Leslie Community Center my first year, and after that, I worked with them I would say from eighth grade until high school. So after my first year there, I was hired on and helped them make decisions on the next kids that will work there. The community center summer youth program, they would put 40 inner-city kids into a camp in the middle of nowhere in Ohio, it was like a leadership camp; there was swimming, arts and crafts, and no TV. There's no electronics, no TV; we just had to get to know everyone and learn communication skills and

leadership skills. I've been a part of that community for many years, and I still support the community center now.

Carla was constantly surrounded by family growing up, and her house was considered a safe haven in the neighborhood. Many kids her age or younger would come to her home because it was the "cool mom's" house. Her mother went to college when Carla was a child, and she would take Carla to class with her. She also remembers her mother being a bartender to make ends meet and to take care of Carla and her brother. Eventually her mother earned her cosmetology license, but she never completed her undergraduate degree.

Carla describes her community growing up as approximately 90% Black. There were about five White students in her high school classes and she only remembers growing up with one White girl. She recalls that her mother had a couple of White friends, but otherwise, until she went to college most of the people Carla knew were Black.

When she went to college, everything flipped: Carla's environment was now 90% White, and she had to figure out how to navigate that system. She had to think about where to go to church, where to get her hair fixed, and many other questions she had not had to think about previously. It was a significant culture shift for which she was not prepared. Carla reflected:

> I had to figure it out: How do I navigate the spaces? So I read a book that had something to do with chicken heads in the title; it was a crazy title. But it talked about how young Black women were always being groomed to be teachers. And I'm like, after reading that book, it made me say, Why is that? Are we somehow being groomed as children . . . like this is what we should do because this is what Black women are responsible for?

That message stuck with her, and Carla began to question why Black girls were so often groomed to be teachers. Growing up she had always wanted to become a teacher, and when she

went to college, she still wanted to be a teacher. However, after reading the book, she began to reflect more on the messages she had received growing up.

Carla began to think about the things society told her she should do as a Black woman. For example, she described a message she had received about marriage:

> I always knew it was different for me; I knew compared to my brother that it was okay for him to bring home a girl who was not Black. And I don't know why and I never expected him to marry anyone that was Black, but I knew it was expected of me. Not that anyone ever said it; I just felt the expectations.

Growing up with a single mother, Carla felt she did not have a model of what marriage should be. So she turned to the media as a way of figuring out what it looks like for a Black woman to go to college and to get married. She stated:

> Even though I always thought about going to college growing up, I think *A Different World* got me all hyped for college. The Huxtables told me about marriage. I remember even telling my mom, this stuck with me, I was probably a sophomore in high school and I was like, What do I need a husband for? I can do it by myself. I can do this. I can have kids. I can have a job. I can do this all on my own. And she was like, This is not how it's supposed to be; this is not how it's supposed to go. There are options.

Carla began to question why she would need a partner. She had seen her mother be a single mom, raise kids, and handle everything. She also saw her grandmother be a single mother and raise kids. After the conversation Carla had with her mother about not needing a partner, Carla's mother talked with her about various routes and options for raising a family. Carla recalls her mother saying, "You don't have to do it alone. You have options; there are choices. I would

love for your father to be here helping raise you and your brother." When her mother told her there were other options, it dawned on Carla that there were different ways of having a family.

Becoming a Mother

Carla became a mother at the age of 35, after two years of marriage. Before she became pregnant she told her husband about her life expectations. Carla recalled, "I told him, I can't have kids. I still got a loan for school, and one day I will take care of my mom."

Carla had previously been diagnosed with Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS), a medical condition she was told would prevent her from having children. After the first year of marriage, Carla switched to a new doctor to see if there was any possibility that she might be able to have children. Her new doctor was a Black woman who encouraged and reassured her that there was hope for having children. The doctor put her on a new medication and told her to lose weight, and within months she was pregnant with boy/girl twins.

Carla's twins are now five years old, and she describes being their mom as a full-time job. Carla states, "I often get asked, How do you handle having twins? I reply, you just handle it; just like you handle one, you handle two."

When Carla became a mother, she had to learn how to balance marriage and motherhood. She recalled:

> Once the kids came, I had to figure out how marriage and motherhood would work.
>
> When I was on maternity leave, I was like, Okay, am I supposed to be cooking food, am I supposed to be cleaning the house, am I supposed to be taking care of the kids? How am I supposed to do all these things when I could barely take a shower?

Carla had to figure out what all the new expectations were now that she was married with kids. She began to surround herself with other mothers who could help, support, and guide her

on how to balance marriage and motherhood. When I asked Carla how it feels to be a Black mother, she replied:

> [Being] a Black mother means that there are certain things that I'm hyper-aware [of]. I have to be mindful of how [my children] present themselves and how they, even going to school, how they present themselves at school. For example, they'll come home and say, Well, such-and-such said this or such-and-such used this word. I tell them, Well, this is what they said and no, absolutely not, you cannot say it. They don't understand why they can't say it. It is about just being socially aware of who they are. Where they are. What we do. And especially as little black boys in this time frame, how you present yourself and represent yourself in different settings where you're always worrying about that.

Carla wants her kids to be able to navigate the spaces they are in. She questions whether she can take her kids back to the neighborhood where she grew up, and whether they would be able to navigate it. She wondered:

> Will my people in my old neighborhood know what they're talking about? Will my kids be able understand other people when they use their slang? Just recognizing and being able to code switch between neighborhoods is what I want them to be able to do.

Carla's kids do not attend a very diverse school and she often has conversations with them about how to navigate that space. For example, she discussed with her daughter why she could not wear certain bows in her hair and why it is important not to let anyone touch her hair. She wants her kids to know how to cope when they are in different environments.

Carla also wants her kids to understand that there are different expectations when they are at school and when they are at home. For example, Carla describes herself as having to be hypersensitive and hyper-aware of what is said and what is given to her kids at school. She

states, “once someone gave [her daughter] a doll, and I told him, Thanks, but yeah, I need to have the doll that looks like her.” She believes it is important for her kids to see themselves in books, characters, and toys, and to know that it’s okay to be beautiful brown-skinned children.

Carla describes her style of mothering as a little bit of her mother’s style mixed with her own style, which she has developed along the journey of motherhood. She also noted that her mothering style is different from that of some of her friends with kids around the same age:

> I’m the one that my children will get pop[ped] with a wooden spoon. I’m okay with that wooden spoon, and they will get pop[ped]. I think I’m a little hard on my daughter, but my husband is a bit hard on my son. That’s just the expectations of this is how you act when you leave this house, and you can’t talk back to me.

Carla and her husband strategize about which conversations each of them should have with their son and daughter. According to Carla, this choice is strategic because she has a theory that women listen to men much more than they listen to other women.

Becoming a Doctor

When Carla was pregnant with the twins, her supervisor at the time approached her about applying to a doctoral program that would be a good fit for her lifestyle. Additionally, she was approached by a professor in that program who told her the program was designed for working mothers and professionals, and encouraged her to look into applying. Carla decided to take their advice and pursue this path. She learned that the program required two years of coursework, including summers, followed by the dissertation. She told herself, “Yes, I can do it.”

Carla went to the first orientation meeting and fell in love with the program. Her doctoral program is grounded in a social justice perspective on higher education. She described it as follows:

> There is a lot of historical stuff, but it also encompasses all the counter-narrative to what we see in here every day. It requires me to go to campus 2 to 3 times out of this semester and the other times are online.

During the time she is away in the summer to attend classes on campus, Carla has to coordinate with everyone in her support system to arrange who is going to help out with the twins. Between help from her mother and her husband, she has been able to fulfill the summer residency requirements without any problem.

When I asked Carla about her experience in the program, she described it as being a great escape from everyday life tasks. In her program, she is often affirmed about her scholarship. Five of the 17 students in her cohort are women. Additionally, all of her female professors are Black. She reflects:

> Being a part of this program is amazing. And I would have to say with my research and my dissertation proposal looking at African-American vice presidents, [Black women professors] asking me, Have you thought of this? Have you thought of that? And they're bringing people to the table; they're bringing the concept to the table. They are knowledgeable, they're affirming. Like, for example, they tell me, yes, you need to review this, even though it's not the first [and] it won't be the last in looking at this population. It's all very affirming.

Carla has talked with her peers about their experiences in the doctoral program, and across the board, everyone feels the same about the program. However, she has different experiences outside of the program. Many of her work colleagues are enrolled in other programs and appear not to be happy with them, so she feels like there is a bit of jealousy because she is pleased with her program. She is hesitant to share at work what she is studying or even that she is

pursuing a doctoral degree. She tries to ignore the negative feedback she gets from colleagues at work about her studies.

However, her doctoral cohort, or at least the group she refers to as the "Fab Five," gives her the support and affirmation she needs. Additionally, her professors have all been accommodating in helping her navigate doctoral study. Carla, along with some of the other members of her cohort, are able talk to their professors about the imposter syndrome and their constant questioning of whether they are good enough. The professors in her program affirm that they are good enough to persist through the program.

Some of Carla's motivation to persist comes from the fact that her husband started a five-year program in engineering and finished before she did, so it has turned into a healthy competition. Also, one of her former supervisors was denied a promotion because they did not have a doctoral degree, which made her want to pursue a doctorate. She states:

> I tell myself that I have the ability to get this doctoral degree. If they are gonna count me out [they] better make sure is good, because I'm not going to give anyone any excuse to count me out.

When I asked Carla to describe herself in three words, she stated:

> I win people over. I love being that type of girl. I love to be other people's hype man. I love to be a cheerleader to others. I like to help others be successful in whatever they want to do. If you're going to be a garbage truck driver, all right, let's go. What city do you want to be in? Do you want to be an electrician or do you want to be able to pick up the garbage? What do you want to do? Let me help you with that.

Carla also describes herself as being a great communicator and very strategic, with an ability to see multiple sides of the same story. Lastly, she loves to have fun. She describes herself

as a giraffe, noting, “I always see, if I look up I can see the big picture but [I’m] never afraid to get down in the details.”

Sankofa: Reaching Back and Giving Advice

When I asked Carla what advice she would give to Black mothers who were considering enrolling in a doctoral program in higher education at a predominantly White institution, she responded:

> Make sure that you’re on the same page as whoever’s helping. Make sure that you have your support system on the same page about expectations of what is needed. Communicate with the program to decide if that program is right for you. Interview the program like you are interviewing somebody for a job. Ask them about different topics that interest you; you want to find out if you can make it there. You want to know if they have support internal and external to the institution. Lastly, figure out how to maximize your time.

Developing Theme for Carla’s Story: The Cheerleader

Much of Carla’s story revolved around her helping and supporting others. Growing up, she would volunteer at a community center to help other kids. Throughout her educational career she has always supported others and helped them reach their potential. When she became a mother, she became more like a cheerleader. She believes in being there to support her twins through their development and self-expression. She describes herself as a “hype-man” who wants to help people become the best at whatever they choose to become.

Summary

The purpose of these narratives was to illuminate Black mothers’ experiences as mothers and doctoral students. The narratives identify the strengths, attributes, and skills each woman

possesses that motivate her to persist through her doctoral study. Additionally, the chapter intertwines an investigation into the messages participants received as children about race and gender with an understanding of the impact those messages have on them in the present as mothers and doctoral students at predominantly White institutions.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I have identified three core themes from the data that synthesized the findings in response to the research question. These themes are: 1) Socialization, 2) Development of resiliency and self-worth, and 3) Utilization of familial, personal, and academic supports. The themes capture the unique findings regarding the experiences of Black mothers in doctoral programs in higher education with a focus in student affairs at predominantly White institutions.

Core Themes

Socialization

All of the participants identified the influence of messages they received in childhood in shaping the people they are today. The women credited the positive experiences they had growing up with contributing to their success as mothers and doctoral students. They used words and phrases like “instilled greatness,” “strength,” “hard worker,” and “just do it” to describe these positive messages. In large part, their mothers were the source of these messages. Even the participants who grew up in two-parent homes recalled that most of the positive messages came from their mothers. Many of the participants acquired their “just do it” attitude from watching their mothers attend school meetings, take care of their immediate family, take care of extended family members, work, and attend school. This attitude has equipped them as adults with the tools to persist through their doctoral programs. It has also helped them navigate being a mother and being in a doctoral program successfully.

Previous literature has often portrayed Black mothers through the lens of societal stereotypes, viewing them as welfare queens, and lazy (Donovan, 2011). Moreover, previous research depicted Black mothers in the 1990s as single, loud and unruly, dysfunctional, nonproductive and inferior to the White family (Dickerson, 1995). Additionally, Rousseau (2013) found images of Black motherhood was manipulated to construct negative views of Black mothers during different social policy periods in the United States. However, the participants in this study have revealed the opposite of such portrayals. One of the core tenets of BFT draws attention to Black women's lived experiences as a foundation for making meaning and for developing a counter-narrative to the master narrative that views Black women in terms of deficits (Collins, 2009). The analysis of this study, through the lens of BFT, demonstrates how each of the Black mothers acquired the tools and skills needed to persist in her doctoral education.

All of the participants in the study stated their mother played a critical role in who they are today. The messages they received growing up assisted them in establishing their identity as a mother and in persisting through their doctoral programs. Several of the participants grew up in single-parent homes with their mother, while others grew up in multigenerational households or two-parent homes. Most literature has focused on Black mothers who are single mothers from a deficit perspective. Jenkins (2005) found the narratives of Black motherhood was that of poverty-stricken single mothers who raised kids who become a menace to society. Moreover, intensive mothering, seen as the ideal style of mothering, where the mother chooses to put her children's need above her own (Lynch, 2008) was not applicable to Black single mothers. Elliott et al. (2013) found that Black single mothers intensive mothering was not conducive with the constraints place on Black single mothers, instead it increased burdens, stress and hardships.

Additionally, single Black mothers were criticized as not being "good mothers" because they are often unable to support extracurricular activities, such as private tutoring and piano lessons for their children (Elliott et al., 2013). However, the participants in this study revealed the opposite of this narrative; four of the six participants grew up with single mothers. These participants' mothers placed them in different activities, such as community centers and different enrichment lessons, for extracurricular activities. The participant's mothers instilled resiliency and strength in the participants by often telling them growing up that "they were smart" and "they were great", which helped them successfully complete secondary and post-secondary education. This study illuminates the influence of the messages participants received from their parents in fostering persistence and success in being mothers and engaging in doctoral education.

Development of Resiliency and Self Worth

Many of the participants displayed resiliency in the ways they both mothered and persisted through their doctoral studies. Many of the women talked about creating a counter-narrative to the dominant societal narrative of being a Black mother by immersing their children in a variety of different experience, being a conscious and open-minded parent, and letting their children know that they are great. Being on open-minded parent, for many of the participants meant allowing the children to express themselves however they wanted to. Lastly, many of the participants talked about not imprinting gender roles on their children and allowing them to freely become and develop into who they want to be.

Previous researchers have found that Black mothers who are graduate students encounter both microaggressions and macroaggression in the context of their graduate programs (Tucker, 2016). The participants in this study were able to successfully navigate such microaggressions and macroaggressions by being present in class discussions, offering their perspective in class

discussions, and being hard workers. Being present in class from their perspective was being able to show up and contribute to class in a thoughtful manner. Most of the participants were able to offer their perspective in class discussion from their salient identities of being Black, being a woman and being a mother. Most of the participants characterized hard work in their doctoral program by going above and beyond what was asked of them in their courses. For the participants, these behaviors were considered essential in order to persist through their doctoral program. Black feminist scholarship identifies resilience as an innate strength of Black women (Collins, 2009); these behaviors proved to be innate strengths that helped Black women overcome barriers during their doctoral programs.

The participants in this study identified their strengths as being a scholar, an educator, loving, deliberate, thoughtful, resourceful, resilient, a giver, a good listener, hardworking, and positive. All of these were words the participants used to describe themselves; the most common words they chose were loving and hardworking. Being able to view themselves from this positive perspective has helped the participants to be effective in both their mothering and their doctoral studies.

Utilization of Familial, Social, and Academic Support

The establishment of support systems from family, social networks, and academic networks were essential to the participants' persistence in their doctoral programs. All of the participants identified family, and more specifically their spouse, as a vital source of support. All of the participants in the study were involved in an intimate relationship. They all indicated that their partners motivated them to begin and persist through their doctoral studies. Additionally, many of the participants received help with childcare from their mothers and some from the

participants' fathers while they completed assignments, went away to attend week-long summer intensive courses, or completed other work related to their doctoral study.

Black feminist thought rely on two types of knowing that derive from Black women's experience, knowledge and wisdom (Collins, 2009). The use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims is another tenet of BFT (Collins, 2000). Black women validate each other experiences through dialogue and storytelling (Collins, 2009). Many of the participants in this study emphasized the importance of the community they had created with other Black women. Most of the participants looked to other Black women for advice. Patton (2009) found that Black women in higher education building coalitions with other women of color for support when navigating oppressive and discriminatory environments. Many of the participants have mentors who have helped support and guide them through their doctoral studies.

Summary of Core Themes

The findings in this study responded to the research question: How do race and gender impact the experiences of Black mothers who are students in student affairs/higher education doctoral programs? Focusing on the factors that motivated and influenced their persistence through their doctoral studies, the three themes illuminate how race and gender affected the participants' socialization from childhood, influencing their self-perception as Black mothers and as doctoral students.

The themes make it clear that race and gender were impactful in the lives of the participants. Their socialization was revealed in their styles of mothering as well as in the attributes and skills they possess. These childhood messages helped shaped their self-concepts, values, and expectations related to race and gender. The messages allowed the participants to

reflect on who they are as mothers and doctoral students, which yielded positive results through their doctoral programs.

These mothers possess high levels of resiliency and positive self-images, both of which helped them succeed in their doctoral programs. The support they received from their partners, parents, doctoral advisors, and faculty reinforced their own motivation to persist through their education. Which, confirms Harper (2010) anti-deficit framework inquires that allows students of color to be viewed through lenses of strengths versus limitations. The three themes revealed the participants did not look at race and gender, or at motherhood, through a deficit lens. My interpretations of the data lead me to believe that being Black and being a mother in a doctoral program are assets, and that the participants are equipped with the tools and skills they need to be successful in their educational pursuits.

Implications

Black mothers in higher education are a great asset to the field of higher education. This study has provided evidence of the skills, characteristics, and attributes Black mothers possess. Black mothers in higher education may be able to create unique policies and practices related to the needs of Black mothers in doctoral programs at predominantly White institutions. Student affairs administrators, students, faculty, staff, and other stakeholders should consider these implications for the support of Black mothers in doctoral programs in higher education with a focus on student affairs.

Development of Additional Support Systems

All of the participants expressed the importance of having a support system to persist in their doctoral program. Most of the women created their support system organically. Student affairs program representatives, administrators, and faculty should provide Black mothers who

enroll in doctoral programs with intentional supports. For example, they can support Black mothers by creating and formally recognizing a Black Mothers Scholar Circle, similar to Sister Scholar Circles, in which Black women are situated and centered with other mothers who may share their experiences (Collier, 2017; Dorsey, 2011; Gaston, Porter & Thomas, 2007). This will give Black mothers additional support to persist through their doctoral programs. Support groups for women of color can make the difference between a student's success or failure (Carver, 2017).

Representation of Black Mothers

Recruiting and admitting Black mothers to pursue doctoral degrees in higher education with a focus on student affairs could support the persistence of those students and establish an academic support system. Additionally, recruiting Black faculty and staff who are mothers, and whose lived experiences may be similar to those of the Black mothers enrolled the doctoral programs, could provide a sense of community and belonging. These Black faculty and staff can offer perspectives on their own experiences at PWIs that may resonate with both current and prospective doctoral students who are Black mothers.

Building the Narrative of Black Mothers

The mothers in this study saw themselves through the lens of race and gender within the context of their doctoral program. However, many of them did not see themselves as mothers, or more specifically as Black mothers, in relation to their program. All of the participants demonstrated skills, characteristics, and attributes that challenge the master narrative about Black mothers.

Challenging racism, genderism and stigma related to being a Black mother can be an effective way of changing the narrative of Black mothers. One way to do this in higher

education is to recognize, acknowledge and celebrate the strengths, characteristics and attributes that Black mothers possess and validate and value their knowledge and experiences that they bring to the classroom in an academic setting. Including Black mothers in trainings related to diversity and inclusion and culturally competent practices is additional way for higher education to challenge the master narrative.

Celebrating Success

Celebrating the success of Black mothers who are striving toward academic success would foster a sense of agency for Black mothers in student affairs within higher education. Their success could be celebrated by nominating them for awards within professional conferences, programs, or any applicable award. Developing initiatives that are led by Black mothers who are persistent and successful in their doctoral programs could help student affairs faculty and administrators achieve a better understanding of the strengths this group of students possesses. Moreover, it could provide the field of higher education with a better understanding of the experiences of Black mothers who are in doctoral programs.

Teaching Black Mothers

Faculty members who teach Black mothers who are doctoral students in higher education at predominantly White universities can have significant impacts on the persistence and success of each student. Having the right mindset, is essential, knowing that Black mothers belong in the space may positively impact their success. Supporting Black mothers by assisting in the increase positive racial, gender, and mother identities will allow Black mothers to internalize a positive self-image that will help with persistence and success in their doctoral program. Setting high-expectations but with much support will allow for an excellent balance for Black mothers. All

too often, the images of Black mothers are met with negative and stereotypical images, which is often reinforced through media and life.

Establishing spaces, in the classroom that mirror positive images of Black mother's success stories will provide a space where Black mothers can see themselves as doctors. For example, having more faculty members who are Black mothers will allow Black mother doctoral students to see themselves through that lens. Black women overall in need for mentors (Patton, 2009; Reddick, 2011; Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2015). Having Black mother faculty can help support Black mother doctoral students with successfully navigating the doctoral experiences by passing down knowledge not traditionally passed down from other relationships within higher education (Patton, 2009; Tucker, 2016). Additionally, Black women need space, in community, that provides strength, comfort, and affirmation (Collier, 2017). Because Black mothers focus so much on taking care of their children, they need spaces that promote self-care. Faculty who teach Black mothers should support spaces where they can create community and practice self-care. This can be in form of an organization, program, or just physical space. For example, the University of Georgia's Griffin Campus offers students stress relief stations, where a professional message therapist is on site to offer free chair messages and stress relief care.

Lastly, have a strong sense of purpose for Black mothers that is liberating. Commit to seeing Black mothers as assets in your program and dismantle the stereotypical views of them. Patton (2009) recommended Black women build coalitions with other women of color to foster support, especially when navigating the oppression and discrimination encountered in an academic environment. I encourage faculty of all racial backgrounds to assist with building a coalition for Black mothers. One way to do this is to have faculty who have scholarship or professional practice in student development related to race and gender provide or develop a

training or mentorship on how to support Black mothers in doctoral programs in higher education at predominantly White institutions.

Creating a Pedagogy for Black Mothers

Listening to the voices of Black mothers in higher education could change the dominant narrative of Black mothers in fundamental ways. Higher education educators should consider adopting pedagogy and teaching practices that will enhance learning for Black mother doctoral students. This could be achieved through pedagogy, by creating an educational curriculum that centers Black mothers from an anti-deficit model. This pedagogy could consist of the deconstruction and analysis of an educational system that has based its narratives of Black mothers on a deficit model. Such a pedagogy could also alter and strengthen policies that are written from a non-deficit approach.

To create new knowledge and transform teaching with inclusion Black mothers in teaching practices must start with the deconstruction of Black womanhood and Black motherhood. For example, Heritage Knowledge in Action (HeKA) is an African-centered approach that describes what students need to know about their own heritage as opposed to the master narrative or cultural knowledge (King et al., 2019). HeKA is an approach that can be used as a pedagogy practice for faculty that can help support Black mother doctoral students. It provides a safe space for exploration and affirmation for identity, culture and heritage and also provides a liberating space (King et al., 2019). This approach can be used in higher education through teaching practices and policies that support the voices and value of Black mothers.

Hybrid Programs

The second shift for Black mothers refers to when they leave their responsibilities at work they have responsibilities of a second shift at home (Hochschild, 1989). Black mothers in

doctoral programs who are also working full-time or part-time are faced with time constraints and many responsibilities. Additionally, adding a doctoral degree to the plan for Black mothers can exacerbate time constraints and responsibilities. To assist Black mothers with these challenges, higher education programs should offer more hybrid programs. This will allow Black mothers to more effectively and efficiently manage their time with family, work and doctoral study.

Children of Black Mothers in Higher Education Doctoral Programs

Higher education professionals value and show a lifelong commitment to learning (Lehman & Krebs, 2018). All of the participants in this study ascribed to wanting the best for their children through continuous learning. They all defined the importance of their children to be holistically developed, not only academically but also with identity. All the participants have future plans of sending their children to college. Student affairs professionals value university life and tend to include their children into university life (Lehman & Krebs, 2018). Many of the participants described how they integrated their children into university life by attending athletic events, programs and visiting their office. With the integration of university life, the participants modeled for their children what success looks like, as successful mothers, students and workers. They demonstrated for the children on how to successfully navigate and balance the role of mother and doctoral student, through strength and resiliency, which broadens the children worldview. The strengths, skills, and attributes the participants embody are predictors of success not only for the participants but also for their children.

The Michelle Obamas and Beyoncé's of Higher Education

In Michelle Obama's book *Becoming*, she revealed lessons that create space for Black women to thrive in society. One of the lessons include having support from others. Obama

(2018) revealed a time when she was supported by her partner, she reflected that Barack was the voice telling her to just go for it, to erase the worries and go toward whatever she thought would make her happy. Like Michelle Obama, the participants lived experiences consisted of having a support system to help them be successful with motherhood and doctoral study. The participants revealed having the support system is essential to their success in navigating motherhood and doctoral studies at predominantly White institutions.

In popular culture, Beyoncé is redefining what it means to be a Black mother in society. Through her songs she celebrates Black women strength and resiliency. Through media and film Beyoncé disrupts stereotypes and traditional narratives of Black motherhood. Like Beyoncé, the participants is the study also disrupts the master narratives of Black motherhood by revealing what it is like to successfully navigate motherhood and doctoral studies.

Both Michelle Obama and Beyoncé are redefining what it is to be a Black working mother. Similarly, the participants in this study are redefining what is to be a Black mother pursuing doctoral studies at predominantly White institutions.

The Invisible "S"

Symbolically, just beneath each of the participants camisole lies an etched "S" for "Superwoman". Each of the mothers in this study represents strength, intelligence, confidence, will-power, ambition, and love. The participants are able to being superstar moms and superstar doctoral students, simultaneously. In doctoral programs, this group of students can be looked upon as s model for what is required to be successful in navigating and persisting through doctoral studies at predominantly White institutions.

Boundaries

This study explored the lived experiences of six Black women who are pursuing doctoral degrees in higher education with a focus in student affairs at predominantly White institutions. It is bound by one institutional type. Additionally, this study is bound by race, gender and mother identities.

Recommendations for Future Research

Literature related to the experiences of Black mothers in doctoral programs in higher education with a focus in student affairs at predominantly White institutions is limited. One way to gain a better and deeper understanding of the experiences of Black mothers in doctoral programs is to design studies that compare Black mothers at predominantly White institutions with those attending historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) or other minority-serving institutions. Such an investigation would offer more information about the level and type of support HBCUs and minority-serving institutions offer Black mothers in doctoral programs in higher education.

This study did not include mothers who are raising children without a partner while pursuing a doctoral education. Single mothers experience different challenges related to navigating graduate study (e.g., finding and paying for childcare, other financial challenges). Most of the research about single mothers is associated with the stereotypical images of Black motherhood (Haskins, 2009; Jenkins, 2005; Rosenthal & Lobel, 2016). Moreover, Haskins (2009) concluded in a study that of all the consequences of family dissolution that are harmful to Black families is the effect of lone parenting on the development of Black children. Including, fewer Black children would repeat a grade, be involved in violent acts, fewer smokers and fewer suicide attempts, if Black parents were married. There is a need to focus on single Black mothers

who are doctoral students in higher education programs at predominantly White institutions to change the master narratives of Black single mothers.

There is a need for specific research on Black mothers who are the first in their family to attend college. In the present study, five of the participants indicated that they were the first in the family to attend college. Being a first-generation college student presents a different set of challenges related to navigating the university environment. There is a lot of information available on Black students who are first-generation college students. Research on Black mothers in doctoral programs in higher education on a predominantly White campus who are also first-generation college students can provide insight into the specific needs of this population and help program administrators provide support for persistence and graduation.

Lastly, socioeconomic class was not a consideration in this study. There is a need for specific research to determine whether socioeconomic status plays a role in the experiences of Black mothers pursuing doctoral studies in higher education at predominantly White institutions. Most of the literature about Black mothers has focused on those in the lower class.

Conclusion

This study adds to the body of knowledge on the experiences of Black mothers in doctoral programs in higher education at predominantly White institutions. Black mothers possess many skills and strengths that help them overcome the obstacles they face as mothers and doctoral students. These skills and strengths support their academic success and their overall educational careers. The participants in this study confronted stereotypes, racism, and various other forms of oppression. Yet despite these challenges, they were able to persist through their doctoral programs while maintaining their commitment to their families.

The participants in this study have created new knowledge regarding the experiences of Black mothers in doctoral programs in higher education at predominantly White institutions. They have described how they were socialized and how the messages they received in childhood supported them through their education. The mothers illustrated how their resiliency and determination proved to be assets in helping them persist through their doctoral programs. Lastly, they established the importance of having a support system for maintaining their motivation and persistence throughout their doctoral program.

The findings of this study provide a greater understanding of the experiences of Black mothers in doctoral programs in higher education at predominantly White institutions. My hope is that administrators in student affairs and higher education will use this knowledge to better support Black mothers pursuing doctoral degrees. Additionally, I encourage them to draw on this understanding to inform the creation of policies and pedagogies, and to provide welcoming spaces for Black mothers who are doctoral students in higher education at predominantly White institutions.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Email for Distribution to Academic Institutions

Hello:

My name is Jennifer Mitchell, and I am a current doctoral candidate in Student Affairs Leadership at the University of Georgia. I am conducting a dissertation study on the experiences of Black mothers pursuing doctoral degrees in higher education or student affairs in predominantly White institutions across the U.S.

I am writing to ask for your help in recruiting Black mothers enrolled in doctoral degree programs in higher education or student affairs to participate in this study. If you are able to forward the study invitation flyer to your graduate student email listservs, it would be of great help.

What this study involves: This exploratory dissertation study consists of one 60-90 minute interview by Google Hangout, Skype, and phone (Via facetime) about the experiences of Black women who are both doctoral students and mothers.

Eligibility Criteria: Participants in this study must (a) identify as a mother, (b) self-identify as Black or African American, (c) be currently enrolled in a doctoral program in higher education or student affairs, (d) be employed full-time or part-time, (e) be involved in a romantic partnership, and (f) be raising at least one child 5 years of age or younger who lives in their home full-time.

Please feel free to distribute the attached invitation to your applicable listservs. Interested participants may contact me directly for further information.

Appendix B

Pre-screening Questionnaire

Q1 Are you currently enrolled in a doctoral program in higher education or student affairs?

o Yes

o No

Q2 If yes, at what institution are you currently pursuing your doctorate?

Q3 Are you employed full-time or part-time?

Q4 Are you currently a (biological or non-biological) mother who resides in the same home full-time as your child/children?

o Yes

o No

Q6 How do you identify your sex/gender?

o woman

o man

o transgender/non-binary

Q7 How many children do you have under the age of 18 living in the same residence as you?

Q8 Do you have at least one child 5 years of age or younger?

o Yes

o No

Q9 Are you involved in a romantic partnership?

o Yes

o No

Q10 Would you like to be contacted to potentially participate in this study?

o Yes

o No

Appendix C

Criteria

Participants in this study must (a) identify as a mother, (b) self-identify as Black or African American, (c) be currently enrolled in a doctoral program in higher education or student affairs, (d) be employed full-time or part-time, (e) be involved in a romantic partnership, and (f) be raising at least one child 5 years of age or younger who lives in their home full-time.

Appendix D

Interview Protocol

Study Title: **Strong Enough to Bear the Children, then Get Back to Business: The experiences of Black mothers who are doctoral students in higher education programs at predominantly White institutions.**

Purpose of Interview: The purpose of this interview is to explore the experiences of Black mothers who are doctoral students in student affairs/higher education through the lenses of race and gender.

1. Guarantee confidentiality of participant's responses.
2. Consent form overview.
3. Discuss the contact after the interview for a member check.
4. Ask participant if there are any questions before beginning interview.
5. Begin audio recorder now (Record start time): _____

Part I

Tell me about yourself

What is your family background?

Tell me about your childhood growing up as being Black and a girl?

What is one fond memory that you remember from your childhood?

How would you say your childhood experiences shaped who you are today?

How would you say race and gender shaped who you are today?

Part II

Tell me about being a mother.

What is a typical day like for you?

What does it mean to you to be a Black mother?

As a Black mother, what are some experiences you have had as it relates to race and gender?

How would you explain your style of mothering? Where did you get this style from?

What strengths, skills, and attributes do you possess?

Tell me about your doctoral program.

Why did you choose that program?

What motivated you to enroll in a doctoral program in higher education or student affairs?

What messages did you receive about your program from your faculty, advisors, and peers once you were enrolled in that program?

As a Black mother, what are some experiences you have had as it relates to race and gender in your doctoral study? Peers? Colleagues? Faculty? Advisors?

What motivates you to persist through your doctoral program?

Do you have a support system? If so, tell me how they support you.

What strategies have you used to overcome the challenges you have faced being a Black mother in a doctoral program?

If you can describe yourself in three words what would they be?

If you can give advice to Black mothers considering to enroll in a doctoral program in higher education or student affairs at a predominately White institution, what would it be?

Anything else you would like to share?

Appendix E

Participants' Overview Handout

Hello, my name is Jennifer Mitchell. I am a doctoral candidate in the Student Affairs Leadership program at the University of Georgia, and I am also a Black mother. Based on the answers to the prescreening questionnaire, you qualify to participate in this study.

I am interested in learning more about the experiences of Black women as mothers and doctoral students in higher education or student affairs programs. If you choose to be part of this study, you will participate in a 60-90 minute interview. The interview questions will invite you to reflect on your journey as a doctoral student and a mother, and to discuss how race and gender have impacted these experiences. You will have the choice of being interviewed by Google Hangout, Skype, or over phone (via facetime). Please note, the information you share in the interview will be kept completely confidential, that I will use a pseudonym instead of your real name and other identifying information about them will not be disclose, to maintain your privacy.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You can accept or decline my invitation and you will be free to drop out at any time during the study. If you are interested, the next step will be to set up a time to discuss further details of the study; at that time you may ask any questions or express any concerns you have about participation.

Thank you for your time and consideration.