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# Black women academicians speak out: race, class, and gender in narratives of higher education

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**Black women academicians speak out: Race, class, and gender in  
narratives of higher education**

by

**Sharon Louise Holmes**

**A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty  
in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of**

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**Major: Education (Higher Education)**

**Major Professor: Nancy J. Evans**

**Iowa State University**

**Ames, Iowa**

**1999**

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Sharon Louise Holmes  
has met the dissertation requirement of Iowa State University**

Signature was redacted for privacy.

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**For the Major Program**

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**For the Graduate College**

**DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my family. Without your unwavering love and encouragement I could have never accomplished this writing. I thank you for helping keep all of this “education stuff” in perspective. From each of you I have learned that receiving a Ph.D. degree is a worthwhile accomplishment, but achieving the A.B.D. (Approved By God) is the highest degree one should strive for. I shall continue to press toward the mark of the latter.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY**

The journey to traditionally White institutions of higher education for women, African American women in particular, and minority women in general, has been long and arduous. Historical documents indicate that women were not intended to be the primary beneficiaries of American higher education. Rudolph's (1990) well regarded study of American colleges and universities during the colonial period stated that at the outset women were thought to be "intellectually inferior—incapable, merely by reason of being a woman, of great thought. Her faculties were not worth training [and] her place was in the home, where man had assigned her a number of useful functions" (p. 308). Brubacher and Rudy's (1997) research on education initiatives during this period indicates that it was a widely held belief that education was the domain of men, who were assumed to be more capable of making religious, social, and political decisions for society. Brubacher and Rudy stated that it was "feared that such educational training would raise women above the duties of her station [and that] a man would not love a learned wife" (p. 65). They contended that popular sentiment was that it was "far better to teach young ladies to be correct in their manners, respectable in their families, and agreeable in society than waste time preparing them for public administration" (p. 65).

While these accounts may reveal the subtle and underlying attitudes of men regarding women's educational and employment concerns in general, they fail to provide an adequate understanding of the prevailing attitudes regarding the needs of African American women specifically. For instance, was sexism the most significant factor that hindered African

American women from participating in higher education? Or, did other “isms” like racism or classism contribute to their stagnant position? And what were some of the myths, exaggerations, or prevailing ideologies that may have also influenced society’s perception of the Black woman which in turn impeded her educational and employment opportunities in selected institutions of higher education?

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study was conducted to examine the academic experiences of the African American women faculty and administrators who participated in this research within the constructs of race, class, and gender. My intent was to use their experiences as a basis of analysis to understand what some African American women may encounter in predominantly White institutions of higher education.

A number of studies have attempted to explain the status of African American women in higher education. However, what generally happens in these studies is that the experiences of Black women are compared to those of other women, usually White women, to verify whether or not they are meeting some arbitrary standard of normalcy in the academy (Collins, 1990; Gilkes, 1980; Miller & Vaughn, 1997; Mullings, 1994). Naturally, these findings will explain the experiences of some African American women in higher education. However, they are limited because they failed to take into account the historical nature of race, class, and gender in shaping the roles of African American women in society in general, and in higher education more specifically (Collins, 1990; 1998; Gregory, 1995; Smith & Stewart, 1983). Furthermore, these studies do not reveal how African American women “feel” about their experiences in predominantly White institutions, nor do they allow the women to discuss how issues of race, class, and gender affect their academic lives. They are

also limited because they fail to consider the personal identities of the women themselves, which also effect how they manage and respond to their academic experiences.

To overcome these limitations, I used the grounded theory methodology found in the qualitative research paradigm. This approach allowed the women in the study to use their actual experiences to help us understand what some African American women may encounter in higher education. The overall goal was to place their experiences at the center of analysis and develop grounded theory to interpret what occurs in their academic roles in predominantly White institutions from their personal standpoints (Collins, 1990; Etter-Lewis, 1993; Mama, 1995).

### **Rationale for Conducting the Study**

Historically, hierarchies built upon race, class, and gender were roadblocks preventing women, and people of African descent in particular from access to higher education (Davis, 1983; Mama, 1995; Noble, 1956; Solomon, 1985). In the case of African Americans, numerous arguments were presented to justify White supremacist attitudes regarding their educational needs. One argument advanced during the nineteenth to early twentieth centuries among the psychology and psychiatry communities was based upon the notion that Africans, because of their dark skin pigmentation, had small brains. This was thought to prevent them from developing complex reasoning capabilities, which are needed for learning to occur (Mama, 1995). And while this discourse was first propagated to advocate the continued enslavement of Blacks during the 1860s, there are some today who still believe that this argument still warrants further discussion (Fraser, 1995). Despite the opposition, many African Americans have persisted in their resolve to rise above the ideological hegemony that has prevented their full participation in all facets of education in the United States.

Today, it may appear that the roads to higher education are barrier-free and wide enough to allow everyone equal access for a chance at the “American Dream” – a dream predicated on the belief that education is the key that unlocks the doors of opportunity, privilege, and upward mobility (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997). And some would say that proof of equal access could be verified from a cursory glance around many college campuses in the United States. From a quick glance one could get the impression that many of the barriers of the past have been removed and that women, African Americans, and other disenfranchised groups in society now have full participation in all areas of the academic community. However, a closer look might reveal that even with the gains made in minority student enrollment since the 1960s, there is still a disproportionately low number of African American students attending predominantly White institutions relative to their percentage in the total United States population. Furthermore, a closer look might also reveal that while the number of White women faculty and administrators has increased steadily at almost all academic ranks of the academy, the gains of African American women faculty and administrators at predominantly White institutions have remained relatively minuscule (McKay, 1997).

If there are no prevailing barriers for African American women in higher education, and arguments regarding their being psychologically inferior to the dominant group have remained unsubstantiated, why then is there still such a disproportionate gap between African American and White women faculty and administrators in the academy? Why does it appear that the majority of African American faculty women are concentrated at the assistant professor and instructor ranks? Why does the percentage of White women professionals in academia still outnumber the percentage of African American and other female minority groups? Why do many African American women have tales of frustration (Johnson, 1997;



McKay, 1997), and lastly, why do they often experience despair in our academic communities (Carroll, 1982; Davis, 1994; McKay, 1997; Thompson & Dey, 1998)? These were some of the questions in my mind when I began this study.

As an African American woman attending a predominantly White institution, I was concerned about the small number of African American women faculty and administrators I had encountered over the course of my graduate studies. I was equally concerned about the lack of literature I could find on African American women in higher education during my graduate work, as well as the substance of that literature. And while I appreciated the encouraging words I received from my professors and colleagues regarding my employability after graduation, I hesitated to think that my experiences would be any different than those of the Black women I had read about, considering that there was a high probability that I would work in a predominantly White institution as well.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions that guided this study were developed out of my curiosity to understand what occurs in the academic lives of African American women faculty and administrators in predominantly White institutions. I was particularly interested in examining their experiences within the context of race, class, and gender because extant literature suggests that these constructs shape the academic roles of African American people in higher education (Collins, 1998; Thompson & Dey, 1998; Turner, Myers, & Creswell, 1999; Miller, & Vaughn, 1997). To explore this phenomenon, the following research questions were developed:

- Does race play a role in shaping the academic experiences of the African American women in this study?
- Does social class status play a role in shaping the academic experiences of the African American women in this study?
- Does gender play a role in shaping the academic experiences of the African American women in this study?
- Are race, social class status, and gender independent constructs that operate independently in the lives of the African American women in this study, or is there an interaction that exerts influence over their academic roles?

### **Significance of the Study**

The results of this study are significant because they increase our understanding of what some African American women faculty and administrators experience in predominantly white settings. The number of African American women in senior-level faculty and administrative positions has actually decreased considerably over the last ten years. Gregory's (1995) study to identify factors that contribute to their success and achievement found that even though some Black women remain in higher education and have positive experiences, between the years 1975 and 1984, the percentage of Black women faculty declined from 4.6 percent to 3.6 percent. In a related study conducted by Laura Perna and Beverly Guy-Sheftall (1999), the researchers found that as of Fall 1995, of the total 560,531 African American full-time faculty in the nation's colleges and universities, African American women represented only 2.3% (13,171). These figures represent employment at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU) as well. When the data were segregated, African American women comprised a mere 1.4% (6,095) of the full-time professoriate at

four-year traditionally White colleges and universities. Furthermore, the researchers indicated that as of fall 1995, a total of 457,315 full-time faculty in four-year colleges and universities had received tenure. African American women represented 1.3% (3,118).

All of this information is useful for understanding the current status of African American women faculty and administrators in predominantly White institutions. However, because of the historical role that race, class, and gender have played in the personal and professional lives of African American women in the United States, a more in-depth analysis is needed to understand how these constructs influence their current academic roles (Miller & Vaughn, 1997). The current study sought to fill a portion of the void in the literature by investigating the experiences of the women who participated in this study using a phenomenological approach.

### **Conceptual Framework and Theoretical Orientations**

This study was conducted to examine the experiences of the African American women faculty and administrators who participated in this research. The primary goal was to understand if or how race, class, and gender influenced their academic roles. Central to that understanding was the necessity of placing the women's narratives at the center of analysis, and deriving grounded theory based upon their actual experiences, as opposed to making their experiences "fit" existing theories.

I sought conceptual frameworks that would grant me the most freedom and flexibility in interpreting the women's experiences. Thus, I relied heavily upon evolving Black feminist standpoint and its resulting epistemology (Collins, 1990, 1998; Davis, 1983; Dill, 1994; Giddings, 1984; Gilkes, 1980, 1994; hooks, 1984, 1993; Ilhe, 1992; Ladner, 1971; Lerner, 1981; Etter-Lewis, 1993, 1997; McKay, 1997; Mulqueen, 1992). Black feminist thought has

its roots in both Afrocentric and feminist standpoints. It illustrates the everyday experiences of African American women, and seeks to address issues of race, class, and gender as it affects Black women's lives. In addition to Black feminist thought, I used a multitude of cross-disciplinary theoretical approaches, such as sociology, psychology, and student development theory to interpret certain aspects of the women's narratives.

### **Theoretical Perspective**

My professional experience at the writing of this thesis had been in the area of student services in higher education. Before starting graduate school, I had been a director of financial aid at an historically Black institution in the Southern region of the United States. It was my belief that that experience coupled with my educational experiences in predominantly White colleges and universities would allow me to approach this study with an understanding and sensitivity to issues that some African American women encounter in predominantly White institutions of higher education.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) defined theoretical sensitivity as the researcher's ability to recognize the significance in the data being collected and to ascribe meaning to it. There are a number of ways a researcher can develop sensitivity to the phenomena under study. The sources cited most often are the researcher's professional and personal experiences, and her or his familiarity with the literature in the area being studied.

I was confident that my past experiences would allow me to undertake a study of this nature. I knew from personal experiences what some African American women encounter in predominantly White institutions. And I felt this insight would allow me to identify, categorize, and assign meaning to the themes that emerged more quickly than had I not had this insight.

To add to this experience, I had attended predominantly White institutions for both my bachelor's and master's degrees. In my undergraduate program, I did not encounter any African American professors or administrators (male or female) in the entire four years of study. In my master's program, there were two African American male professors. There were also a limited number of Black students in higher education when I completed these programs. Therefore, I have first-hand knowledge of how it feels to be lonely, isolated, and misrepresented because of the lack of a critical mass in my ethnic group.

And last, the experiences of African American women in higher education at all levels have been a long-time interest of mine. I have had the good fortune to pursue this interest within my academic program as a novice researcher under various professors for classroom assignments and through my graduate assistantship involvement. Both of these experiences required a review and synthesis of the literature on African American women in predominantly White institutions.

### **Tentative Presuppositions**

- Based upon my experiential knowledge base, I assumed that Black women have different issues and concerns in the academy than do White women and Black men.
- The women's personal identities may influence how they manage their academic roles.
- Although all of the women in this study self-identified as African American, each of them had very different personalities. They do not represent, nor is there, a monolithic African American female group. These women represent different socio-economic strata, family backgrounds, and values systems. Therefore, their perceptions of the influence of race, class, and gender in shaping their academic roles may be different as well.

- Because of the long history of race relations in the United States, race, class, and gender may influence how Black women relate to White Americans in all spheres of their lives, including higher education.

### **Terminology**

- Throughout this study, the terms “African American(s),” “Black(s),” “Negro(es),” and “Black Americans” will be used interchangeably to denote women of African descent who are citizens of the United States.
- The term “women of color” will be used when referencing women of Native American, Asian American, and Latina/Hispanic descent.
- The terms “White Americans,” and “Whites,” will be used interchangeably to denote people of European descent who are citizens of the United States.
- The terms “traditionally White,” and “predominantly White” college or university will be used interchangeably when describing an institution wherein over 65% of the academic community is of European American descent.

### **Organization of the Dissertation**

Sheila Gregory (1995) in Black Women in the Academy: The Secrets to Success and Achievement asserted that to understand the unique experiences of some African American women in higher education “it is important to contextualize the framework of their perspectives by comprehensively analyzing the historical components which help identify their thoughts, feelings, and experiences” (p. 3). I agree with Gregory’s suggestion, but also believe it is equally important to allow the silenced voices of women, past and present, to speak for themselves whenever possible. Therefore, throughout this discourse the voices of

African American women will speak forth in the form of excerpts from their personal papers, diaries, and interviews given to others to set the historical context for the narratives that will be presented in the study. I believe this information will add credibility to what is being presented and remove some of the researcher bias that is present in all research.

Additional contextual data will be offered in the form of quotes from former owners of enslaved Blacks, or newspaper reports to provide a more thorough understanding of the popular opinion that contributed to shaping the personification of African American womanhood.

I am also committed in this thesis to follow what Patricia Hill Collins (1990) termed as “reconciling subjectivity and objectivity in producing scholarship” (p. xiv). As an African American woman investigating other African American women, I chose not to objectify their experiences by using pronouns such as “they”, “them,” or “the subject,” but rather to reconcile my subjectivity and identify with their Black female experiences through terms such as “I”, “we,” and “us” when dialogue necessitates, and it is appropriate.

Chapter I has included an introduction, purpose of the study, research rationale, study significance, theoretical perspective, tentative presuppositions, and an explanation of terminology. Chapter II, which contains the review of literature, is divided into three major sections: an historical overview of how the persona of African American womanhood was shaped during slavery and immediately following the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation, the current status of African American women in higher education, and factors that influence identity development. Chapter III outlines the research methods used to guide the study, inclusive of an explanation of the research methodology, respondents, and interview protocol. Chapter IV introduces the participants in the study across four common

categories. Chapter V contains the analysis and interpretation of the findings. Chapter VI includes the conclusions, grounded theory, recommendations for further research, and implications.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF SELECTED LITERATURE**

The literature is replete with studies that address the issue of sexism in the lives of women seeking full participation in the academy (Baron, 1978; Caplow & McGee, 1965; Farley, 1982; Finkel, Olswang, & She, 1994; Foster, 1981; Harris, 1970; LeBlanc, 1993; Sokoloff, 1987). Volumes, upon volumes, record the injustices and frustrations women face in higher education. There have been numerous reports of wage inequities, vague and unclear research and publishing expectations, ambiguous tenure requirements, limited access to certain academic disciplines, lack of mentorship and networking opportunities, and exclusion from strategic decision-making positions (Exum, Menges, Watkins, & Berglund, 1984; Finkel et al., 1994; Freeman, 1977; Halaby, 1979; Malveaux, 1982; Warner & DeFleur, 1993). In much of this research, women are classified as a singular group not taking into consideration the impact that race and class may contribute to any one of these variables if the whole group were broken down into separate ethnic groups. For instance, based upon the long and turbulent history of race and class distinctions in the United States, a person would be remiss to assume historical ideologies (i.e., inferior vs. superior) created by a White male patriarchal system have no bearing on the experiences of African American and other women of color in higher education today (Amott & Matthaei, 1996; Wilkerson, 1989). This is not to imply that White women in higher education have not suffered because of the White male patriarchal system in existence; rather it is to infer that because of their ethnicity, their academic experiences have not been shaped within the trilogy of race, class, and gender as have those of women of color.

Yet, there are some who contend that racism and other forms of oppression have disappeared (Wilson, 1978) and who consequently believe equal opportunity initiatives and affirmative action are no longer needed because the problems they addressed have been resolved. Reinforcing this view, the federal government has removed its backing from many of the civil rights laws passed in the 1960s and 1970s that gave women and other minority groups a chance for full participation in American society in general, and higher education specifically (Washington & Harvey, 1989). Even still, Adams (1983) contended that “such legal reforms did not guarantee change in discriminatory attitudes and behaviors. Both women and blacks [sic] continue to be underemployed and underpaid” (p.69).

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a review of selected literature related to the experiences of African American women in predominantly White institutions of higher education. A number of researchers (Gregory, 1995; Perkins, 1983; Wilson, 1989) have suggested that in order to understand the uniqueness of the Black woman’s experiences, an historical framework is needed to situate her academic life within an institutional culture originally designed for the benefit of a White male patriarchal system. Wilson (1989) stated that “it is apparent that the limited presence of women of color in higher education administration has its roots in the history of America and cannot be understood separately from that history” (p. 85). Thus, the chapter begins with a discussion of how the persona of Black womanhood was shaped within the constructs of race, class, and gender by White males during slavery and immediately following the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation. The intent here is not to provide a conclusive analysis of the experiences of Black women in history; rather what is presented is offered only as a framework to conceptualize historical and social influences that shaped the personal experiences of African

American women in society in general, and professional experiences in higher education more specifically. (For a thorough recounting of the history of African American women in America, see Bennett, 1993; Davis, 1983; Giddings, 1994; Hines 1993; Lerner, 1981; Noble; 1956). This particular section of the chapter concludes with a review of some of the current producers of research on Black women in higher education.

The personal and professional identities of the women in this study are used as the overarching lens to investigate the research questions in this dissertation. Therefore, the remainder of the chapter will draw from selected literature bases to provide an overview of theoretical and conceptual frameworks that are used to explain female identity development. For some of the women in the study, self-esteem was a salient theme that emerged from the data, therefore the literature review will focus on the primary influences that impact the development of self-esteem.

### **The Shaping of African American Womanhood**

The signing of the Emancipation Proclamation by President Abraham Lincoln on January 1, 1863 granted freedom to 4,500,000 Negroes after 250 years of slavery. Of this number, approximately two million were women (Noble, 1956). For all intended purposes, this day should have been one of the most joyous occasions in the history of Black people. Yet, the day was marred for the newly freed Negro because freedom was a two-edged sword. First, the newly freed slaves were expected to go from a life of bondage wherein everything was dictated, decided, and controlled to making decisions overnight. And they were expected to live and function within a dominant culture that assumed them to be ignorant, inferior, and worth the price of a common farm animal. Gaining freedom was definitely the smooth side of the sword because it offered Negroes an opportunity to learn how to read and write,

acquire land, travel freely, and gain some form of respectability—all the things that had been long denied. But, the sword of freedom had a jagged edge, too: an edge that would produce the most profound and far-reaching consequences for Negroes in the United States that anyone could have ever imagined.

Social historian Lerone Bennett (1993) contended that even though African Americans had worked “from sunup to sundown for over 200 years without pay, had created the wealth of the South, and much of the wealth of the North, they were turned loose without clothes to hide their nakedness, or shelter to protect them from the storms” (p. 170). He conceded that, yes, they were free, but free to what? To starvation, to the winds and rains, without means to provide shelter for themselves, to the pitiless wrath of their enraged masters who had for so long reaped the benefits of slave labor that they were reluctant and oftentimes unwilling to give it up, and to themselves who were understandably frightened and unsure of what was expected of them next.

Questions abounded concerning their emancipation. Whose responsibility was it to care for the newly freed Negro, – to provide food, shelter, and medicine? And above all else, to define who they were, their legal status, and what was to be done for them and with them? And for the newly freed Black woman, how would she ever overcome the distorted images that had been created for her to make the vicious acts of slavery justifiable in the hearts and minds of her White captors (Bennett, 1993; Noble, 1956)?

To justify their insidious treatment of Black women during slavery, White men contrived a public image for Black women that depicted them as subhuman objects of labor, fit only for breeding and fieldwork. The Black woman was viewed as a person who had no sensibilities as far as the family unit was concerned, someone who lacked Christian values or morals, and

a person with an insatiable sexual appetite who preyed on the lascivious shortcomings of the “respectable” White men of the community (Amott & Matthaei, 1996; Collins, 1990; Giddings, 1984; Jordan, 1976; Lerner, 1981; Mama, 1995; Vaz, 1995). Collins (1990) contended that these images were primarily “designed to make racism, sexism, and poverty appear to be natural, normal, and an inevitable part of everyday life” (p. 68).

### **Black Women as Objects of Labor**

Social activist and writer Angela Davis (1983), in Women, Race & Class, dispelled the long-standing myth that Black women had an easier time in slavery than Black men. Davis stated that contrary to popular belief, the majority of Black women during slavery did not have insulated and cushioned positions such as cooks, maids, and mammies. Slavery was a recognized and court-sanctioned system of abuse designed to prosper a select group of White men in power. Hence, both women and men were needed to contribute to the economic system (Amott & Matthaei, 1996). Davis maintained, “like the majority of slave men, slave women, for the most part, were field workers” (p. 5). As such, “where work was concerned, strength and productivity under the threat of the whip outweighed consideration of sex. In this sense, the oppression of women was identical to the oppression of men” (p. 6). This assessment is consistent with that of Bennett (1993) who stated that slave-masters made no distinctions with regard to age or sex when disseminating work. In fact, “some plantations were manned (sic) entirely by a work force of women” (p. 148).

Amott and Matthaei (1996) contended that while slave women often performed tasks that had been designated by plantation owners as male slave work (e.g., chopping wood, clearing land, plowing, etc.), “there is little evidence that slave men performed slave women’s work of nursing and caring for white children” (p.146).

African American women no longer perform backbreaking work on plantations for the benefit of slave-owners. A succession of laws, not to mention a Civil War, put an end to the demoralizing business of slavery. And over a succession of years, Black women have risen up to participate in virtually every occupational category available, albeit in limited numbers, but not without cost. Amott and Matthaei (1996) provided the following synopsis as an example of the various kinds of positions Black women held after the Civil War.

In 1880, the first African American woman became a lawyer; the first female doctors to practice in the South were Black. By 1890, there were 160 Black female physicians, seven dentists, ten lawyers, 164 ministers, assorted journalists, writers, artists, 1,185 musicians and teachers of music, and 13,525 school instructors.

However, the vast majority of Black women continued to be barred from nearly all jobs other than agriculture and private domestic service. In 1900, 44 percent of African American women workers were concentrated in private household service, mostly as servants or laundresses, while another 44 percent worked in agriculture. Only 5 percent held jobs in higher-paid occupations: approximately 3 percent in manufacturing, 1 percent in professions (mostly as teachers), and a negligible number in sales, managerial, and clerical work. In contrast, less than one-third of employed white women worked in domestic service, and 10 percent in agriculture; almost one-third worked in manufacturing, 10 percent in professions, 7 percent in clerical, and 4 percent in sales. (pp. 157-158)

Over the years, African American women have made steady gains in all areas of labor force participation; however, Gregory (1995) indicated that “many [of us] still remain at the bottom of the socioeconomic scale, and continue to be concentrated in service and lower level occupations” (p. 9). With regard to academia, Lois Benjamin (1997), editor of one of the most recent books on the status of African American women in higher education, indicated that the situation of Black women is as bleak in the academy as it is in the larger society. Benjamin noted:

Although the number of black [sic] women in the academy has increased, we still remain largely invisible... We constituted only 2.1 percent of full-time faculty and 2.4 percent of part-time faculty in 1989, compared to 2.0 percent and 2.3 percent, respectively, in 1979. In 1989 only 0.7 percent of black women working in higher

education were full professors; 1.6 percent associate professors; 2.7 percent assistant professors; 3.3 percent instructors, lecturers, and other faculty and 4.2 percent administrators. Black women administrators and faculty are largely concentrated in predominantly black institutions. Whether in black or white institutions, we face barriers of racial and sexual discrimination. (p. 9)

This information serves to emphasize the fact that African American women still face nearly insurmountable odds in achieving equity in labor force participation. Amott and Matthaei (1996) concluded, “from slavery through the present, African American women’s labor has been crucial to the U.S. economic wealth...[Yet,] Black women have stood at the intersection of race, class, and gender oppression” (p. 142) and therefore, have not been able to cross over.

### **African American Women and the Cult of True Womanhood**

Around the time Black women were granted freedom, White women were being idealized under the fallacy of what became known as the “cult of true womanhood” (Giddings, 1984; Hines, 1993). An observer of the early 19th century history referred to the emergence of the cult philosophy as one of the most significant events that shaped women’s education, as well as their lives during this period (Perkins, 1983).

The idealized image of White women under the cult of true womanhood stressed “piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity” (Hines, 1993, p. 380). However, domesticity was the over-riding feature behind the cult idea because it was in this sphere that White men were able to construct an idealized image for White women that separated and distinguished them from both poor lower-class immigrants and Black females. And it was the latter group of women who, out of necessity, were forced to seek employment opportunities outside of their homes. Historian Paula Giddings (1984) explained the importance of domesticity in the cult idea as follows:

The true woman's exclusive role was as homemaker, mother, housewife, and family tutor of the social and moral graces. Isolated within the home, woman "raised" men above lusty temptation while keeping themselves beyond its rapacious grasp. Women's imprisonment in the home virtually guaranteed piety and purity. Submissiveness, too, was assured where housewives depended on male support. When leisure (formerly scorned as idleness) rather than industriousness indicated one's social standing, middle-class [White] women, once contributors to the family economy, became models of "conspicuously unproductive expenditure. (p. 47)

While White women were being praised for their unselfishness in returning to the homestead, Black women and poor immigrant women were being ridiculed and looked down upon because they had to leave their homes to find employment. In fact, Giddings (1984) stated that "it was not a coincidence that the cult idea gained impetus at a time when the abolition of slavery brought Black women into the wage-labor force" (p. 48). Lerner (1981) supported Giddings premise that the cult idea was a strategic maneuver by White men in power to alienate and separate Black and poor immigrant women from White women who were becoming a part of the middle-to-upper class social structure that was being established. Lerner stated that "just as the cult of white womanhood in the South served to preserve a labor and social system based on race distinctions, so did the cult of ladyhood in an egalitarian society serve as a means of preserving class distinctions" (p. 26).

What did this happy homemaker image mean to the newly freed Black woman? In a society controlled by White males, it meant that she could never be one of the women described by the tenets of the cult because of the life she had lived during slavery. Her life during slavery would be hard, if not impossible, to erase out of the minds of the people who would grant her entrance (Perkins, 1983). She could never be perceived as fragile or delicate like one of her White sisters because she had been required to perform the same kinds of tasks as Black men during slavery. And with regard to purity, how could a woman who was



frequently the victim of sexual assaults by overseers and masters, and forced to copulate for the purpose of increasing the slave community, ever be looked upon as pure?

Sojourner Truth, speaking at an all-White women's rights convention in Akron, Ohio in 1851, posed this question to the crowd of people in the auditorium who were at odds with each other because women were demanding the right to vote: "Ain't I a Woman?" Her speech, now famous and widely quoted, served to express how Black women felt about being denied voting rights because they were perceived unladylike in comparison to their White sisters (Amott & Matthei, 1996; hooks, 1981).

That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted and gathered into barns and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman?

I could work as much and eat as much as a man –when I could get it –and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne 13 children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman? (Truth, 1982, pp. 202-203)

What is most fascinating about Truth's speech is that it dispelled the myth that womanhood is synonymous with domesticity. Davis (1983) said that Truth nullified the ideology of true womanhood. Her presence at the meeting was a testament that "all women were not White and all women did not enjoy the material comfort of the middle classes and the bourgeoisie. Sojourner Truth herself was Black—she was an ex-slave—but she was no less a woman than any of her white sisters at the convention" (p. 62). Davis stated that by her constantly repeating the refrain, "Ain't I a Woman," Truth also exposed the class and race biases that were becoming prevalent in the women's movement at that time.

Vaz (1995) asserted that the inability to "control images of Black womanhood stemming from the White imagination have very real consequences in the lives of Black women" today

(p. 13). In her book, Black Women in America, Vaz provided the following excerpt from the autobiography of Jill Nelson (1993), a former employee of *The Washington Post*. Ms. Nelson was having a discussion with her therapist regarding the strain that working with White people at *The Post* was causing her. She indicated that they had been interacting with her based not on who she was but on their image of what she represented to them. Ms. Nelson said she experienced daily assaults on her integrity and sense of self by the group who felt themselves superior to her simply because of her skin color.

At work I'm treated like a great big, intimidating Negress, so I spend half my time trying to make myself [appear] non-threatening, even though I'm not really threatening, so the Caucasians can deal with me. I mean, actually, I'm really a softie. I wear my feelings on my sleeve. Is that so wrong? I feel like a criminal every day I go to work because I love myself and African American people. I really feel if I don't get away I'll go berserk, get a machine gun, go into the office and go off. (p. 231)

Ms. Nelson's experience is not an isolated incident. A number of African American women have reported ill-treatment because of the distorted images that Whites colleagues have of them in the work setting (Collins, 1990).

### **African American Women in the Community of Family**

During slavery and well into the nineteenth century many White people believed that Black people did not have a strong sense of family values and that they lacked cohesiveness as a community of people (Dill, 1994). And it was also believed that the subservient role that many Black women had played for Whites mirrored the role they played within their own families and communities. But these misconceptions could not have been further from the truth.

McMillen (1992) maintained that for enslaved Negroes, the family unit represented a safe haven because it was here that Black people found solace from the harshness and brutality of

slavery. Even though estimates indicate that 20 percent of all slave families were broken apart by the sale of a husband or wife for breeding purposes, or simply to another plantation as workers, the family “played a key role in the slave’s struggle to combat oppression and gave slave women a sense of purpose” (p. 12). Dill (1994) noted, “they [women] and their menfolk had the task of preserving the human and family ties that could ultimately give them a reason for living. They had to socialize their children to believe in the possibility of a life in which they were not enslaved” (p. 149).

### **The Role of the Extended Family in Black Culture**

Both Ladner (1971) and McAdoo (1980) found that during slavery it was not uncommon for Negro women to share child-rearing and other family responsibilities with other women within the extended family unit (i.e., grandparents, uncles, aunts, neighbors, and other kin). Older women and younger girls were relied upon to assist mothers with infants or small children who had to work in the fields, and everyone who could assisted in educating the next generation. Dill, 1994 stated that even at the end of slavery, the extended family still played a prominent role in the lives of Black people “linking individual household units in a variety of domestic activities” (p. 154). Gutman (1976) suggested that the reason these networks endured and became so strong was because slavery limited the number of relationships individuals could develop outside of their immediate circle, and close relationships were a necessity for the survival of the group as a whole.

### **African American Women and Education: Lifting as We Climb**

The women of the Colored Race need to well understand their duty to one another, and to the world at large, their relation to society, and the good that may be accomplished by rightly understanding what is expected of them, and what may be accomplished by them, in elevating their people. (Alexander, 1992, p. 39)

This excerpt could have very easily served as the Black Women's Manifesto: Getting an Education to Uplift my People. However, in all fairness to Black men who were also victims of the injustices of slavery, I hasten to add that this educational creed could have spoken for most Black people before the Civil War.

Prior to the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation and a number of years thereafter, there was not a legitimate or well-defined space for African American women in American higher education. If she received an education at all it was because: (1) she was a free Northerner who was permitted to acquire a minimum amount of education befitting a person of her class in society; (2) she had gained access to learning while a household or personal servant of a White plantation owner; or (3) she was secretly educated by sympathetic White Christian workers who were against the practices of slavery (Hines, 1993; Noble, 1956; Williams, 1993). Still, no matter how she entered education it was always considered to be for the betterment of the Black race. And Black girls especially were raised to view education as the primary tool needed to catapult Black people from White subjugation to Black liberation (Collins, 1990).

For those who could go, it was expected by the community at large that they would leave for a time of knowledge-gaining, and then bring the knowledge and skills they had acquired back into the Black community to increase the level of understanding of those who did not have the opportunity to go themselves (Perkins, 1981).

As society approached the twentieth century, the instability of the Black family due to forced separations, coupled with the inability of many Black men to secure credible employment opportunities, were among the driving forces behind the Black woman's push for higher education (McCray, 1980). Lerner (1981) contended that due to discriminatory

hiring practices “the only hope a [B]lack girl had to escape the unskilled-job trap was in getting a professional education” (p. 74).

In 1835, trustees of Oberlin Collegiate Institute in Ohio, sparked by an evangelical commitment, became the first coeducational institution in the United States, and the first college or university, to admit African American women before the Civil War (Hines, 1993; Solomon, 1985). Hines (1993) asserted that “at a time when other college doors were closed to Black students, the Oberlin trustees’ commitment to the education of people of color had profound effects on the educational aspirations and achievements of free Black women” (p. 897).

Oberlin graduated more of the country’s leading Black female educators and social activists than any other institution. The most noted among them were Mary Jane Patterson (AB 1862), Fanny Jackson Coppin (AB 1865), Mary Church Terrell, and Anna Julia Cooper, both of whom earned the AB degree in 1884. Black graduates of Oberlin played an important role in establishing the first Black colleges in the nation and a number of the women served on the faculties of these institutions (Ihle, 1992).

The personal papers of Mary Church Terrell indicate that she had a wonderful time while a student at Oberlin and that neither race, class, nor gender marred her stay. Mrs. Terrell wrote:

I entered the senior class of the preparatory department of Oberlin College, which has since been abolished. The lady who[se] duty it was to attend to the dining room declared that I gave her a great deal of trouble, because too many people wanted me to sit at their table.

If I were white, it might be conceited for me to relate this. But I mention these facts to show that, as a colored girl, I was accorded the same treatment at Oberlin at that time as a white girl under similar circumstances. (Ihle, 1992, p. 24)

Year later when Mrs. Terrell took her daughters to enroll at her alma mater, the once

accepting institution had changed, and Mrs. Terrell indicated that it was apparent that race and class would be a factor in the kind of experiences her daughters would have at Oberlin.

While Mrs. Terrell's concern that race and class would effect the type of experiences her daughters would have had at Oberlin College is well over 104 years old today, it is still a valid concern of many African American parents and students at predominantly White institutions today (Holmes, Ebbers, Robinson, & Mugenda, in press; Jackson, 1984). African American female faculty, staff, and students continue to raise questions regarding their experiences in White institutions where they believe issues of race and class have played a central role in their inability to achieve parity with their White female counterparts.

#### **African Americans in Higher Education: A Twentieth Century Perspective**

Practically every societal event influencing the lives of Black people in the United States from 1877 to 1954 effected them adversely (Smith & Stewart, 1983). While society advanced as a whole, the status of African American people remained relatively fixed. Many White Americans persisted in their prejudiced attitudes toward Blacks and these attitudes translated into acts of segregation and discrimination in virtually every aspect of life (Pinkney, 1969).

Even where segregation and discrimination were not required by law, they became deeply ingrained into the infrastructure of the community (Higginbotham, 1994; Sokoloff, 1987; Washington & Harvey, 1989). Such behavior became as much a part of the "American way of life" as apple pie and baseball games on Sunday and there were few White Americans who challenged these discriminatory practices. Many Black people, on the other hand, constantly challenged them, especially those that were enacted into law; but they were consistently rebuffed by majority members who were the rulers of the judicial system. Pinkney (1969)

stated that “by this time, African Americans had been relegated to a caste position in society, and no Black person, no matter what his or her level of achievement, could expect to be accorded treatment equal to that of a White person” (p. 40).

No institution in the United States was exempt in putting forth discriminatory practices against African American people. In a landmark case, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled in 1896 that separate (i.e., segregated) facilities for Blacks and Whites were not in violation of the constitutional guarantees of the Thirteenth (abolition of slavery) and Fourteenth Amendments (rights guaranteed for citizens of the United States). While the case debated the use of separate railroad facilities for Blacks and Whites, the decision was later through inference extended to cover everything from bathrooms facilities to educational institutions through the concept that “separate but equal” was acceptable (Fleming, Gill & Swinton, 1978). This ruling set the stage for future policy-making that would exclude Blacks from participating in choice occupations and upper levels in all areas of society. Fleming et al. (1978) maintained that “white institutions of higher education continued to ignore the plights of blacks. Only a few were willing to accept even a token number of Negro students, and virtually all refused to hire black faculty members” (p. 20). The ruling also set the attitudes toward and treatment of Blacks in the United States and remained the central law of the land until it was overturned in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education* decision of 1954 (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997; Washington & Harvey, 1989).

*Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* was a consolidation of cases in four states: Kansas, South Carolina, Virginia, and Delaware. All four states had cases in which the doctrine of “separate but equal” had been challenged. In all four cases the lower courts had upheld the doctrine and the cases had been sent to the Supreme Court for a ruling. The

cases were consolidated under the umbrella of Brown because each of them challenged the same issue (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997).

Brown v. the Board of Education has been called the major breakthrough in the area of nondiscrimination in the United States since the Fifteenth Amendment. While the decision was directed toward secondary education, the ruling had positive side-effects for Black student enrollment at White colleges as well (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997; Fleming et al., 1978).

As a result of the ruling, enrollment of “blacks attending White colleges in the South rose from 3,000 in 1960 to 24,000 in 1965 and to 98,000 in 1970” (Levine & Associates, 1989, p. 64). Other factors that contributed to the increased growth of Blacks enrolling in white colleges and universities were: (1) the migration of Blacks to Northern states that substantially increased enrollment at northern white public colleges; (2) the educational provisions of the GI Bill; (3) the 1973 Adams decision that mandated desegregation of state systems of higher education; (4) the inception of two-year colleges into the state system of higher education; (5) expanded financial aid programs that provided various grants, loans, and college work-study opportunities; (6) increases in the high school graduation rate of Black students; and (7) Black student activism on White college campuses that also hastened the opening of many doors previously closed to Black academicians (Levine & Associates, 1989; Mosley, 1980; Smith, 1980).

An additional impetus to access to predominantly White institutions came as a result of affirmative action executive orders backed by the federal government in the 1960s. Basically, the federal government tied affirmative action to its contract compliance program. All employers, including institutions of higher education, who received federal contracts of



\$50,000 or more with a workforce of at least 50 employees were required to suspend discrimination on the basis of race, creed, national origin, or sex and were required to develop written affirmative action programs to ensure that all groups of people were hired at a rate their availability in the work force would suggest (Fleming, et al., 1978).

In 1971, affirmative action mandates were tied specifically to higher education institutions through Executive Order 11246. This provision provided broad-based access to all areas of the academy for African Americans and other minority groups (Washington & Harvey, 1989). However, access through affirmative action did not always translate into acceptance of minority groups in higher education, and African Americans were often marginalized and perceived by their White counterparts to be less qualified and scholastically inferior (Collins, 1990; Mitchell, 1994; Moses, 1997; Turner, et al., 1999). Nor did White institutions always implement programs that ensured increased participation by minority groups in higher education. Kawewe (1997) contended that “colleges and universities devised sophisticated internal mechanisms to subvert affirmative action in recruitment, hiring, retention, and promotion to the advantage of the privileged gender and race that dominate the academy” (p. 264). Thus the very nature of the law through implementation has been racist and sexist since its inception.

Being aware of all of these events enables us to examine the current status of African American women in higher education within a proper historical context. Since the federal government became involved with increasing minority participation in higher education in the 1970s, there have been noticeable improvements. However, many of the executive orders ratified in the late 1960s and early 1970s were nullified during the Reagan Administration in the 1980s, and now it appears that White institutions have begun to regress in their efforts to

retain African American and other people of color in all areas of the academy (Washington & Harvey, 1989).

### **The Current State of Affairs for Black Women in the Academy**

Constance M. Carroll, a contributing author of All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave (1982), started her chapter with the following:

Four years ago, if anyone had said to me that the Black woman in higher education faces greater risks and problems now than in the past, I doubt I would have taken the remark seriously. I would have marveled at the rhetoric and pointed to federal legislation enacted on the crest of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, and nodded proudly at the few Blacks in token (“you’ve got to begin somewhere”) positions in major institutions....“A great deal still needs to be done,” I would have said, “but Blacks, including women, have come a long way.”

In 1972, after four years of teaching and working in a university administration, I would nod my head in ready agreement if the same remark were made. My mind was changed...Black women in higher education are isolated, underutilized, and often demoralized. (p. 115)

Carroll indicated that she made this assessment from her experiences as well as from “listening to accounts of Black women educators and administrators across the country” (p. 115). Unfortunately, the perils some African American women encountered in higher education in 1972 have not been eradicated and the concerns continue to mount.

As more and more workshops and conferences are taking place around the country to discuss and consider how to increase the number of African American women in the academy, so too has there been a proliferation of literature documenting the unfavorable experiences that some women are having in White colleges and universities. Some of the most frequently cited concerns raised by Black women in predominantly White institutions are: isolation and alienation, tokenism, the lack of networking and mentoring opportunities, race and sex discrimination, not being supported in the work environments, promotion and tenure, unrealistic role expectations, race relations between Black and White women, and

limited career opportunities for upward mobility (Burgess, 1997; Collins, 1990; Frankenberg, 1993; Gregory, 1995; Moses, 1997; Phelps, 1995; Smith, 1980; Turner et al., 1999).

### **African American Women Compared to Other Members of the Academy**

Historically, only a select number of African American women were permitted on the campuses of White colleges and universities as faculty and administrative staff (Fleming et al., 1978). Today, while their numbers have increased in all areas and levels of the academy, there is still a low representation of Black women in faculty and administrative positions when compared to other groups in higher education (Collins, 1990; Turner et al., 1999).

A belief held by many people during the period of the early nondiscrimination mandates was that large numbers of African American women were being hired by White colleges and universities because they helped the institution fulfill the federal government's affirmative action requirements. Anderson and Sullivan (1997) contended that many believed that because "African American women [belonged] to two protective classes, i.e. race and gender, ...it was advantageous for institutions to hire these women to push up their affirmative action numbers" (p. 2). If this assumption is true, current data should verify that there are substantial numbers of African American women in higher education today who entered during this period of "two-for-the price-of-one." However, as Anderson and Sullivan (1997) stated, "a look at the data dispels that notion" (p. 2).

The U. S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics is considered one of the leading sources of available data examining current trends in faculty participation in higher education. Michael Nettles and Laura Perna (1997) using the Center's statistical data bases conducted a study entitled the 1992/93 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPE:93). The study was based on a national sample of faculty and instructional

staff employed by public and private not-for-profit colleges and universities as of the fall of 1992. The researchers presented data collected from 25,780 of the 31,354 faculty and 872 of the 974 institutions contacted. The data can be used to illustrate how African American women faculty compare to White males and White females in higher education.

According to Nettles and Perna's study, African American (non-Hispanic) women represented only 2.4% (14,692) of the total 605,224 teaching faculty employed by institutions of higher education as of fall 1992, as opposed to 34.4% (208,372) for White women, and 54.7% (330,911) for White men. What does this figure mean when compared to the total U.S. population of 270, 299,000 people? Simply stated, this means you would have to increase the number of African American women teaching college by a factor of almost 3 to have equal representation in the total U.S. population. Thus, these comparisons indicated that African American women are underrepresented in faculty teaching positions. The data also indicated that in fall 1992 African American women held only 2.6% (8,266) of the total 317,60 regular, full-time teaching positions, compared to White men who held 59% (187,430) and White women who held 29.8% (94,725).

With regard to academic rank, African American women fare no better. Full professors constituted 101,967 (32.1%) of the 317,610 regular full-time professors in academe as of fall 1992. African American women numbered a mere 1410 (1.4%) of the total tenured regular, full-time full professors (101, 967) as of fall 1992. White men totaled 76,386 (74.9%) and White women totaled 15,189 (14.9%). If you compare the percentage of Black and White women full professors with White men, gender inequities could explain why there is such a significant difference at the full professor rank. However, when the two groups are separated (i.e., Black and White women), it appears that other factors may contribute to the disparity in

the number of African American women regular, full-time, full professors when compared to White women at the same rank.

Because African American women rank lowest as regular, full-time faculty when compared to White faculty, it stands to reason that the rate at which they become tenured faculty would lag behind as well. As of fall, 1992, there were 190,031 tenured faculty (all academic ranks) among the total of 317,610 regular full-time professors in academe. African American women numbered 3545 (1.86%) of the total tenured faculty (190,031). White men totaled 128,316 (67.5%) and White women totaled 41,371 (21.8%) of the tenured faculty (190,031) for the same period.

The numbers start to improve slightly for African American women at the tenure track level. African American women represented 4.3% (2,866) of the total 67,037 faculty in line for tenure as of fall 1992 versus 47.5% (31,838) of White men, and 39% (26,171) of White women.

The college presidency is viewed as the pinnacle of academic administration and can serve as a benchmark of status for women administrators in higher education (Anderson & Sullivan, 1997; Wilson, 1989). As of fall 1988 women of color numbered 38 (1.3%) of the 296 presidents in higher education. They serve at all types of institutions; however, the majority is concentrated at community colleges. As of the writing of this thesis, this researcher could not obtain an exact figure of the current number of African American women presidents. However, Wilson's (1989) research indicated that "black women fare better as presidents of predominately white institutions than as presidents of historically black colleges" (p. 89). Anderson and Sullivan (1997) indicated that "recent history has recorded the first African American female appointed to the highest academic post at a major

institution. Condoleezza Rice is the provost at Sanford University” (p. 3).

### **Current Knowledge Producers of Research on Black Women in Higher Education**

An extensive literature review was conducted to frame the discussion for this section.

Yet, relatively speaking, a very limited body of research was available on the experiences of African American women faculty and administrators. And most of the readings were anecdotal as opposed to theoretically grounded documents.

The majority of the literature dates from the mid-1970s to the early 1980s. And it appears that the primary focus of most of the inquiry was directed at understanding the academic experiences of Black males in white colleges and universities. Mosley (1980), attempting to study the plight of the Black female administrators, indicated she found “little or no information” and concluded that “the most authoritative source [i.e., producers of literature] would be Black female administrators themselves” (p. 296). Her words were prophetic because the majority of literature available today examining the experiences of African American women in higher education has been produced by other Black female researchers.

The limited amount of literature concerning African American women faculty and administrators comes as no surprise when one considers that White males have been in control of the validation and distribution of what is considered good scholarship since the inception of higher education in America. In many ways, the White male’s control of scholarship production has contributed to the problem that some African American women have experienced in higher education regarding publications needed for promotion and tenure (Collins, 1990; Kawewe, 1997).

Collins (1990), speaking on the paucity of Black women’s participation in knowledge creation, stated that “educated elites typically claim that only they are qualified to produce

theory and believe that only they can interpret not only their own but everyone's else's experiences. Moreover, educated elites often use this belief to uphold their own privilege" (p. xii). She said, "Black women's exclusion from positions of power within mainstream institutions has led to the elevation of elite white male ideas and interests and the corresponding suppression of Black women's ideas and interests in traditional scholarship and popular culture" (p. 7).

### **Identity Development Theory**

Who am I? This is the primary question that everyone will be confronted with at one point in their life or another. When Erik Erikson (1963) posed this seemingly innocent question over 30 years ago, he informed the nature of how we view ourselves in relation to the world around us, and thereby became the foremost theoretician on identity development across the life span. Erikson (1963, 1968) postulated an eight stage model in psychosocial development wherein each stage is identified by a challenge that leads a person to progression, regression, a standstill, or to the reoccurrence of the challenge in the stage set within a different context. According to Erikson's epigenetic psychosocial model, identity formation represented the fifth stage of development and was characterized by identity v. identity confusion (Widick, Parker, & Knepfelkamp, 1978).

Identity development is an on-going process that occurs over a person's life cycle. However, it reaches a crescendo during late adolescence when youths are separating from the family unit (i.e., parents in particular) and attempting to answer the question that Erikson posed independent of who they are in relationship to their parents (Chickering & Havighurst, 1981). Up to this point, their families have had the greatest influence on their development, primarily because they have not been exposed to competing systems of ideas that challenge

the family's role definitions and/or value systems. As individuals proceed through late adolescence, the influence of the family on their development will become secondary as they begin to associate with peers in school and other social settings (Rosnagal & Vance, 1982).

As one might suspect, identity is multi-dimensional and represents a consolidation of internal and external constructs that influence and inform a person's life. And because of the uniqueness of every human being, there is no one definition that can be offered to encompass all the various dimensions of identity that a single individual could possess.

Ruthellen Josselson (1996) provided one of the simplest conceptual frameworks to understand the nature of identity within the context of how it is shaped within society and the external culture.

*In forming a core of who we "are," identity weaves together all the aspects of ourselves and our various locations of ourselves with others and with the larger society...usually, we include in our identity an economic function in society; a set of meanings we have for others, a place in a sequence of generations, and a set of beliefs and values. We may also have an unusual genetic makeup, an atypical early history or family background, an eccentric temperament or psychological structure, or we may have special abilities or disabilities. Any of these may channel our lives in one way or another. (p. 28)*

This description recognizes that identity formation is a fluid process that is constantly being shaped and molded as individuals engage with the larger society around them. Josselson (1996) noted that "identity 'makes sense' only within the context of a particular social and historical time" (p. 28).

Since the inception of Erikson's model, a number of researchers have challenged its utility for understanding identity development in women (Hodgson & Fischer, 1981; Josselson, 1987). As a result, a number of useful models have been developed to provide a better understanding of how women develop through their life cycle.



In Revising Herself, Ruthellen Josselson (1996) presented findings from a third follow-up study on the development of identity in women across their life cycle. In the original study, Josselson developed a theoretical model to explain the pathways to identity four distinct groups of women who had participated in the study had taken. In the current study, she was able to locate 30 of her original research participants to be included in the follow-up study.

The basic premise of the model is that a woman at a certain stage in her identity development (usually late adolescence) experiences a crisis (e.g., a new choice or lifestyle possibility that challenges her existing childhood beliefs) wherein she must make a decision to commit to or reject the new choice or lifestyle possibility into her current belief system. The following is a brief description of the four stages in Josselson's (1987) model.

#### **Josselson's Model of Female Identity Development**

**Purveyors of the Heritage: The Foreclosures:** This stage represented women at the end of college who had made identity commitments without having experienced crisis situations. These women followed childhood patterns (beliefs and ideologies) established for them by their parents. According to Josselson, Foreclosure women made occupational decisions based solely upon their parent's expectations for them.

**Pavers of the Way: The Identity Achievements:** Identity Achievement women formed their individual identities independent of the values and beliefs they learned from their parents as children. When these women experienced crisis during identity formation, they compared the new choice or lifestyle possibility against their current belief system, then selected what most fit their personalities.

**Daughters of Crisis: The Moratoriums:** The women in the Moratorium phase were in a state of confusion because of the plethora of possibilities. They valued their parent's beliefs

and values, but recognized that other alternatives of equal value and significance existed from which to choose. And because of available choices, they often stalled in making a commitment.

**Lost and Sometimes Found: The Identity Diffusions:** The women in the Identity Diffusion group had experienced psychological traumas in their childhood years that prevented them from having a clear sense of who they were as young adult women. Women in this stage had not formed strong bonds with their parents as children; hence they had no established value systems or ideologies that would be challenged in a crisis situation. Josselson indicated that Identity Diffusion women were in a constant state of searching for the lost structure in their lives.

### **Cross Model of Psychological Nigrescence**

William Cross (1971, 1991, 1995) is credited with developing one of the first identity models to assist in our understanding of how African American children in particular develop their ethnic identity. The Cross model posited a five-stage psychological conversion process through which Black people proceed, ranging through degrees of self-degradation for being Black to acceptance of their Blackness (Evans, Forney, & DiBrito, 1998). The stages of the model are presented below:

**Pre-encounter.** In the first stage, Black youth devalue their Black identity in favor of the more politicized Eurocentric worldview.

**Encounter.** In this stage, Black youth encounter societal events or special circumstances that make them begin to challenge their previously held opinions and/or Eurocentric frame of reference, and begin to actively search for a Black identity.

**Immersion-Emersion.** In stage three of the model, Black youth have an over-exaggerated focus on their Black identity. They experience high levels of race pride and tend to denigrate White Americans. However, at this point in the search for their ethnic identity they have not really internalized or rationalized what it means to be a Black American; therefore, their feelings of Black pride are not yet concrete.

**Internalization.** Black youth in this stage of the model have internalized their Black identity, and have achieved an inner peace of what it means to be a Black American in a White majority-dominated culture. They no longer denigrate White Americans, and have come to accept and appreciate their own culture and ethnicity.

**Internalization-Commitment.** The fifth stage of the model is characterized by youth who are committed to and involved in activities that affect all African Americans, and other marginalized groups in society.

### **The Biracial Identity Development Model**

Herring (1995) defined biraciality as the “coupling ” of people from different racial ethnic groups. The following five-stage model advanced by Poston (as cited in Herring, 1995, p. 33) is used as a basis for understanding the stages of development through which biracial youth proceed:

**Personal Identity.** Biracial children generally have identity conflict because they internalize prejudices and values of the larger society. At this stage in their development, members of their primary reference group influence the young child’s identity more.

**Choice of Group Categorization.** At this stage, youth generally are pressured by their peer group to select an ethnic group identity. Poston indicated that children in this stage of their ethnic identity do not elect to choose a multiethnic identity because such a decision is beyond

the level of their cognitive reasoning. Youth between the ages of 10 and 15 experience the pressure of this stage most.

**Enmeshment/Denial.** Confusion and guilt at having to choose one identity that is not fully expressive of one's background characterize this stage. Biracial youth may experience alienation at the Choice stage and make a choice even if they are uncomfortable with it.

**Appreciation.** Individuals at this stage begin to appreciate their multiple identity and broaden their reference group orientation. They might begin to learn about their racial-ethnic-cultural heritage, but they still tend to identify with one group.

**Integration.** Individuals at this stage experience wholeness and integration. They tend to recognize and value all of their racial and ethnic identities. At this level, biracial youth develop a secure, integrated identity.

### **The Influence of Family on the Identity Development of Black Children**

For many Black children, the family unit provides a safe place—an insulated environment where they can grow and development away from the imposition of the outside world. Gregory (1995) noted that historically “the Black family can best be described as a social system which emphasizes the interdependence of familial and community relationships” (p. 4), all of which play a role in the child's development. Within the family there could be the child's primary caregiver or parents, siblings, and a host of extended family members and friends (Dill, 1994; Ladner, 1971; McAdoo, 1980). Nevertheless, many developmental theorists agree on the significant role parents alone play in their children's identity development (Bell, Avery, Jenkins, Field, & Schoenrock, 1985; Kunjufu, 1984; Sroufe, 1979; Walker & Green, 1986). Bell et al. (1985) contended that when children form strong bonds of attachment with their parents, they are more likely to develop “a sense of basic

confidence or trust, which permits the individual to interact with the [larger] environment in an appropriate and adaptive way” (p.109). Furthermore, Sroufe (1979) stated that this early attachment may give children the ability to form close relationships in their later years.

### **The Multiple Roles of the Mother in the Social Development of Daughters**

Research reports suggest that the role of the mother within the family has a significant impact on the daughter’s self-esteem and her career choice decisions in later years (Almquist & Angrist, 1971; Etter-Lewis, 1993; Sholomskas & Axelrod, 1986). For instance, in an early study conducted by Almquist and Angrist (1971) on the influence of mothers’ work-roles on the daughters’ career choice decisions, the researchers found that daughters of working mothers were more inclined to work outside the home than daughters of non-working mothers. However, in later research conducted by Sholomskas and Axelrod (1986) on the same topic, the researchers found that the “mother’s work-role choice did not relate to the adult daughter’s work-role choice, and that the women’s current role choices appeared to be guided by more current exogenous factors” (p.180).

Furthermore, Etter-Lewis (1993) found that the work-roles of the African American mothers of the women in her study did not always meet the traditional definition of work. She indicated that some of these mothers “took active roles in their respective communities, and many explored their own talents while providing a nurturing and supportive home environment for their children” (p. 88).

Several researchers have also noted the significant impact mothers have on their daughters’ development of self-esteem. For young girls particularly, the mother-child relationship has a significant impact on the development of self-esteem and other social constructs because girls develop esteem within the context of their relationship to others

(Gilligan, 1982; Josselson, 1996; Sanford & Donovan, 1984).

### **The Influence of the Educational System on Identity Formation**

It is not surprising that participation in the public educational school system (K-12) in the United States contributes to how children develop their identity, particularly since most children spend at least 13 years (i.e., kindergarten through high school) in school under the current system. And some students attend more through daycare or nursery school involvement (Rosznagel & Vance, 1982; Sanford & Donovan, 1984; Steele, 1992). In the United States, the public educational system is divided into a minimum of three sequential levels; elementary through secondary education, undergraduate education, and graduate and/or professional studies (Brubacher & Rudy, 1976).

Rosznagel and Vance (1982) asserted that up to the age of five, the family forms the child's primary environment. Hence, the family unit has the greatest influence on the child's identity formation because the child has not at that point had the opportunity to engage on a regular and consistent basis with members of the larger society. In subsequent years, "the family will continue to influence the child, but the schools, including teachers, peers, and the 'system,' will be the center of the child's extrafamilial existence for a decade or more" (p. 452). Furthermore, research indicates that participation in K-12 education will either complement, supplement, or contradict the values, traditions, and expectations that parents instill in their children by offering differing ideologies that either value or devalue the family's belief system, which in turn impacts the child's overall identity development (Rosznagel & Vance, 1982; Sanford & Donovan, 1984; Steele, 1992). Regardless of the exchange, Rosznagel and Vance (1982) argued that concern for the impact of schools on identity formation is justified because of the significant level of influence that schools exert

over a child's development.

Historically, institutions of learning in the United States have devalued the family traditions of African American and other minority students by requiring them to conform and adapt to customs and practices inherent in the European Anglo-Saxon culture (Cordeiro, Reagan, & Martinez, 1994; Dei, Mazzuca, McIsaac, & Zine, 1997; Fordham, 1996). For minorities in education, conformity carried with it the connotation that being something other than White lacked relevancy; therefore, children were expected to suppress their ethnicities and adapt the cultural orientations of the dominant White group (Dei et al., 1997; Holmes et al., in press). And children who attempted to retain their familial teachings met with strong rebuke from institutional proponents who favored conformity. Cordeiro et al. (1994) noted that people who supported the theory of Anglo-conformity felt that "the role of school should be to 'Americanize' children from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds to ensure that they were competent in English and that they identified primarily as 'American' rather than as members of an ethnic community" (p.10). It was never considered problematic at the time that being "American" meant being "White," or that being White represented an ethnic racial group as well (Helms, 1992).

Additionally, Sanford and Donovan (1984) insisted that "schools shaped our most fundamental beliefs about our purpose and possibilities in this world, while at the same time providing us with our basic conceptions of the nature of knowledge, truth, excellence, and history" (p. 177). These conceptions have had long and significant consequences for African Americans and other minority students who became a part of the educational system.

The philosophy of conformity became the prevailing focus of education during the late 19th and early 20th centuries in America. As the years advanced, the philosophy was

shrouded under different names (e.g., melting pot theory), but the underlying context of Anglo conformity mixed with Anglo superiority remained wholly intact through the 1960s, and still continues today at some levels in education (Cordeiro et al., 1994; Wilson, 1989).

### Peer Group Influence on Identity Development

The public educational school system is the site of another significant influence that impacts identity development in adolescents. Students generally become associated with a peer group in school.

Peers generally begin as same-sex cliques, and advance to incorporate members of both sexes as the students mature (Clark, 1989). Kunjufu (1984) provided a comprehensive description of a peer group and its within-group interactions. While the description is rather lengthy, it will allow us to understand the significance of peer relations in a multi-dimensional form, and it also alludes to the power and dynamic force the group exerts over individual members.

The peer group allows us to see ourselves in the eyes of people “who do what we do.” The peer groups bestows labels such as “popular” and “good looking,” and this either encourages or discourages us to participate in other activities. The peer group informs its members who’s “good” to date who, and whether you’ve qualified to participate in certain activities. When it’s time to choose teams, it does not take long for you to find out what your peers think of your abilities as they begin to choose sides, nor does it take long for you to find out what your peers think about your looks and who else may be “good looking,” therefore in your “league” to date. These votes of approval and disapproval are very significant to a child trying to find himself, and it becomes very difficult for other institutions to counteract their effect. (p. 19)

### **Conclusion**

In summary, the review of literature on African American women in higher education was situated within a historical framework because of the unique position Black women have held in society in general, and higher education more specifically. The literature suggested



that race relations in the United States may adversely affect the academic experiences of African American women more significantly in every area of our lives than in the lives of White women, White and Black men, and other men of color. Also reviewed were theoretical and conceptual models that describe some of the major influences that affect the identity formation of African American women long before they arrive at the academy. The assumption is that who women are within the various dimensions of their identity will also influence how they experience their academic roles.

This study was undertaken in an attempt to answer some of the questions that remain concerning African American women in higher education; particularly, why Black women faculty and administrators have not reached parity with White groups in higher education. It was also undertaken in an attempt to understand the specific academic experiences of the women who participated in this study.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The primary goal of this study was to examine the academic roles of the African American women faculty and administrators who participated in this research within the constructs of race, class, and gender. Central to that understanding was to allow the women to have an active role throughout the research process. I sought a method that would allow us to have a mutual exchange within a collaborative stance. For these reasons, I chose to use qualitative research as the methodological approach in the study.

#### **Qualitative Research Methodology**

Qualitative research means different things to different groups of researchers (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In the late 1960s when qualitative research was becoming a popular methodological approach for conducting studies in education (i.e., research with regard to human phenomena), it was called naturalistic inquiry (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Guba & Lincoln, 1982). Bogdan and Biklen (1992) stated, "in education, qualitative research is frequently called naturalistic because the researcher frequents places where the events he or she is interested in naturally occur. And the data are gathered by people engaging in natural behavior: talking, visiting, looking, eating," [etc.] (p. 3). Guba and Lincoln (1982) agreed, but said that naturalistic inquiry encompasses much more than how and where one conducts inquiry. They contended that "naturalistic inquiry is a paradigm of inquiry; that is, a pattern or model for how inquiry may be conducted" (p. 311). To understand this assessment, one would need to know and understand what a paradigm is.

Simply stated, a paradigm is a model (i.e., a tentative plan or pattern for carrying out an

activity or event) that has basic axiomatic (i.e., universally recognized truths) assumptions that are inherent in its design (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). Furthermore, according to Guba and Lincoln (1982) and Lincoln and Guba (1985), the axiomatic assumptions underpinning naturalistic or qualitative research are as follows: (1) realities are multiple; (2) both the researcher and the participant share an influential position during the research; (3) the resulting hypotheses are time and context-bound; (4) the impact of multiplicity on events, people, and reality mean that all inferences and/or explanations of occurrence are continuously being shaped; and (5) because people shape the events, circumstances, choices, and research phenomena in their lives, all inquiry is value-bound.

Today, the term naturalistic inquiry has been replaced by qualitative research. However, its meaning still has not been succinctly decided. By far the best definition I was able to ascertain, and the one I used as the philosophical foundation for this study, was offered by Denzin and Lincoln (1994):

Qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretative, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials—case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts—that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives. Accordingly, qualitative researchers deploy a wide range of interconnected methods, hoping always to get a better fix on the subject matter at hand. (p. 2)

Strauss and Corbin (1990) contended that “qualitative methods can be used to uncover and understand what lies behind any phenomenon about which little is yet known. [And] it can be used to gain novel and fresh slants on things about which quite a bit is already known” (p. 19). The researchers maintained that qualitative research methods “can give the intricate details of phenomena that are difficult to convey with quantitative methods” (p.19).

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) indicated that research in this paradigm should possess the following features:

- qualitative research has the natural setting as the direct source of data and the researcher is the key instrument;
- qualitative research is descriptive;
- qualitative researchers are concerned with process rather than simply with outcomes and products;
- qualitative researchers tend to analyze their data inductively;
- “meaning” is of essential concern to the qualitative approach. (pp. 31-32)

I share the beliefs of these leading proponents (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) of qualitative research in that I, too, believe people are far too complex and multi-faceted to be explained using statistical analysis. I have come to believe that in order to understand human phenomena more fully – how and why people develop, act or display certain attitudes and behaviors – it is imperative that the researcher be able to observe the participants’ actions within the contexts of how those actions are manifested in their everyday lives. I found that qualitative research allowed me to engage more intimately with my participants through face-to-face, open-ended interviewing and dialoguing (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Our interactions were always dynamic, and the woman had an opportunity to provide unqualified interpretation of what they believed had occurred within their academic careers. Hence, the results of this study are a collaborative work wherein the women have actively participated in developing the “meaning” of what is presented.

The methodological approach in qualitative research varies depending on the topic of concern and the discipline of the researcher conducting the study. Some of the most favored methods in the social sciences are ethnography, the phenomenological approach, life histories, conversational analysis, and grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In this study, I used the grounded theory approach.

As was stated earlier in the discussion, my primary goal here was to understand the academic experiences of the women who participated in the study. It was my belief that the most effective way to do this was to place their experiences, as Patricia Hill Collins (1990, p. xii) stated, “at the center of analysis” and allow their experiences to build the interpretative theories that describe their particular academic roles.

### **Building a Theoretical Framework from the Ground Up**

I sought to gain an understanding of the women’s academic experiences inductively (Crowson, 1993) with the direction of knowledge construction coming from the “ground up” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Theoretical explanations were developed only after I had analyzed all of the data. Crowson (1993) indicated that with the inductive approach, “the working hypotheses are ‘grounded’ in the individual cases and are both time and context-bound and thus are not to be confused with data-based generalizations” (p. 172).

Strauss and Corbin (1990) provided this definition:

A grounded theory is one that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. That is, discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon. Therefore, data collection, analysis, and theory stand in reciprocal relationship with each other. One does not begin with theory, then prove it. Rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge. (p. 23)

### **Using a Grounded Theory Approach to Explain Phenomena**

Oftentimes when empirical research is conducted with African American women or other marginalized groups as the subject of inquiry, theoretical suppositions from majority group norms are used to explain and evaluate their experiences (Collins, 1990). These assumptions are generally derived from selecting a sample of the larger population and extrapolating the findings broadly. A fault of using broad-based generalizations to explain the experiences of marginalized groups is that consideration of cultural and social differences is not accounted for; nor are the findings placed within an historical framework that may provide a greater understanding of the how and why of some action or event. Hence, there is a high probability that the marginalized groups may be perceived as “inferior” because their realities are shaped within cultural and historical contexts that do not fit majority group norms. By using the grounded theory approach, I was able to account for both the historical and cultural contexts of the women’s lives because the theory derived was situated directly from my data set. Therefore, the theory generated in this study is considered to be, “suited to its supposed uses;” meaning it “fits” the women in the study, and it “works” in describing their academic experiences (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 3). Fit means that the categories that emerged in the study are readily (not forcibly) applicable to the women’s situations; and “work” means that they are meaningfully relevant to and able to explain the women’s experiences.

Glaser and Strauss (1967), two of the earliest advocates of the grounded theory approach in social research, indicated that generating theory in sociology (i.e., the study of human social behavior) serves a five-fold interrelated purpose. Grounded theory (1) enables explanation and prediction of behavior; (2) assists in the advancement of sociological theory; (3) provides practitioners with practical solutions to everyday behavioral concerns; (4)

provides a data management system; and (5) serves as a guide for research on specific behavioral areas. Thus theory in sociology is a strategy for handling data in research as opposed to a method of research. Its primary goal is to provide modes of conceptualization for describing and explaining the phenomena under study.

### **Data Collection Methods**

The primary data collection method employed in this study was one-on-one tape recorded interviews. I wanted to give the participants an opportunity to share their experiences, perceptions, and concerns about working in a predominantly White institution as faculty and administrators.

The respondents in this study were interviewed on five separate occasions. The first interview lasted approximately 90 minutes and there were four subsequent interviews of 60 minutes each. In the first interview we discussed the nature of the study again, and the participants' family background. In the second interview I asked the participants to clarify different parts of the data from the first interview about which I was unclear, then we proceeded to questions related to the participant and her family's educational background. In the third interview I again clarified sections of the data, and we discussed various themes that were emerging in her data set. After this, we discussed questions related to her employment. In the fourth interview, we discussed themes that emerged from the data, and she read her profile. We also continued the discussion in the area of employment. The fifth interview was used for member checking.

Two of the participants lived in another state. Therefore, after our fourth interview was completed, we communicated on the telephone as well as the Internet. The profiles were sent to them for review via the Internet.

### **Selection of Respondents**

In Fieldwork, Jackson (1987) indicated that “only a lunatic or a person with a great deal of time and a steady income wanders the countryside or cityscape with a notebook, camera, and recorder doing fieldwork at random” (p. 13). When I read this passage in the book, I smiled because he had captured the true essence of my feeling with regard to locating participants for this study.

As a graduate student working within prescribed time constraints and stringent budgetary parameters, I was very deliberate in selecting women to participate in the study. The women were selected for participation based upon the following factors:

- They were African American women faculty or administrators employed by two- and four-year predominantly White institutions;
- At the time of the study their length of employment with the institution was more than three years. It was assumed they would have a greater understanding of the institutional culture than someone who had been employed for less time;
- It was felt that their academic departments or disciplines would lend breadth to the overall nature of the study. The faculty represented history, education, and nursing; and the administrators were in student and academic affairs.
- When I asked them to participate in the study they expressed a genuine interest in the study. In other words, their participation was not simply to assist me as a student with completing my dissertation research. I sought women who had “real” concerns about their experiences and those of other African American women in higher education and wanted to help with framing viable solutions and/or recommendations; and
- They were all affiliated with institutions in the Midwest region of the United States that



were within my ability to reach.

### **Data Analysis and Theory Development**

I used constant comparative analysis to generate the theory in this study. Glaser and Strauss (1967) stated that grounded theory is a process; and comparative analysis is the procedure by which the process of generating grounded theory is carried out. Inherent within the comparative method was my ability to analyze and code the data as it was being collected. Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 56) indicated that the analytic procedures of grounded theory are designed to:

- Build rather than only test theory.
- Give the research process the rigor necessary to make the theory “good” science.
- Help the analyst to break through the biases and assumptions brought to, and that can develop during, the research process.
- Provide the grounding, build the density, and develop the sensitivity and integration needed to generate a rich, tightly woven, explanatory theory that closely approximates the reality it represents.

I started the analysis by reading over each of the participant’s interview transcripts just to familiarize myself with the data. The second time I read the transcripts I started the coding process. Strauss and Corbin (1990) indicated that coding is considered the primary step in generating theory from data because it allows you to break the data down into conceptual units around emergent theme categories. Data analysis and coding occurred in a circular motion, and I used the four-stage method suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1990): (1) comparing incidents applicable to each category; (2) integrating categories and their properties; (3) delimiting the theory; and (4) writing the theory. Below is an outline of the

procedures I followed to analyze and generate grounded theory in this study.

**Stage One:** Comparing incidents applicable to each category. In this stage the data were sorted, coded, and categorized into conceptual units. As new data were being analyzed, emerging themes were compared to existing themes that helped me explain, and/or define the category more fully. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), a unit of data must possess two characteristics: (1) it must be heuristic, proving some understanding needed by the researcher; and (2) it must be “the smallest piece of information about something that can stand by itself...” (p. 345). I continuously compared new units of data to the categories I had already established. Glaser and Strauss (1967) indicated “this constant comparison of incidents very soon starts to generate theoretical properties of the category” (p. 107) and the dimensions and characteristics of the theory begin to take shape.

**Stage Two:** Integrating categories and their properties. As coding continued, my emphasis shifted from comparing new units of data to comparing emerging units to the properties that had been generated within the category.

**Stage Three:** Delimiting the theory. At this point, new incidents and categories were no longer expanded and attempts were made to use the data to expand the properties of the existing theories.

**Stage Four:** Writing the theory. The grounded theory that was generated in this research is presented in chapter six.

### **Validating Grounded Theory**

Guba and Lincoln (1982) suggested that researchers adhere to the following guidelines to ensure that trustworthiness is maintained within a qualitative research study: (1) creditability; (2) transferability; (3) dependability; and (4) confirmability. Furthermore,

Guba and Lincoln (1982) have identified specific procedures that should be observed within each guideline to ensure trustworthiness. What follows are the procedures that were followed within each guideline in this study.

### **Credibility**

Credibility is an important aspect of any research study. It refers to what a researcher intends to do to ensure that the results of the study accurately represent and reflect what has been examined within the context of the study. In order to ensure that this study is a true portrayal of my participants' feelings, perceptions, and understanding of their experiences, I took the following steps:

#### **Triangulation**

Triangulation refers to a method whereby the researcher uses a variety of data sources, investigators, theories, and methodological approaches in an attempt to understand the phenomena under study (Janesick, 1994). Glesne and Peshkin (1992) indicated that these steps are necessary because "it is sometimes difficult to know how much of what researchers see is a product of their earnest but unconscious wish to see it [as] so" (p. 147). By using a variety of data sources, I was in a better position to make valuable assessments of what was occurring. In this study, I: (a) conducted one-on-one interviews with the respondents; (b) conducted follow-up telephone interviews; (c) reviewed relevant literature on the subject of African American women faculty and administrators in predominantly White institutions; (d) solicited documents from the women that would help me understand their standpoint more fully; and (e) reviewed documents from the women's places of employment to get a better understanding of the institutional culture.

### Member checking

Member checking represents a “check and balance” system in qualitative research.

Glesne and Peshkin (1985) indicated that obtaining the reactions of respondents can be a time-consuming and laborious task. But participants may be able to: (1) verify that you have captured their reality, and not your superimposed one; (2) inform you of responses that may be problematic if the information were to be revealed in written form; (3) help you to remain focused on specific thematic areas; and (4) provide new ideas and areas to be examined.

Throughout the interview process, I consulted with the participants to verify that my understanding of their experiences was actually how they perceived the experience to be, or that it captured what they had told me. Once I had completed significant portions of the narratives, I shared the information with the participants. In some cases I was asked to delete text that they felt was too revealing, or they helped clarify incidents for me. Since a number of my participants were not located in my state of residence, I used the telephone and internet to check their responses.

### Peer debriefing

Peer debriefing occurs when the researcher consults with colleagues and others who may be able to assist him or her in shaping the study. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) suggested that the researcher ask friends and colleagues to work with portions of the data by developing codes, applying previously determined codes to new data to check for fit, or checking the researcher’s perceptions of his or her field-notes.

My dissertation advisor was invaluable here. She read through the transcripts and offered suggestions for re-thinking how I had categorized and/or coded themes. I also enlisted a select group of colleagues who read and commented on sections of the coded transcriptions.

### **Transferability**

Transferability is not a term readily associated with qualitative research methods because it is too closely akin to the term generalizability. And most qualitative researchers cringe at the positivist's use of generalizations from a sample group to explain the behaviors and actions of a larger population. Yet, Lincoln and Guba (1985), two of the leading authorities on the "how to" of qualitative research, suggested that qualitative research should be transferable. They contend that transferability is contingent upon the degree to which the researcher supplies the reader and/or subsequent researcher(s) with enough contextual data (referred to as thick description; see Clifford Geertz, 1973 for an in-depth discussion) about the setting of the study whereby it allows someone else to replicate the study in a similar environment. Within the narratives that follow, I have provided as much information as possible about the participants and their institutions without comprising their confidentiality.

### **Confirmability/Dependability**

To address the issue of confirmability and dependability, I established an audit trail inclusive of field-notes, interview tapes, coding procedures, an explanation of how themes were developed and assigned, a journal of my personal thoughts about the research process, the research proposal, and a written case study of my findings.

### **Limitations of the Study**

To explain the experiences of all African American women in predominantly White institutions of higher education is beyond the scope of this study. Therefore, I sought to examine the academic experiences of the women participating in this study alone. Furthermore, while their narratives may provide insight into the academic experiences of other African American women faculty and administrators in similar settings, they should not

be perceived to represent or explain the experiences of all African American women in predominantly White institutions.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **PARTICIPANT PROFILES**

In this chapter, I will introduce the five women who participated in the study. My primary objective here is to establish a foundation of understanding so that the reader will have a sense of who each of the participants are and how they evolved into the academic women they have become. By my providing this understanding, the reader will be privy to some of the joys, hardships, and intimate feelings that frame the African American female experience in higher education microscopically and society macroscopically. As the reader, your responsibility will be to keep what you read in perspective. These are the experiences of five women who participated in this study. Their stories may or may not represent experiences that you have encountered or fully understand, yet they are the realities of the women I interviewed as they presented them and as I perceived them. The life experiences and backgrounds of each woman in the study are unique to her.

The chapter begins with a general overview of the women in the study, their similarities and differences, and what it was like for me as an African American female researcher interviewing other African American women. After the generalities, the participants and I will provide details about their lives within the context of their (a) family background; (b) the communities where they grew-up; (3) identity development; and (d) educational experiences. The chapter closes with a personal biography of the author so that the reader will have the full context in which the study originated.

### **An Overview of the Women in the Study**

All of the participants in the study were African American women; their ages spanned the decades between 30 and 60. There were two women in their 30s, a 40 year-old, one in her 50s and another in her 60s. It was interesting that the older the woman was, the less likely she was to give her exact age. All of them were from two-parent households whether it was a stepparent and a biological parent or both the biological mother and father. Three of the women grew up in predominantly White communities, and the other two grew up in predominantly Black neighborhoods but had a fair amount of interaction with the surrounding White community during adolescence. Four of the women were married and one was single. All of the married women spoke very positively of their relationships with their spouses and seemed to enjoy marriage and family life. The single woman spoke often of how she missed having a significant other in her life and attributed her singleness largely to working and living in a predominantly White environment. The married women were parents of either school-age children or grown adults, and the 60 year-old was a grandmother. Three of the women were first-generation college students, and the others were second or third. There was only one woman in the group who had ever attended a historically Black institution; all of the others had received their Master's degree, or both the Master's and Ph.D. from a predominantly White institution. Three of the women were employed by the same predominantly White institution where they had received their Ph.D. degrees, and the other two had both attended the same predominantly White institution for their Master's degrees, and were now working at the same community college. Two of the women had performed some type of professional service at their current institutions prior to employment, and at least four of them had been strongly encouraged to apply or recruited directly for the



positions they now hold.

### **My Outsider Within Status in the Investigative Process**

Some scholars (Collins, 1986, 1990) use the term “insider/outsider” or “outsider within” to describe marginalized Black women. These women are considered to be privy to certain types of information or activities because of their role or position within the group, setting, or institution, even though they are never truly considered to be a member of the “in crowd.” I use the term here to describe my position as an African American woman who interviewed, identified with, and perhaps impacted the re-lived experiences of the African American women who participated in this study; even though I would not be considered one of them.

I was an outsider within because as a Black woman in my 40s, I could relate to many of their stories of personal and professional triumph and challenge as a minority person attempting to navigate the terrain of a majority-dominated society. I, like some of the participants in this study, grew up in a predominantly Black community that was situated so close to the larger White community that I learned early how to operate within two worlds. In other words, like the women in the study, I learned how to “act” to represent my race in the eyes of the White beholder. I knew what to do and how to do it. But I also understood that when I came into the privacy of my people, I could be myself and let my guard down. I also attended predominantly White institutions throughout my academic career, which gave some of us another point of reference. And I have also been employed at a predominantly White and historically Black institution.

My insider status also extended to how we communicated with one another. It was easy for us to drift back and forth into the dialect of our people (i.e., Ebonics) and it was just as comfortable for us to speak in the recognized standard language of American English.

Still, I knew I was an outsider, too; because as a student, I did not possess their academic ranks or administrative titles, nor was I yet a holder of the coveted Ph.D. that is highly esteemed in higher education, as some of them were. As an African American woman investigating the academic experiences of African American women in higher education, some of whom I aspire to emulate, I was able to use this outsider within status to my advantage. The position provided me with an opportunity for “reflexivity” (Kreiger, 1991) and self-examination regarding some of the events that had occurred in my own life and academic career.

### **Juanita Johnson**

Juanita is a medium-sized light-skinned African American woman with what the Black community has always called “good hair” because it is naturally wavy, which to us means she doesn’t have to straighten it after washing, and it is very thick. Her eyeglasses shield dark penetrating brown eyes that seem to challenge you to contradict what she is saying, and she speaks very distinctly with body language that says I am quite cognizant, and ready to respond to your question. She appears very confident and self-assured.

Our first interview was scheduled for 10:00 p.m. at her home because she is emphatic about motherhood and wanted to make sure that her children, aged 5 and 15 years old, were settled down for the evening so that her time with them would not be interrupted. She became a participant in the study in an effort to help what I am sure she believed to be a younger woman in need of participants to complete her research project. We later learned that we are the same age. However, I sensed that she still perceived me in my student role as being much younger than she is, and frankly she seemed older than our 40 years. When I arrived she welcomed me in and offered me something to drink before we sat down to talk.

Juanita is a senior-level administrator at a four-year, Research I land-grant institution and had been in the position for almost four years at the time of our first interview. She also provides consultative services for the company she worked for prior to her employment at the university.

### **Family Background**

Juanita grew up in a small rural predominantly White town located approximately six hours from the university where she is currently employed. Her mother and father raised her and it was just the three of them until she was about three years old. Then her father's two daughters from a previous marriage came to live with them after their mother passed away. She indicated that it took her a long time to figure out exactly why they were there, and it seemed like they just appeared one day and nobody really said why. It wasn't until much later that she learned that their mother had died of alcohol abuse. Her sisters are part Native American and were 13 and 14 when they came to live with them. Juanita said, "I didn't like having big sisters because they were mean to me because they didn't like the fact that I was 'daddy's little girl' so there was always conflict about that in our home." When she turned five her brother was born. These new additions crushed her because she had been the only child and then all of a sudden there were four of them.

Juanita is biracial. Her mother is White and her father is African American. She described how she came to learn of her mother's ethnicity as being one of the most memorable events of her childhood.

The most memorable thing about my childhood was the day that I realized that my mother was White. I was about seven or eight years old and I was playing in the street with this little Black boy and my mother called me to come in. When he saw her he said, "Your mother is White," and I said, "No she's not." I remember going into the house and looking at her, and it was like a veil

had been removed from my eyes, and I looked at her and said, “Oh my God, she really is, she really is White, my mother is White.”

Juanita said she felt betrayed because neither of her parents had told her that her mother was White. Her mother had assumed that she could look at her and tell that she was White, so she never mentioned it. But Juanita recalls there being a number of very light-skinned Blacks in the neighborhood, so she assumed that her mother was just lighter than anyone else. “My mother’s eyes were dark and her hair was dark, too, and it was kind of tight and curly.” In retrospect she says, “She used to perm her hair so that it would look more like an afro-style hairdo, so it just never occurred to me that she was White.”

She was very angry with her mother and would not speak to her for a while. When they finally talked, her mother asked her if she loved her any less now that she knew that she was White. “Naturally, I said no. And she said, ‘You have to remember that no matter what anyone says about me, I’m still your mother.’” Juanita indicated her mother telling her this was very helpful because it was something that she could say to people if they commented about her mother being White. “I would go, ‘Yes she is, but she’s just momma to me.’”

There were times growing up when Juanita was treated badly because she is biracial. Sometimes the kids would be cruel and call her names. It wasn’t the neighborhood children she played with on a daily basis who teased her, but some of the other Black children she encountered when she got to the middle school. They would pull her hair and call her names like “half-breed” or “salt-and-pepper.” Sometimes she’d go running to her father crying and he would console her by saying, “But do you love momma?” and Juanita would say yes. Then he would say, “It doesn’t matter what they say about your mother.”

In an effort to be accepted she says of those times, “I would always try to go out of my

way for people because I wanted to fit in, but they would just make fun of me.” Juanita thinks that she was the first biracial child in her town. That may explain why people reacted so strongly to her being there: she was an anomaly to them. I asked her if she received any mistreatment from the White kids in school. She replied emphatically with her hands on her hips, “No, they knew better.” Plus most of them probably did not know that she was biracial, or that her mother was White because they never came to her house to play or visit.

Juanita talked a lot about interacting with her Black extended family (e.g., grandparents, uncles and aunts, etc.) when she was growing up. She recalled the excitement of going down south to North Carolina every year in August for her father’s family reunions and interacting with the Black side of her family. “My father would drive straight through without stopping, and I remember that there was always this kind of excitement in the air about us getting there.” Part of the excitement of going down South had to do with the influence the family had in the community. “My grandfather was initially a sharecropper. He worked for the White people and he acquired a lot of land from them, so our family was well respected in the area.” Everyone knew who Mr. Kelly was in Jasper, North Carolina. Plus two of her uncles owned the only Black funeral parlors in town. So, her extended family in the South lived much better than most of the people in their area. It appears even as a child Juanita knew what having money could mean in terms of having social status in the eyes of the larger community. “At home, I would say my mother and father would have been considered lower class; down there, everyone knew who the Kellys (i.e., her maiden name) were because my grandfather owned most of the land in the area.” But attending the family reunions was also a bittersweet time for the family because her mother could not accompany them on the trips.

Juanita's trips down South occurred during the 1950s when interracial marriages were not accepted, and the Ku Klux Klan was still very active in that part of the country, and her parents feared that the family's lives would be in danger if someone were to see a White woman with a Black man and biracial children. So, her mother always stayed behind. "Even by the 1960s, 1964 or 1965 when the courts begin to recognize interracial marriages, she still wouldn't go because she was fearful that something would happen to my grandparents as a result of her being down there with us." As a result, her mother never met most of her father's family in the South.

Her mother's family members were absent from her life during her growing up years. "When my mother married my dad, her family had nothing to do with us. I would see an aunt every now and then, and my grandmother periodically, but if you asked me how many brothers and sisters she has, or where they live, I couldn't tell you." Her mother never told her much about her family because she knew Juanita was angry with them and feared that she might try to contact them, and she didn't want Juanita to be hurt.

Juanita's mother has more regular interactions with her family members now that they are older and since she has been diagnosed with terminal cancer. Juanita attributes their re-appearance to guilt. "Her sisters and brothers are coming back into her life feeling bad for all the years that they were not there for her. But, I still don't interact with them." She says she knows that she needs to pray about her feelings toward them, but as far as she is concerned, she wants nothing to do with them. "I don't know them and I don't want anything to do with them because they really didn't have anything to do with me as a child." Her emotions rose quickly when she spoke of them and it caught me off guard. She looked at me, smiled, and said, "I still have anger as you can probably tell."

### **Growing Up in a Predominantly White Community**

Juanita grew up in a poor predominantly Black and Hispanic community in a rural town. “We lived on the westside, Whites lived on the eastside and people with money lived on the northside, but they were White, too.” I asked Juanita if there were no signs posted and desegregation had already occurred, how did she know where her place was in the community? “No one ever really taught me how things were in our town, like the rules or anything; you just knew it, especially when I became a teenager and me and my friends would walk downtown.” The town was divided by streets and once they crossed a certain point, they knew they were out of their neighborhood.

### **Identity Formation**

Juanita identifies herself as an African American woman. However, before she came to this resolution, she had many questions regarding her Black identity. She recalled when she was about 15 or 16 trying to figure out what the differences were between herself and her mother. “I would wonder what was so special about her that my father married her as opposed to a Black woman. And there were times when I wondered if there was something wrong with me, or if a Black man would want me because my father didn’t want to be with a Black woman.” She shares a conversation that she had with her father about the subject.

One time when I was angry with my father about something, I came right out and said to him, you just don’t like me because I am a Black woman and you have never liked Black women. He looked at me like I was crazy and asked me what was I talking about. I reminded him that his first wife was Indian and his second is White. He said that it was just that there was nobody that he fell in love with that happened to be a Black woman, but that he had dated Black women when he lived down South. But to me that wasn’t a good enough answer. I still didn’t understand what was wrong with being a Black woman and I felt that something had to be wrong with us because my father had never married one.

She credits reading lots of books about African American people, particularly Black women, with giving her a sense of Black female identity. She would get lost in Black books at the local library and had a favorite librarian who would set the new books aside for her to read. Some people even thought she was crazy because she preferred reading to playing marbles like the other children. She read everything she could get her hands on, including books like Richard Wright's Native Son, books by Dick Gregory, and all kinds of history books that told about the Black experience because she wanted to understand more about Black people, even though she was raised around them.

Juanita was on a mission to find where she fit in the world. She knew she didn't fit into her mother's world. "I knew that I could never be a part of that world, so I needed to know where my place was." Her desire stemmed from a nagging thought at the back of her mind that asked, if something were to happen to both of her parents, what would become of her and her brother? "It was always a fear of mine, because on my mother's side of the family there was this non-existent relationship and then I really only saw my father's side of the family for two weeks out of the year during the family reunions. So I didn't know what would happen to us if something were to happen to my parents."

While reading books helped Juanita understand her race and ethnicity, they also made her aware of the negative representation of Blacks in media. She indicated that in most of the material there was a connotation that being Black was synonymous with something that was bad. It was during this time that she became somewhat militant and began to argue and confront teachers in school who would present Black people negatively in their class discussions. "I would question everything people said about Black people. I would say, why does a black cat have to mean bad luck, why can't it be a white cat?"



### **Educational Experiences**

The elementary schools Juanita attended were predominantly Black. She was considered a “smart” student and did very well in her classes. “I always got A’s, and every now and then a B. Like in gym or swimming because I didn’t appreciate having to undress in front of all those White kids. I didn’t want them looking at me.” When she started middle school, the racial composition of the student body changed significantly because students from all over the west side of town came together into one school. So there was a sizeable number of Black and White students. She and other Black kids would “make fun of the White kids at school and the White teachers. We had a little saying, ‘white patty, white patty, you don’t shine, call me a nigger, and I’ll beat your behind.’” This spirit of antagonism was prevalent in every area of the school, and there was no common place where Black and White students came together. Juanita indicated that “even on the playground they played on their side of the yard, and we played on ours.”

Her exchanges with some of the White teachers were no different than they were with White students; they were very adversarial because she says “they often stereotyped Blacks in their presentations.” The knowledge she had gained about Black culture was used to combat their representations. “I knew what they were saying was not true because I had done all of this reading. And I knew that they could not change what had been written about us, but I would still say something anyway.” Her militant resistance regarding the portrayal of African Americans in the classroom was even more prevalent during college. “I would argue with the professors in class because some of their material [regarding cultures] was presented like there was something wrong with being Black.”

The high school Juanita attended had a larger percentage of White students than she had

ever encountered in education to that point. She indicated that it seemed with each new phase of her education, the Black student population decreased, and the White population increased. There were a total of 200 students in her high school graduating class; African Americans represented only 50 to 60 of the total group. In her hometown, Juanita was the only African American female student to complete high school and go on to college. "There may have been a couple of guys that were older who may have gone on an athletic scholarship, but I was the first one to attend on an academic scholarship." This feat she achieved in spite of her high school guidance counselor who would discourage her from college preparatory classes because he did not believe she would attend college.

He would help me as far as picking my classes, but he would always say to me, "You don't need to take that math class." I always got A's in my geometry classes, but at a certain level, he stopped allowing me to take them. After my junior year, he said, "You can go ahead and graduate now." I said, "Well don't you need to take classes to get ready for college? And he smiled and said, "Yes you do, but you are not going to college."

Juanita indicated that the only thing she could think of at that moment were the words that her mother had drummed into her ears from the time she was a small child: "When you go to college, when you go to law school," so she knew what he was saying was incorrect. Her mother had always encouraged her to do well in school to earn a scholarship because the family could not support her college education, but she was expected to go because she was destined to be a lawyer. "So, I would always tell him when he said that, 'My mom says I'm going to college.'" She attended a large predominantly White university in Iowa.

During her college experience Juanita took great pleasure in the fact that most people did not know she was bi-racial. So when her Black friends would make comments about White people, she loved to shock them by telling them that her mother is White. Most of the time

“they did not believe me because I guess I don’t talk, act, or sound White. At least I don’t think I do. And I think I go out of my way not to. I don’t want to look White, and I don’t want to sound White either.”

### **Iman Tate**

Iman is a copper-toned African American woman who wears her hair in a short natural haircut. She told me later in our interviews that she’s always worn her hair natural and was the first person in her hometown community to do so even when the natural was not in style. When I first saw her I thought that she was much younger than her 32 years because of her small frame. She reminded me of someone who might be in need of protection from a bully. My first impression certainly did not reflect the woman I found within the outward package. Iman is a very strong and dynamic individual who needs no assistance holding her ground with anyone. Her intellectual savvy was incredible and I was constantly in awe of her depth and knowledge of national and international world events and her analysis of the socio-economic class and race divisions in America. She is very clearly an academician, right down to the wire-rimmed eyeglasses hanging on her nose. She is very conservative in style and I doubt that you would see her wearing bold prints or bright reds or yellows. Her demeanor is forthright and somewhat challenging as she presents facts about the development of America’s race, class, and gender ideologies that only a person who had done extensive study would know. She describes herself as an anti-imperialist, and desires to be considered a serious scholar.

A former professor who knew Iman gave me her name and number indicating that she would be an interesting person to interview for the study. When I contacted her and told her what I was proposing to do, she laughed in a deep nervous kind of voice and said, “Sure, I’ll

be in it.”

All of our meetings took place in her faculty office, which is adorned with a number of artifacts from places around the world, but mostly Africa. At our first meeting, I was somewhat nervous because it was clear that Iman is an intellectual and I felt slightly intimidated. Iman is a tenure-track assistant professor and had been at her university for three years at the time of our first interview.

### **Family Background**

Iman, like Juanita, grew up in a small rural predominantly White community not far from the university where she is currently employed. She, too, is a woman of mixed heritage. Her father is African and her mother is African American. She is the oldest of three children; her sister is three years younger and her brother is five years younger. She was a second-generation college student; her father is a mechanical engineer and her mother, after having been a schoolteacher for many years, recently became a lawyer. Her parents and grandmother, who has a high school diploma, were very adamant that she and her siblings take advantage of the educational opportunities available to them. She was constantly told that “education is a good thing, and you should get as much schooling as you can.” Iman laughs and says, “You read studies about girls not being encouraged to go into the sciences, but that was not the case in our household. My dad said, you need everything, science, literature, physics, math, you need it all.” And Iman, being the oldest, felt the pressure to set the example for her younger siblings, both of whom have at least a four-year college degree. Her sister was an economics major, but switched and is currently pursuing a law degree, and her brother majored in business and currently works for a very prominent retail corporation. Iman initially majored in biology thinking that she would go on to veterinary or medical

school, but switched to a social science field to the temporary chagrin of her father who wanted her to be a scientist.

Iman's mother is originally from Baltimore, Maryland and her father is from South Africa. Her additional interests are the creation and perpetuation of race, class, and gender inequities in the United States and abroad. Both her parents were students at the University of Kansas when they met and married. She thinks their original plan was to live in Africa, but something came up and they remained in the United States. She was born in the Midwest and lived there until she turned 20 years old.

We were talking about sibling relationships and I told her that I and my brothers and sisters are very close and asked her if that was the case with hers. She indicated that they had recently talked about their relationships over the Christmas break and agreed that they liked each other a lot more now that they are older than they used to. Of the three, her sister is the free-spirited one and can occasionally drag Iman out for a night on the town. Her sister recently moved to California in what Iman describes as "a quest for self-understanding." Her brother is "very serious about his career right now" and spends most of his time working or with his girlfriend who lives in another state. She says, "He's very private and does not share his personal life with the family." Iman is considered the anti-social one in the family because she prefers to be alone. She wrestles with extreme shyness. Overall, there is not a lot of interaction among the siblings other than on occasional holidays when they gather at their parents' home for celebrations. Their lack of interaction is partially because they live in different parts of the country and they may be closet workaholics. However, she described her family as "real supportive" and indicated that she felt "very safe and protected growing up" within her immediate family. Outside the family in the larger community is where she

met her greatest challenges.

### **Growing Up in a Predominantly White Community**

Sadness mixed with anger is what you hear when Iman describes her growing up in a predominantly White community. Although it has been many years since she lived there and her parents are no longer in the area, hence it is not necessary for her to go back there, it is obvious that the painful experiences reside right under the surface. The tone of her voice and composure changed instantly when she began to talk about her experiences growing up as a minority in a White community. “I was very uncomfortable as a child in my hometown. I didn’t like the town at all, and I felt very isolated because of my race.” Iman grew up in a rural community of approximately 23,000 people. There were a fair number of Latino families in the community, some Blacks, but the majority of the people were White. She believes that her parents decided to remain in Iowa in an attempt to provide her, her sister, and brother with a stable family environment. And while she respects their decision, it is clear that it may not have been the most favorable decision where she was concerned. It was very difficult for Iman to make social connections with the kids in the community. She said, “I had a few friends, but probably from the sixth or seventh grade onward when all the kids started forming intimate relationships, you know this kind of lovey-dovey stuff, I was totally out of that.” Education became her companion. She said, “the more isolated and alienated I felt, the more I escaped into education. I used it as a resource to fall back on because I felt alienated and isolated from what the other kids were doing.”

### **Black Identity Formation**

Iman, like Juanita, credits reading Black material with helping her develop a positive Black self-image. “I did a lot of reading about other Black people who grew up in places

where there was a limited number of Black people. It helped me understand that some of what I was feeling was real, and that I wasn't imagining things." She read books about people who lived in places like Hawaii and North Dakota who felt fairly comfortable in their race among the larger White population. She continues, "I eventually came to a point where I looked around at the kids in my community, or wherever else I was at the time, and decided that I was not like them, nor did I want to be." She resolved in her mind that being Black was who she was, and that being Black was okay. "It's like I'm here, I'm definitely not White, nor do I want to be White. There are some people who are wannabes, but I don't want to be White." As Iman's search for identity continued, she developed "the insight that Black folks exist all over the world and that being Black isn't just being urban or having an inner-city-type mentality." I asked her what she meant by this, and she said sadly, "You can't imagine how I felt when I would hear stories about Black people who lived in the inner-city. And you know, the inner-city was this code name for Blacks." The popular press portrayed "Blacks in the inner-city as being heavy drug and alcohol abusers, welfare recipients who had kids at the drop of an hat, and all this other crazy kind of stuff." She lived in rural Iowa and could see for herself the one-sidedness of their portrayals. But that "Understanding of there being more ways to being Black has taken me a fair amount of time to develop. It was something that I didn't become comfortable with until I was probably in my middle 20s," which was after she had experienced much pain and confusion.

### **Educational Experiences**

Iman's educational experiences were basically non-descript for the first six years. She attended Catholic school and described herself as being "very Catholic from the first through the sixth grade." Then like most elementary schools do, her school emptied into one of the

two primary junior high schools in town. She likened this new phase in her life to being put into “a snake pit.” When I asked her to explain, she said, “it was kind of like the novel, Lord of the Flies. I know that’s stretching the analogy because no one got murdered. But, it seemed like the kids were mainly in charge, and the teachers seemed absent. And I didn’t feel like I belonged. I felt unsafe, and it wasn’t just physically, it was emotionally and socially [as well].” I asked her how could things have changed so drastically from elementary to middle school considering she had attended school with some of these kids all along. She says “that there was a lot of drug abuse going on, and a fair amount of racial strife which was directed mostly against the Latino students because they out-numbered the Black students in minority status.”

Junior and senior high school was also a period in her life when she was trying to determine who she was as a Black person in relationship to the larger White community of kids around her. So this period in time posed many challenges for her. And the isolation exacerbated her shyness.

Iman was not the only Black person at her school. There were three other Black students in her class and about ten at the school altogether. However, they were not a united group nor did they hang out together. She believes that all of them were “feeling some level of stress” and “were trying to adapt or find a niche” where they could belong. “I’ve thought about this a lot since then and have come to the conclusion that we all had very different personalities, about as opposite as you could get.” And within their own personality they each found a way to manage in the environment. “Some of us found our niche in sports, some became the class clowns, and others became very very religious. My niche was in the books.”



I asked her if she thought that her sister and brother had the same kind of experiences and she stated emphatically, “No, they did not.” By the time they started junior and senior high school, the family had moved out of state to an area that was more ethnically diverse than the small rural farm community, even though it, too, is a predominantly White state. She also believes that “boys and girls develop very differently in traditionally White settings” because of the way society views each group.

My brother seemed to manage things much differently than me. He was far more socially accepted even though he attended an all-White school. His best friend at that time was a guy who was biracial; his mother is White and his father is Black. I can remember overhearing them talk about what it means to be Black in this state versus what it means to be Black in another. I think because he had that kind of network and because he was more socially active, his experience was much different than mine.

In fact, her brother still maintains some of his childhood relationships. She, on the other hand, has not kept in contact with anyone. She refers to that period in her life as a “great big blank space.”

### **Nakia Taylor-Smith**

What struck me most about Nakia’s appearance was her bronzed skin-tone and reddish-brown shoulder length hair. It is like the color of the sun setting on a hot summer’s day and she wears it down flipped under at the ends. Nakia is a tall full-figured woman, and carries herself like one of the proud African queens that you read about in Black history books. Her shoulders are broad, yet there is not the slightest hint of masculinity in them. I perceived her as a woman of strength and strong character; yet, there was also a tinge of sadness about her, too. Her face has laugh lines and small wrinkles around the eyes and mouth, and while there were a few gray strands of hair mixed in with the red, I would have never guessed that she was a woman in her 60s. During our conversations she wore vibrant colors that accentuated

her hair color and skin tone. I never once saw her wear a deep conservative blue or black. Red seemed to be her favorite color. Her demeanor was slow and easy and she seemed like a person who never raised her voice or screamed out loud. Nakia described herself as an African American feminist.

I met Nakia through Terah, another participant in the study. Terah thought that Nakia could add another perspective about the experiences of African American women at their college because she was older and had been at the institution for a number of years. When we first talked about her possible involvement in the study, she seemed slightly hesitant, yet she indicated that she would do anything she could to help me finish my degree. She had started working on her Ph.D. degree years before, but stopped because of time conflicts and the amount of work involved. So she was more than happy to be able to assist me in completing mine. She said, "Education is important, and the more you have, the more you will be able to make your own choices in life." We conducted our interviews over a period of six months during 1998 in her office where she is a director in the division of student affairs at a community college.

### **Family Background**

Nakia was born in Sumter, South Carolina during a period in history when there were still many court-sanctioned restrictions on the freedoms of African American people. She was brought up North when she was 11 months old with her older brother and mother who was in search of a better life for her family. "It was the usual pattern for Blacks back then. My mother wanted more than the South was offering, so we migrated to the North in the great Black exodus thinking that there would be greater opportunities for us here." She was raised by her mother and father who she later learned was not her biological dad, along with her

brother and younger sister. Her father, as she refers to him, is African American and her mother was biracial. The family's history is rather complicated and it was difficult to follow Nakia at times when she discussed their background because she often flowed back and forth between what she had always believed their history to be, and what she had recently learned about her heritage. Her mother's real reason for coming to the North was to escape the ridicule and scorn of the people in the community where she was from. Nakia's grandmother was Black and her grandfather was the son of her White slave owner. However, this information was kept secret from Nakia until after her mother's death when a great aunt shared the story. She had just learned the full account of her mother's family history months before our first interview.

My mother's purpose for coming to the North was to get away from the people in the South because of the circumstances surrounding her birth. She was never fully accepted by her family in either the Black or the White communities, and she didn't know what else to do. She got married thinking it would be her ticket out, but it didn't work. He was abusive. So, when she heard about the fabulous North, she decided to come live with an aunt who was already here.

Nakia indicated that she had heard bit and pieces of the story while she was growing up, but had never heard the full account, because her mother didn't talk about her past, and everyone else was sworn to secrecy. It was a story that movies are made of "where the young girl is working on the plantation and is raped by the owner's son." When her grandmother became pregnant by this White man, and Nakia's mother was born, "her mother didn't want her because in the eyes of the Black community having this White child of rape around caused them all shame and disgrace." So when she was old enough to fend for herself, her mother sent her away. "And it was never a consideration that she would become a part of the White side of her family. They never even acknowledged her existence."

Nakia's mother was born in 1908, and was 16 years old when she came up North to live.

Her mother was able to find work in a number of places when they arrived in Cleveland because White people thought that she was a White Italian. So she was always able to make a good living for her family. But the reality was that she had to deny who she really was and that bothered her tremendously because being Black was a big part of her life, too, and she hated to have to deny it. But she knew what speaking up could mean for her small family. So she internalized it all. "She was angry with the Whites for the position she felt they had placed her, and she was also angry with her Black family because they would not accept her after her mother gave her away." Nakia believes because of this paradoxical position, her "mother's life was pretty difficult and she never fully recovered from the experience."

Nakia's mother never reconciled with the White side of her family, hence they were absent throughout her life. I asked how she felt about this, if she experienced rejection, too. "It's been such a part of my life now, I don't feel the loss. Even on the Black side of the family, my mother did not reconcile these relationships until she was in her 30s. Now, it doesn't matter, she's gone."

Her mother met and married the man Nakia calls dad after she had been in Ohio for a number of years. When her mother married her stepfather, the family's life improved even more. Her father "owned a number of cleaning businesses and had large accounts working for some of the major office buildings in town. In addition, he owned a small store. So we were well taken care of when I was growing up." She believes that they would have been considered lower middle-class.

She and her siblings are second-generation college students. Her stepfather was a seminary trained Methodist minister who strongly believed that getting an education was

extremely important for girls as well as boys. “The unspoken rule in our home was that you went to college – period.” While her mother never finished high school, she still played a big role in Nakia pursuing a college education.

My mother told me something very early in life, when I was a little girl that I never forgot. She said, you have a choice as a Black female, you can either scrub floors or you can get an education and become a teacher or a nurse.

Nakia indicated that scrubbing someone else’s floors was never an option for her. She had watched her mother and other Black women do that, so she knew that she did not want that for herself or her children. “I knew that I had to break the cycle of being a domestic or a laborer in my family.” She adds with pride, “I have never done day work, me or my sister.”

The advice of her mother was heeded by all of her siblings. Both Nakia and her brother received Master’s degrees, and her younger sister has her bachelor’s degree. However, when Nakia went back to school to work on a Ph.D., the family’s attitude had changed and she received a lot of opposition from everyone except her brother. She recalls, “My dad wanted me to get the masters’ degree, but he thought that I should stop there. So when I started pursuing a Ph.D. program, he, like my mother, just could not understand why I wanted to get it.” They would gang up on her, and her mother and sister would say things like, “Why in the world do you want to go back to get another degree?” or “You need to be at home spending this time with your children.” This became a great source of conflict for her because she had always listened to the advice of her mother. But she also knew the value of having a Ph.D. degree, being in higher education. But her family's chiding seemed to have won out. Thinking back she says, “I could have been getting some of that because my brother did not have a doctorate degree, and maybe they thought that I was stepping too far outside of the traditional roles for women and men, especially since he was the oldest.”

### **Growing Up During Segregation**

Nakia grew up in a small predominantly White suburb of Cleveland, Ohio during the 1940s long before the civil rights movement and other initiatives to gain equality for African Americans and other disenfranchised groups in society. Jim Crow laws were still being used to mandate and enforce the systematic practice of prohibiting Blacks from participating in all activities that members of a free society enjoy. I asked her what was it like growing up back then. She says more than anything she remembers it as being “extremely constricting.” There were so many things that they couldn’t do, and places where they couldn’t go. “Don’t get me wrong, it was scary and dangerous, too, because the Whites were at liberty to take advantage of us.” Nakia says that “as a Negro, you knew your place in society, and there was a constant fear of not behaving in an appropriate manner even though we lived in the North. And we were constantly being told that we were inferior to White people.” I asked her who taught her the rules of society and she said her mother did. “My mother made sure that we knew how to act in the presence of Whites, so that no one would have cause to hurt us.”

### **Black Identity Formation**

The experiences of Nakia’s mother, her search for self-identity and peace as an unaccepted biracial child, were the impetus that helped Nakia accept at an early age who she was as a Black person. “There was no way I could get away from who I was as a Black woman, and I didn’t ever want to be anyone else. I saw what that did to my mother.” Nakia grew up during a time of intense discrimination against Black people. It was a time when the dominant communities used every available resource (e.g., courts, mass media, schools, etc.) to control and/or define who Black people were to be. Yet, she says, there were many

opportunities for her to witness the strength of her people. Her dad being a minister in the church put her in constant contact with a number of strong Black women. And her mother, “even with what she had gone through, she was a strong Black female. White people may have perceived her as one of them, but she always knew who she was. I admired and respected that in her.” Seeing her mother made Nakia proud of who she was because “she could have easily passed for White, but she didn’t.”

### **Educational Experiences**

Nakia says that she “excelled scholastically all the way through school and was a college prep student during high school.” But while her grades said that she was destined for college, her high school counselor encouraged her to do otherwise. He said very directly “Why would you want to go to college and get a degree when all you are going to do is stay home and have children?” Back then, the general consensus was that men went to college and became the breadwinners of the family, and women either became teachers or nurses, or stayed home and raised the children. “I think some of what he was saying to me was racially motivated, but in many respects, he was just mirroring the thoughts of the larger community where women were concerned.” As her mother had alluded to years earlier, the primary opportunities available to women, Black or White, were very limited. Nakia recalls that the counsel given to male students was very different than what girls were told. However, “advice given to African American males was different than what was given to White guys.” White men were encouraged to attend college; they were constantly told of the opportunities available to them. Black men were encouraged to pursue backbreaking labor positions.

She laughed and says that no one would dare say anything like that counselor said to her today unless they wanted to be put in their place. But it is more than that: “Because of some

of the work I've been involved with, most people know me as an advocate of women's rights and all people for that matter."

### **Annette Jones Ross**

Of all of the respondents in the study, the interviews with Annette were the most difficult. There was something about her that made me want her to be proud of me as an up-and-coming African American female researcher/scholar following in her footsteps. Each time we met, I found myself particularly conscious of my use of grammar and diction, and I was very mindful of how I presented myself throughout our meetings. And Ebonics, unlike with the other participants in the study, were only used during our conversation when the use of any other words except Black English would have lost the meaning or been inappropriate to describe the specific incident we were discussing.

Annette is a petite woman of medium height and size with hazelnut colored skin. Her eyes and hair color are black, and she has a teasing smile that she flashes when she knows that she has caught you off guard by a humorous remark that you had not anticipated from her. She could have very easily been the straight side of a stand-up comedy act because whether she tries to or not, she is very funny, and her timing is excellent. I think she used humor to defuse some of the more serious portions of our conversations, so that I would not be uncomfortable with what we were discussing.

The aura around Annette emits pride, confidence, and inner strength. She is totally professional in her outward appearance and presentation, yet not overly stuffy or impersonal. Her style is of a person who is self-assured and I found her to be quite comfortable in her role as an African American woman on a predominantly White college campus. She speaks very properly, and her voice tone generally lowered to a whisper when she reminisced or shared



memories about people from her past as though she were reliving the moment and forgot that I was present in the room. I found it fascinating to watch her body language as she talked about relationships with various people in her life and it was obvious during our conversations that she cares very deeply about her immediate family and extended loved ones. She described herself as a “Christian” and indicated that “being a Christian dictates her behavior in any given situation.” She is 50 something years old, and at the time of our interviews she was ten years into a second marriage.

All of our meetings took place in the conference room of Annette’s academic department during regular business hours because as she stated, “the university does not consume my total life. You would think that it does, but there are other activities that I’m involved in, such as my church and community events that are equally important to me.” At the time of our interviews, Annette’s academic appointment was split between administrative assignments and adjunct faculty teaching. She has since become a full-time tenure-track assistant professor.

### **Family Background**

Annette grew up in the Southwest corner of the United States within the enclave of a small neighborhood of Black people who were situated within a larger White community. Her family lived in the railroad district of town and she indicated that they were considered poor. However, she was very adamant that “being poor did not mean that they were homeless or nasty.” She was an only child and the first grandchild on her mother’s side who relished the attention paid to her by her parents and maternal grandparents. It was apparent when Annette discussed her family background that her grandparents could not be considered extended family members as is generally the case because they were as integral to her growth

and development as were her parents. In fact, she spoke more often of her grandfather's influence in her life than of her father's, and talked often about the privileges that were bestowed upon her by people in the community because of their respect for her "poppa" as her grandfather was fondly called within the immediate family. She smiled when she said, "I was my grandfather's baby. I was very important to him. And because he was well known by most of the people in the community, both Black and White, there were a number of people who interacted with me because of him."

The overall family structure was traditional of the time. Women stayed home while the men went off to work. However, her mother had a business degree, so she could have found employment outside the home if she wanted, but chose not to do so. "My mother stayed home until I was almost ready to graduate from high school. She taught some kindergarten classes at home on occasion, but working outside the home was not a conventional role for women back then." Her mother and grandmother shared the philosophy that "the woman's responsibility was with the children." As a result, the women became the "guiding force of the family and primary leaders in the community. They held leadership positions in the church, were heads of organizations, and community activists."

*My mother and grandmother were strong workers in the church. And it's interesting because the Black church served not only as a place for [spiritual] learning, but also as a place of leadership skill development and leadership skill implementation. You see, Sister Sue in the Black church may have been president of Knitting Circle Number One, now that may have been the only place in Sister Sue's life where she operated as a leader, but it was very important to her and for her.*

After Annette graduated from high school, her mother began to work with the local school district. She first became the principal's secretary, then was promoted to the superintendent's secretary, and later became the administrative assistant of the entire school

district. “My mother was [also] the PTA (i.e., Parent Teacher Association) president when I was growing up, and presided over a number of other community events. She was my first academic teacher, and also my first piano teacher.”

Annette was concerned that so much talk about the maternal side of her family may have given me the wrong impression about her father and grandfather’s contribution to the family. She indicated that it was not that they were not concerned about the family’s development, or the community for that matter, rather the type of work they did kept them away from home and the community for long periods of time. “That’s why they had limited participation in the day-to-day community activities.” The men were the wage earners and often performed laborious and time-consuming work to sustain the family. “They were not office workers, so they did not work from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. They usually left home around 5:00 or 6:00 a.m. in the morning and returned about 8:00 or 9:00 p.m. at night.” Her father had a good job, and her grandfather was in the logging and paper mill industries, and he also worked for the railroads.

### **Growing Up During Segregation**

Annette grew up “on the cusp of segregation and integration.” Jim Crow laws were still being practiced and “segregation was still a systematic reality that affected every area of a Black person’s life.” She remembered very vividly the experiences of having to sit at the back of the bus on public transportation, not being able to go into restaurants and order food across the counter, and not being allowed to sleep in hotels when she traveled with her church youth group. She talked about the days when Black people had restricted hours to attend the movie-theater, and then having to sit in the balcony section because they were not allowed to sit on the main floor of the theater. She also recalled overhearing a conversation

when she was very small in which “the grown folks” talked about a Black boy who had been tied with ropes to the back of a car and dragged to death by a group of White people. “I was small, but I remember them saying they dragged this boy up to his family’s house and left his body in the yard. Obviously, I was not a part of the conversation, but I understood what they were talking about.” The consensus of her parents and other Blacks in the community was that the boy had been found in a area of town that was supposedly “off limits” to Blacks and the killing was done as a warning to others. Annette indicated that as she grew older, the implication of that incident kept her from wandering into “neighborhoods where I should not have been.”

Another systematic reality that seemed to have a long-lasting effect on her was the water fountains marked “Colored and White only.” Her eyes held a far-off look as she reflected upon how she felt being told that she could not drink out of the “Whites Only” water fountain.

I often tell my students how much I wanted to drink from that Whites only water fountain. I don’t know, maybe I thought their water was cleaner. But the fountains were not that close to each other all the time, so you did not have the opportunity to explore the matter because you were not supposed to be over by theirs. I tell my students, I guess I thought lemonade came out of their fountain, and I just wanted to get some. And for that reason, the movie about Jane Pittman’s life was very touching to me because at the end, she walked over to the Whites Only fountain and took a drink. That was very special to me because I could relate to that very much.

I asked Annette to describe her feelings regarding growing up during segregation. She said very pointedly, “If you mean how did growing up during segregation affect me, segregation hurt tremendously. It was a hurtful experience. And I think it has been one of the most personal experiential bases for my social activities today.” “There were signs posted to keep us separate, but more important than that, you knew your place and you didn’t get out

of your place because segregation had relegated you to a position.” She wanted me to understand precisely what she meant and offered the following as an example.

On the street where I lived, Blacks lived on one end and Whites lived at the upper end. We played together, Blacks and Whites, and when we got ready to go to school, we would [all] go to the end of the street where I lived to catch what was like a city bus that would take us to school. All of us would stand at the bus stop, and laugh, play, whatever, and when the bus would come, we would get on the bus, and our talking would stop. We all knew that that was what we were supposed to do, and we [Black kids] knew that our place was at the back of the bus.

Notwithstanding, Annette experienced more freedoms and opportunities during segregation than many other Black children in the neighborhood because her family were “the adored Blacks” due to her mother’s community work and involvement on the school board and her grandfather’s reputation with the town-folks. “So, whenever there were activities and the White community wanted to showcase or involve a Black child, I was always considered first; whether it was reciting poetry, speaking, or singing, I was asked to be involved because of my family.” She indicated that during these times she was still aware of who she was as a Black person in relationship to them. They fondly referred to her as the “little Jones girl” as a show of familiarity. “Yes, the little Jones girl had a lot of opportunities even in the midst of segregation, yet the little Jones girl knew that it was an outstanding opportunity, and that once the activity was over, the opportunity ended.”

### **Black Identity Formation**

Unlike a number of the participants in the study who grew up in predominantly White environments, and thus had to consciously work at developing a positive Black female identity, this was not the case for Annette. The women in her life, her mother and grandmother, church women, and other Black women she encountered as she was growing up served as role models and visible sites of contradictions to the portrayals of Black women

that were presented in the popular press and mass media. She also encountered a number of African American female professors from colleges and universities throughout the state who came to her high school on recruiting trips. "I would be in total awe of them [because] during the time I grew up, the professional [women] were very conscious of their dress, and you could recognize them because they looked different. I liked that [about them], and I wanted to be like that, too."

### **Educational Experiences**

The majority of Annette's experiences in elementary through high school were during the period of court-sanctioned segregation. It was not until her senior year in high school that federal legislation mandated public school integration. Still, her educational experiences far-exceeded those of other African American children in the school district. Her mother was well known for her community work and she was also the president of the PTA, which provided Annette favor and recognition by many of the White school officials, and she excelled scholastically and often represented the school at various competitions and social events. Annette also was president of the senior class and student council, and first clarinet in the band.

Going into her senior year of high school, she was selected to be one of the students to integrate the White high school in town. Back then, integration meant "taking three or four top Black students, the so-called 'cream of the crop' and placing them in the White high school." White students were not to be transferred to Black schools. Annette's grandmother was strongly opposed to the idea of her being used as a vehicle of integration and spoke out very fervently against the idea. "My grandmother had come up during the period of [Black] lynching and was fearful of the physical violence that might take place when integration

occurred.” A transfer would mean that Annette might lose the right to privileges she had earned as a participant in student government activities. Therefore, she remained at her segregated school, and graduated as valedictorian of the senior class. Annette indicated that this was the start of her education through academic scholarships and fellowships. And had she transferred to the White school she would have lost these privileges.

Although Annette’s mother was the only one who had a college education in her immediate family, there was a general expectation that Annette would attend college. “It was expected that I’d attend college by three strong socializations in my life--my family, church, and community--even though we did not have money to support my education.” But as luck would have it, as the valedictorian of her high school graduating class, Annette received an academic scholarship to cover her education.

### **Terah Simmons**

I met Terah months before I asked her to participate in the study when I was an intern at the community college where she is employed. She was one of two women and the only African American female on a ten-member bargaining team for the institution, and I had been allowed to sit in on their meetings to observe how they prepared the document that would be used to negotiate the new union contract. This gave me the opportunity to observe Terah in her professional setting which ultimately lead to my asking her to participate in the study. I was impressed by the fact that other members of the team seemed to value her input, and that she appeared quite at ease in spite of being one of two African Americans in the group. And I was also curious as to why she did not introduce herself to me, or acknowledge my presence in the room (i.e., eye contact, head nod, etc.) which is often done when African Americans are the minority in a group of White Americans. Most of the other Blacks I had

met on the various campuses had followed this common practice. This intrigued me and I wanted to know why she did not feel the need to build community. She left before the meeting was over, so I did not have an opportunity to meet her afterwards. Therefore, I got her number out of the campus directory, called her and introduced myself, told her about the study, and asked if she would be willing to participate. She said, "Sure, why not?" and we scheduled a date for me to visit her campus.

Terah would be considered nice-looking according to African American standards. She has shoulder-length thick black hair, which she wears down or pulled back in a ponytail, a slim figure, which she maintains by working out on her lunch hour, and her skin tone is the color of milk chocolate. She has a pleasant smile that extends to her eyes when she laughs, which was often, and other than when I saw her at formal college functions, she dressed very casually. She usually wore a pair of slacks, and a sweater or shirt, which again was unlike the other African Americans I had met on the campuses who dressed a little more formally. Terah's attire bespoke a Black person who is either very comfortable in a White setting, or confident enough in herself that she does not feel as though she needs the added assistance of "business" attire. As I got to know Terah, I found both of these descriptions to be a true assessment of her. She is very comfortable being a minority in a predominantly White setting and has on a number of occasions been the only African American in an employment or practicum training situation. She is also very confident of her professional skills and believes that she has a definite contribution to make at the institution, which negates her having to impress anyone with her attire. She said, "What I bring to the table is far more important than what I wear."

At the time of our first interview Terah was 37 years old. She is the mother of two



children, a 10 year-old daughter and a 7 year-old son, and had been married for almost 15 years. She is a full-time non-tenure track instructor in respiratory therapy, and the coordinator of a campus-wide, minority student support association. All of our interviews took place in her faculty office.

### **Family Background**

Terah was born and raised in a predominantly Black lower middle-class neighborhood in Cleveland, Ohio. She has seven siblings, two brothers and a sister by her biological mother and stepfather, and two brothers and a sister by her biological father. Her parents divorced when she was young, and she was reared from the age of six years old with her mother and stepfather. When she speaks about her family background, she identifies her stepfather as such, and her biological father as “my dad” or “my father.” She indicated that her father was around when she was growing up, “but didn’t have much input in [her] upbringing and pretty much left the responsibility for [her] care to [her] mother.” But it was very apparent as her story unfolded that her relationship with her father was as key to her personal growth and development as were the relationships she had with other members of her family.

It was also evident when she spoke of her brothers and sister, that she was referring to her siblings by her mother and stepfather, who she lived with on a daily basis, as opposed to her brothers and sister on her father’s side, whom she saw only on occasion. With regard to them she said, “I’m pretty close with one of my brothers on my father’s side, but me and my sister are not close. I guess it’s because we’re headed in two different worlds, and we value very different things.” On a number of occasions, Terah has tried to assist her half sister by offering suggestions of what she could do to resolve some of the personal dilemmas in her life, but feels as though she has had “no real impact on any of them. They don’t value

education, none of them completed high school, and they have irregular work patterns.” Her brothers and sister on her mother’s side seem to share her values regarding education and the necessity of working to get ahead. Her sister is a nurse, and is currently a manager at a national health facility. And both of her brothers are employed and working on their college degrees. The oldest has three children and is working toward a degree in computer science, and her youngest brother majored in chemistry. Overall, she believes that she has a good relationship with them and that their family structure is pretty solid. Her brothers live out of town, and her sister lives in the Cleveland area, so they try to get together as much as possible to do things. But, Terah confessed that it is partially because of her that they are not closer.

I’m somewhat of a closed person. I don’t tell people a lot of stuff about me, so you don’t really get a lot about what’s going on in my life. And I’d say my sister is the same way, so that might be why we are not as close as we could be.

Terah’s mother was the head of the household and primary decision-maker in matters concerning her when she was growing up. Her stepfather was present, but did not actively participate in her upbringing as he did with his own children. When she talked about what it was like growing up with her stepfather, her mood changed instantly, and it is obvious from her facial expression and the way she crossed and uncrossed her arms that their relationship was a source of discomfort for her.

I don’t know how the role that my stepfather played in my life has affected me, but when I look at the overall picture of how the situation was with me and my brothers and sister, he took more of an active role in their upbringing than he did in mine. It was almost like he said to my mother, this is your child, you steer her. Every now and then, he might say something, but for the most part, he didn’t have anything to say about things that concerned me.

She never verbalized her feelings, but says she is sure that he knows how she feels about

him. "I've never sat down and talked with him about how he treated me when I was growing up. I've never said to him, why didn't you do this for me, or why didn't you do that, but I think he knows that there is definitely some distance between us. However, I have to say that I do respect him."

Terah's mother was either unaware of the distinctions her husband made between the children, or she simply did not wish to confront him about it.

For some reason, either my mother didn't see it, didn't understand it, or just didn't want to deal with how my stepfather treated me when I was growing up as opposed to his children. She never really said anything to him, like why are you doing this [to her], or why are you doing that. So, I felt like, then don't expect me to say or act like this is my father, because when I look back at all of my experiences with him, I don't feel like he was a father to me.

While she and her mother never openly discussed her relationship with her stepfather, she and her sister did. "I guess she could see how I acted toward him on birthdays and things like that, or that I never sought his advice on things like I did with my mother. I finally had to tell her what it was like for me growing up with him, and why I felt the way I did." Her sister had not been aware that her father had treated her any differently than he did her and her brothers when they were growing up.

Terah's interaction with her father was very limited when she was growing up because her stepfather "did not want him around." When he would visit, her stepfather would show his disapproval by asking her mother "why is he here?" and things like that." So his visits were infrequent and Terah believes that this is why "he did not have a strong fatherly impact" on her. "If I needed [financial] assistance with anything, he was there. But just in terms of us having real personal interactions or those types of experiences, they were not good." Terah felt that if she had had a different type of relationship with her father when she was younger,

it would have impacted how she responds in relationships now that she is an adult. Her father died in 1993 following an accident. And she still harbors “resentment” toward her stepfather for his intervention in their relationship.

### **Growing Up in a Predominantly Black Community**

Terah grew up in a predominantly Black suburb of Cleveland, Ohio. She indicated that things were pretty nice in the neighborhood where she grew up. It was a working-class neighborhood and Terah indicated, “the families took pride in their homes, and kept their yards up and general surroundings up.”

### **Black Identity Formation**

Terah, like Annette, who also grew up in a predominantly Black environment, had no problem establishing her identity as a Black female. The influences of her mother, extended female family members and women throughout the community provided her with numerous examples of Black femininity.

### **Educational Experiences**

Terah attended predominantly Black public schools in her neighborhood from kindergarten through the twelfth grade. She was a serious and conscientious student. “I would say, starting from junior high school, I never missed class. And if I had an assignment to do, I did the best I could, and if I was supposed to be somewhere, I was there.” She credited her determination to observing the habits of her aunt and her grandmother. Her grandmother was a supervisor in the dietetics division of a local hospital, and Terah says, “she never called in. She had a job to do, and she did it. You would never find her sitting around the house because she didn’t want to go to work.” Her aunt was the same way. She owned a beauty shop, and worked constantly. “She wanted different things in life, and didn’t

mind working to get them. I'm sure watching them impacted me. My mother was the same way, but she did not work all of the time when they did." Terah carried this attitude of working hard to better herself throughout her high school experience. She indicated that by the time she was ready to graduate from high school, the only questions that remained regarding her quest for upward mobility were, "Where was I going to go to college, and what was I going to major in. I knew early on that I wanted to go into the medical field, but I did not want to be a nurse. So I decided on respiratory care therapy."

### **Author Comments**

Some educational scholars believe the topics researchers investigate are "as much a part of [the] researcher's life history as it is a part of her curriculum vitae" (Nuemann & Peterson, 1997, p.1). They disregard the notion that researchers must remain detached and distanced from their feelings and the participants in the study (Krieger, 1991). They choose rather to intertwine the odyssey of exploration with self-reflection and discovery in an attempt to legitimate the research process, and provide readers with a more conclusive understanding of the total context in which the study was conducted (Altheide & Johnson, 1994). Altheide and Johnson (1994) contended that by accounting for the researcher's perspectives in the narrative, the likelihood of the reader's "confidence in the findings, interpretations, and accounts [being] offered" (p. 494) will be increased. As an African American female investigating the experiences of other African American women regarding issues with which I am personally familiar, I share my narrative in an attempt to provide the reader with a means to ground and contextualize my representation of the women's lives. I situate myself within some of the same contexts used to describe the women who participated in the study.

### **Sharon Holmes**

I am a dark-skinned African American female who wears a short natural hairstyle, thought by some to be unfeminine for a woman. I have never deceived myself into thinking that I could win any beauty contest, but by African American standards, I would be considered “okay” in the looks department. And probably “real okay”, if I lost about 100 pounds. My teeth are straight and unusually white for someone who used to smoke almost two packs of cigarettes a day for almost 10 years. People have asked me on numerous occasions if they are my teeth, or the work of a dentist. They are mine, in spite of the fact that I did not visit the dentist regularly until I was an adult. Nice teeth run in my family. I correct my vision with contact lenses, unless I am at home, because eyeglasses in my opinion inhibit on-lookers from seeing the twinkle in my eyes when I smile, which is often. For the most part, I have a happy disposition, and I make a conscious effort to edify and encourage those around me. I am a good listener, opinionated at times, but I can admit when I am wrong. I have been told on more than one occasion that I dress well for a graduate student, and that I appear to “have it altogether.” If this assessment means that I am confident, independent, self-assured, and knowledgeable of where I am headed, then I would agree that, at times, I am all of these things. At other times, I am unsure of myself, and rely on the advice and validation of a small circle of intimate friends.

#### **Family Background**

I am the last of eight children (three boys and five girls) born to the union of Bessie and Sam Terrell. My mother died in 1962 when I was two years old of a heart ailment that is correctable now, and probably back then for those who were able to afford the treatment. Her death left the responsibility for myself, and my siblings to my father, who was a young

man, and socially active outside the home. He was an avid golfer, and seemed to live to be on the golf course. As I reflect back upon the number of first and second place trophies that adorned our living-room, he probably would have been recognized as a professional golf player by a wider audience had it not been for the prevailing racism of the 1960s.

As a result of my father's outside activities, a significant contributor to my early childhood development was my oldest sister, who was 17 years old at the time of my mother's death. It was through her nurturing that maternal care was provided for two sisters, a brother, and me. There were two sets of age groups in the children in my family; she was the oldest girl in the first group (ages 13 through 18), and I was the youngest girl in the last group (ages 2 through 8).

Dad was a very tall man, who exuded strength and power. He could control the household simply by the tone of his voice. It was the 1960s, and children did not "talk-back" to their parents, nor any other adult for that matter, and it was a given in our household that you said, "yes sir" or "no sir" when you were addressed. As I ran into older people from the neighborhood when I became an adult, they would compliment my father for having raised such a "good group of kids."

We were a poor family, but we never received any form of public assistance, even though sometimes we children felt that my father needed some help in managing things. He was too proud to ask anyone for help. However, the connotation of us being poor did not mean what it means does today, because many families were poor back then. So in a sense, there was not shame attached to it. My father was a cement finisher and made a decent salary, but it was not enough to support a family the size of ours.

As a cement finisher his specialty was pulling a straight-edge. The White American

contractors he worked for built most of the University of Michigan and veterans hospitals in Ann Arbor, Michigan. He and the group of men he worked with laid the foundations in the buildings (i.e., concrete floors). He was well respected by people in our community, and by his working associates, whom he generally met in the morning for coffee. I later learned that he was one of the first African American men in our area to do this type work and to have the associations he did with White men.

### **Growing up in a Predominantly Black Community**

I grew up in Inkster, Michigan, a predominantly Black suburb of 120,000, which was located approximately 45 miles to the west of Detroit, a large predominantly Black metropolitan city; and about 30 miles east of Ann Arbor, a mid-sized predominantly White upscale suburban community. Rumor has it that Dearborn, Michigan where Ford Motor Company is headquartered was once a part of Inkster, but city officials sold the community out and re-zoned the area, situating the auto industry along with its finances outside the Black community into the White.

Although my environment was predominantly Black, I had interactions with White Americans when I was growing up, but not on a regular basis. They were mostly service people who worked in Montgomery Ward and the other variety stores we frequented. While they were not particularly friendly, they did not go out of their way to be rude either. But then I knew my place, too. No one in my family ever said that I needed to be on my best behavior, or speak a particular way in their presence, it was just something that I knew I was supposed to do. We all knew what White Americans thought of us as a race of people, so I would say that it was an unspoken and unwritten rule that you behaved yourself in their presence in such a way as to disprove their perceptions of us.



### **Black Identity Development**

My sister says that I was very independent as a child. She indicated that most of the time I preferred to be alone, and that I would not allow people to cuddle me as a young child. What I remember most about my adolescent experience is craving my father's attention and validation. I was self-conscious about my size, I had a voluptuous body for a kid, and I didn't know what to do with the attention it attracted. I was also self-conscious about my skin-tone. I thought that I was extremely darker than the other kids in my family, and most kids in the neighborhood. These things contributed to my being insecure as a Black female. But I was pretty comfortable in who I was as a Black person in general because being Black was popular in the mid-1960s.

### **Educational Experiences**

I attended the public elementary school in my neighborhood, which was predominantly Black. We may have had one or two White teachers, but I can not recall having any White classmates until I was in high school. I was a studious student because it would have been detrimental to my health to take a bad report card home to my father. And there were also expectations placed upon me by the teachers who had taught my brothers and sisters who were considered "real" studious students. Many of their academic accomplishments were outstanding, so the bar of expectation was high for me. I excelled academically. I was a "A" or "B" student. And in spite of my insecurities about my body shape and skin color, I had a strong peer group and was popular in elementary and junior high school. However, there were occasions in elementary school when I was teased and called names like "tar-baby" or "chocolate" by a small group of Black boys. I laugh now when I think about that time, because the primary guy who harassed me was darker than I was; and in high school we

called him “blue,” to signify that he was so black that he looked blue.

High school was a great experience. My youngest brother was in the twelfth grade when I started the ninth grade. He played sports, so I already knew a number of the upper-class students because of him. They called me “Big T’s little sister” and that type of recognition was a big deal. By my senior year, I had come to terms with my body, I wore a size 12, and being dark-skinned was “in.” I felt good about myself. I was popular, fashionable, vice president of my senior class, and one of the students considered college bound.

When I graduated from high school, I had been living away from home for one year, and I did not think that I would be able to afford to attend a four-year institution. Instead, I enrolled in a one-year business institute for accounting. It was a White owned and operated school in the heart of downtown Detroit. Because of its location, the students were very diverse, both culturally and socio-economically. I graduated with honors in 1979, and was offered a position in the financial aid department of the institute. Five years later in 1984, I went back to college to pursue a four-year degree. I was 25 years old. I attended a small private predominantly White institution in the heart of Dearborn, Michigan. My primary reason for selecting this college was that the transfer agreement with the business institute I had attended would allow me to reduce the length of time I would need to complete the degree. I worked full-time during the day, and attended college full-time in the evening. I graduated with honors in 1988 with a Bachelor of Business Administration degree. I started graduate school at the age of 34 in 1993 at Iowa State University. Iowa State is a large predominantly White Research I land-grant institution located in what is called “the heartland of America.”

Prior to starting graduate school, I had been an administrator at a historically Black

institution for women. And prior to that position, I had held other administrative positions in a number of predominantly White institutions in Michigan. However, the impact of these colleges being White institutions was lessened because I still had easy access to the Black community.

I experienced significant adjustment challenges as a graduate student at Iowa State. By far, the greatest challenge was learning how to manage the isolation I experienced as a Black student in a predominantly White environment. The university is located in a rural White farming community. I am sure that some of the students on campus had never engaged directly with an African American before coming to college. This would be obvious from how they would stare at me as though I were a novelty. Or they would totally ignore me as though I were not there. Often I was the oldest student in my class, which engendered its own sort of problems, but then I was also sometimes the only African American in class. I felt very isolated.

When I first arrived, the campus was ablaze with racial tension over an incident that had recently occurred between an African American male student and a White American female faculty member. Majority students would make insensitive remarks in my presence, or the campus newspaper would print a news article that portrayed Blacks negatively. It was my impression that some White students felt that we (i.e. African American students) did not belong here. And I resented their thinking because most of the minority graduate students who were recruited were required to maintain a grade point average well above what was required of White graduate students.

My plans after graduation are to remain in the academy. And there is high probability that my employment will be in a predominantly White institution. I embarked upon this study to

gain a greater understanding of the issues that African American female faculty and administrators may experience in these institutions.

### **Conclusion**

For a long period in history many educators and researchers alike assumed that women lived similar experiences because of their gendered natures. The women in this study indicate that no two women are alike regardless of race, class, or gender because many factors contribute to the shaping of our individual identities.

The biographical sketches that have been provided will allow the reader to have a greater understanding of the individual lives and perspectives of the women who will be examined further in chapter five.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **INTERPRETATIONS OF A WOMAN'S LIFE**

In the preceding chapter, the respondents were introduced across four categories – family background, the racial ethnic environment where they grew up, identity formation, and educational experiences. This chapter will continue the exploration of the women's lives through analysis and interpretation of the core category (i.e., identity) and accompanying sub-categories that emerged from examining the interview transcripts across all participants. An examination of these categories will allow us to situate the findings of this study within theoretical and conceptual frameworks that best fit the experiences of the women in their respective predominantly White institutions. The categories are closely related to the research questions that guided this study.

Personal identity will be used to conceptualize the women's experiences through their developmental years. It has three related sub-categories: family's influence on identity development, the mother/daughter relationship, and public school system influence on identity development. Professional identity will be used to conceptualize the women's career experiences. It encompasses five related sub-categories: undergraduate college, transition from undergraduate college to work, combining marriage and career aspirations, professional career path, and academic experiences of African American women. These two primary sub-categories along with the accompanying sub-themes represent the differences and commonalities in the women's lives that are significant to our understanding of their current academic roles within the context of race, class, and gender.

The reader should be aware that the two categories are presented here as though they are

mutually exclusive and independent of each other. But in reality they are not because overlap and interconnections occur continuously. You should also be aware, that to cover each aspect of the women's personal and professional identities would be too exhaustive and beyond the scope of this study. What will be highlighted in this chapter are significant events in the women's lives that provide a understanding of how these African American women form their personal and professional identities and experience their academic roles.

Nakia, Annette, Juanita, Terah, and Iman will use their own voices through transcribed interview text to discuss their experiences within the context of the themes that emerged during data analysis and the research questions that guided this study. Throughout the discussion that follows, I will provide my interpretation of the women's narratives, as well as use extant literature to enrich our understanding. Editing of the interview text is minimal, to preserve the women's voices and their unique styles of presentation.

### **The Dimensions of Personal Identity**

#### **Family's Influence on Identity Development**

One of the first themes to emerge in the study was the significant role the women's families played in their development. It was obvious from talking to Annette that the relationship she had with her parents was instrumental in her developing positive self-esteem. And equally obvious from the conversations with Terah, was that her relationship with her mother and stepfather had affected her deeply and contributed to her not being able to form close personal relationships as she got older.

The sub-categories that will be discussed within this section include: family's influence on developing positive self-esteem, the family transmits resiliency of Black heritage to the next generation, and effects of negative parent-child relationship.

### Family's influence on developing self-esteem

Annette knew she was the “apple of her family’s eye,” and relished being an only child and the center of attention for her grandparents as the first grandchild in the family. She looked up to her mother and grandmother, and adored her father and grandfather. She said, “I knew that I was real special to all of them.”

What Annette is saying here is significant because it alludes to the beginning level of self-esteem and self-confidence she will have as she continues to mature. All children need to feel a sense of self-worth, and our parents convey to us how much we matter in the world by how they react to us. Sanford and Donovan (1984) contended that as children “if we believe [that] we did not matter much, [and] that we were not important in our own right, then our self-esteem gets off to a poor start” (p. 38). This was not the case for Annette, who knew she was special and important to the adults in her life.

As an African American child growing up during the late 1940s and early 1950s, Annette would have been inundated with negative images and stereotypes from the mass media that portrayed African American people as less favorable human beings than their White counterparts (Collins, 1990; Mama, 1995). These images could have very easily catapulted Annette into the self-degradation stage as presented in the Cross (1995) model of Black personality development (i.e., patterns of racial transformation). The Cross model presented in Chapter Two, posited a five-stage psychological conversion process that Black people proceed through, ranging through degrees of self-degradation for being Black to acceptance of their Blackness (Evans, et al. 1998).

Fortunately, Annette’s family members, who were proud of who they were as African American people, provided her with immediate contradictions to refute the negative images

that she without question would have received from the mass media and popular press (Collins, 1990); therefore, she did not grow up with a poor self-image and appreciated her Blackness. Annette said, "We were proud Black people. I never once wanted to be anyone else." She was loved and encouraged as a child; hence she grew up to feel good about herself as a Black person. This could suggest that African American children who are raised within different types of familial environments, despite being a part of the larger dominant White society, may not all experience the stage of self-degradation in racial identity as suggested by the Cross model (Ladner, 1971; Mama, 1995). However, additional research is needed to confirm this tentative supposition.

Annette's family's connections also played an instrumental role in her developing positive self-esteem. As a child, she participated in a number of social and scholastic activities that allowed her to mingle with the White and Black communities. She indicated:

It was not so much who I was, but whose I was" that people took notice of. My family members were well liked and respected by both the White and Black communities in town. So, whenever there were outstanding social activities and the White community wanted to showcase or involve a Black child, I was always considered first, because of my family.

We can discuss what Annette is saying here on two levels. First, the fact that her family was well known and widely accepted, which permitted her to have regular interactions with Whites, is not surprising. There has always been a small percentage of African Americans who have had some level of social, political, and economic acceptance by the dominant culture. And there have also been a number of Whites and Blacks who have developed personal relationships, despite prevailing conditions that would otherwise separate the two groups. Still, African Americans on a whole, as a race of people, have not been readily accepted into the dominant structures in American society.



On another level, Annette being singled out and invited by White community members to represent other Black children had to be significant to her self-esteem because later she said, "I was probably able to go more places and see more things than a number of the other Black children in the community." The obvious conclusion is that all children feel special when adults recognize their skills and abilities. And we can assume that a Black child who is selected from among her peers and receives this level of recognition from Whites would especially feel good about herself considering what must have been occurring in the wider community between the two races.

#### The family transmits resiliency of Black heritage to next generation

Iman, Juanita, and Nakia had similar experiences in their families growing up. Each of them had a relatively happy childhood, and they indicated that they felt loved and secure in their place in the family unit. Their families conveyed to them the traditions of Black culture, instilling in the women the importance of having a sense of pride in themselves as Black women, the value of a honest day's work for a honest dollar, and the necessity of helping Black people to get ahead. And in one form or another, each of the women related that their parents had shared stories of the resiliency of past African American people as an indication of their ability, too, to bear whatever opposition they might encounter in life. Laughing, Nakia indicated that her parents' cure for every situation when she was coming up was either, "You'll be all right," "Just treat people right," or "We're [Black people] strong people, you can make it."

Honig (1984) contended that some children in society are "at risk" due to historical, social, environmental, and/or biological factors that exert influence over their lives. The women in this study could have been considered at risk as children because of the racist and

discriminatory practices in use when they were growing up. Hence you have Nakia's and the other women's parents emphasizing the need for them to be resilient in the face of obstacles they knew their children would encounter. The American Heritage College Dictionary (1993, p. 1161) defines resilience as "the ability to recover quickly from illness, change, or misfortune." It goes on to say, it is "the property of a substance that enables it to resume its original shape or position after being bent, stretched, or compressed." To expand on this definition, for the at-risk African American female child growing up in White male-dominated America, resiliency becomes the ability to encounter racism, sexism, and classism and recover quickly without their leaving psychic scars and deep wounds upon the soul of the individual.

#### Effects of negative parent-child relationship

Terah's childhood experiences were somewhat different from those of the other women in the study because of the relationship she had with her stepfather growing up. She never felt as though he accepted her as his own or contributed to her personal development, even though she lived with him and her mother from the age of six years old until she left home for college. Several statements made by Terah during our interviews indicated that her lack of attachment to her parents during her childhood is one of the reasons why she is unable to form close relationships as an adult.

I'm somewhat of a closed person. I don't tell people a whole lot about me, so you don't really get a lot about what's going on in my life.

I've always been kind of detached in relationships where it seems that if I'm getting too close to the person, I kind of pull back. You know like you may have this best friend that you talk on the phone with all the time, and you tell her this or that, or the two of you do things, I've never gotten to that point in a relationship. Don't get me wrong, the relationship doesn't go away or anything, it just doesn't get any closer.

I think that maybe if I had had a different relationship with my father, how I relate to other people could have been different, I don't know.

Basically, what Terah is saying here is that she lacks the ability to form close relationships, possibly stemming from insecurities she developed from the relationships she had with her mother, natural father, and stepfather growing up, which in-essence confirms Sroufe's (1979) claim. Sroufe (1979) claimed that early attachment of children and parents was a pre-requisite for children to form close relationships in their adult years. Her mother's reluctance or inability to intervene in the situation with her stepfather resulted in Terah believing that she had to look out for herself, which may have resulted in her not being able to trust people with her feelings.

Perhaps her mother's actions, or lack there of, constituted a direct reflection of the historical status that women held in their households specifically, and in society in general, at the time Terah was growing up (Baruch, Barnett, & Rivers, 1983). Her mother worked outside of the home on occasion, but for the most part she was a housewife and mother, which meant that she was dependent upon her husband for financial support. Baruch, Barnett and Rivers (1983) noted that these types of roles created power structures within the family—men as breadwinners held the power in the family, and women as stay-at-home wives and mothers were dependent upon their husbands for financial support. These dependent and independent roles sometimes affected how couples communicated.

In summation, it is without question that identity is strongly influenced by one's family of origin (Collins, 1998). The parent-child relationship is crucial to the child's development because parents establish the standards for children and convey acceptable societal norms (Mulqueen, 1992). Black parents also have the added responsibility of socializing their

children to live and survive in a society that is often hostile toward them (Ladner, 1971). Furthermore, Ladner maintained that the influence of extended family members, particularly the grandparents, upon the socialization of the young Black girl is often very strong, and many children normally grow up in a three-generation household where they absorb the influences of grandmother and grandfather as well as mother and father.

The parents and extended family members of the African American women in this study served as sites of strength, inspiration, character definition, and contradiction to the negative images of Black people that were being promulgated through popular culture during their formative years, and, for Terah, this was a site of confusion as well. Still, the mere fact that these women were able to rise above the negative stereotypes and prevailing attitudes regarding girls in general, and Black females more specifically, to become academic women, is a testimony to their inner strength and their family's contribution toward their developing a healthy and positive self-image (McCray, 1980).

### **The Mother/daughter Relationship**

All of the women in the study recognized the significant and long-term impact their mothers and extended female family members had on their personal development. Naturally, the variance in their ages, and the social and historical moments they grew up in, determined some of their experiences. But each of them credited the women in their lives with helping them to understand what it meant to be Black and female growing up in a White male-dominated society.

The sub-themes that comprise this category include: valuing differences, the importance of self-definition, strength of Black womanhood, outsider/within: confiscated knowledge on White Americans, othermothers: positive images of Black womanhood, White mother Black

daughter: Who am I?

Valuing differences

Nakia and Annette, the oldest participants in the study who were in their 50s and 60s, grew up during some of the most difficult periods for Blacks in the United States. The impact of the era (i.e., gender bias and social class discrimination against women in general, and race, class, and sex discrimination against Black women particularly) could have been devastating on their identity formation, but was cushioned by the love and support they received from their families. Both of the women credit their mothers, and grandmother in Annette's case, who were their primary caregivers, as being the most influential people who contributed to their development.

Nakia indicated that one of the most significant lessons that she learned from her mother that has had a long-term effect on who she is as a person, was the importance of looking beyond the color of a person's skin to determine his or her value. Her mother, who had endured years of race discrimination from both Whites and Blacks because of her mixed ethnicity (i.e., African American and Caucasian), stressed to her daughter the importance of accepting people for who they are, despite whatever differences may exist.

I witnessed the pain and anger my mother internalized from having to live as someone she was not in order to get work to feed us. They (i.e., White Americans) thought she was Italian, and she couldn't say anything for fear of not being able to get any day-work (i.e., domestic work). If they would have just accepted her as a human being, regardless of her skin color, her life would have been so much better. But back then, Black folks were constantly being told that they were inferior, or if not told, treated that way, so she couldn't say anything, and that hurt her deeply.

It's possible to interpret what Nakia has shared about her mother's experience, and its subsequent impact on her, on two levels. First, the fact that her mother subjected herself to degradation to provide for her family dispels the stereotypical myth that Black women lack

mothering skills and are all welfare recipients (Amott & Matthaei, 1996; Collins, 1990). On another level, it bespeaks the powerless position that Black people were in as a result of race and class discrimination in society (Collins, 1990, 1998). Because African Americans have not been permitted to participate fully in all areas of mainstream society, they have been socially, politically, and economically disadvantaged, and have, for the most part, been at the mercy of White Americans for their livelihood (Amott & Matthaei, 1996).

### The importance of self-definition

Nakia indicated that her mother's experiences also taught her the importance of not allowing anyone to define her or her self-worth, no matter what it cost her.

I watched my mother suffer for many years because of how people treated her. I think the Blacks were ashamed because she was half White, and that reminded them that their oppression was real; and the Whites didn't want anything to do with her because they looked down on Black folks, and maybe her Whiteness reminded them that they were really the oppressors. In any case, she struggled for years trying to determine who she was and where she belonged in the world. And I don't think she ever really resolved the issue before she died. So, I made up in my mind, that no matter what people thought of me as a Black woman, that's who I am, and that's all I will ever be, so I decided to love me.

Nakia learned from her mother's experiences the power of resistance and self-definition, both of which were important to her survival and development as an African American woman in a racialized society where created images of African American women were often negative.

In Black Feminist Thought, Patricia Hill Collins (1990) spoke eloquently about how Black women used the power of self-definition as a form of resistance to oppressive institutions that sought to define Black feminism at a cost to Black women's psychological well-being.

Collins wrote:

Black women's lives are a series of negotiations that aim to reconcile the contradictions separating our own internally defined images of self as African American women with our objectification as the other. The struggle of living two

lives, one for “them and one for ourselves” creates a peculiar tension to extract the definition of one’s true self from the treatment afforded the denigrated categories in which all Black women are placed. (p. 94)

Nakia’s refused to allow external forces to define who she was. She empowered herself and created a comfortable space where she could grow and develop into the person she was destined to become.

#### Strength of Black womanhood

Nakia indicated that in spite of her mother’s apparent issues with her own identity, her mother was a strong woman who provided her with an excellent example of Black womanhood.

From my mother and other Black women I came in contact with in the church, I learned that you have to have a strong backbone and inner strength to make it in this life. These were women who came up during some of the most turbulent times that ever existed for Black people, and they made it. They were from the South, and had endured great hardships, but they survived. Whatever the world threw at them, they dealt with it. So I knew that I would be able to do the same as I grew older and experienced things.

Annette shared a similar story of the inner strength and determination she gained from observing her mother and grandmother. She saw them as strong Black women and wanted to be like them when she grew up.

In my family, the women were the church leaders, heads of organizations, and community workers. I remember as a child going to NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] meetings with them. We would walk along in silence until we got to the person’s house because during that time, NAACP advocates were not free to be identified and work as they are now. You didn’t go out and say, we’re going to a NAACP meeting, it was kept quiet. They had to be discreet and they planned their strategies in secret. I remember there was always this eerie feeling surrounding our going to the meetings. Back then I didn’t understand it, but now I know the danger that must have been involved in our attending those meetings. But my mother and grandmother never appeared to be afraid. They believed that what they were doing would benefit our race, and they worked tirelessly at it.

Her mother’s and grandmother’s involvement in the NAACP meetings, which can be defined

as social activism (Gilkes, 1980, 1994), instilled in Annette invaluable lessons that would become salient to her development as a Black female, and as a minority in a majority-dominated society. From observing her mother and grandmother and other women involved in the secret meetings, Annette, like Nakia, learned the power of subtle resistance and how that power could be evoked to transform the whole community. Gilkes (1994) maintained that community work served many purposes in the lives of Black women. It “focused on internal development and external change, and created ideas enabling people to think about change...[and it also] focused on changing ideas, stereotypes, and images that keep a group perpetually stigmatized” (p. 231).

Annette also learned from her mother’s and grandmother’s community activities that Black women possess inner strength, despite having to orchestrate their movements in secret within an oppressive society. But most importantly, she learned that a person has to take the lead in creating opportunities for change.

#### Outsider/within: Confiscated knowledge on White Americans

Another influence of importance in Annette’s life was the sharing that occurred within her family unit (Ladner, 1971). When Annette’s mother interacted with White people during community activities, she would often come home and share her experiences with Annette and the family. This provided Annette with inside information that would be helpful to her as she interacted with the larger White community later on.

Mother knew how to get along with White people. She had knowledge of how they operated because she was the president of the PTA and was involved in a number of other community activities with them. They even gave her credit in their stores when many other folks, Black and White, did not have it, and by our living in a small town that was very important.

I take liberty with the term, “outsider within,” to discuss the significance of what Annette is



saying here. “Outsider within” is normally used to describe an African American, or other disenfranchised person, usually a female operating in a working capacity, who is privy to some of the most intimate details of White culture because of her role as domestic worker (Collins, 1990). Collins contended that Black “mothers who are domestic workers or who work in [close] proximity to whites [sic] may experience a unique relationship with the dominant group....[and that] working for whites offers domestic workers a view from the inside and exposes them to ideas and resources that might aid in their children’s upward mobility” (p. 124).

Although none of Annette’s family performed domestic work when she was growing up, her mother’s and grandfather’s close associations with the White community allowed the family to hold an outsider within position, per se. As a result, they gained valuable information about the habits and workings of the White community, which benefited all the members of the family, including Annette. This is not to imply that the relationships Annette’s family members formed with White community members were not genuine.

#### Othermothers: Positive images of Black womanhood

In addition to the influence that Annette’s mother and grandmother had on her development, she also came in contact with other Black women who had a significant influence on her development as well.

Black college professors would often visit our school to talk to us about attending their universities, and some of the recruiters were women. I was in total awe of these women. I loved the way they talked, the way they looked, and the way they dressed. You see when I was growing up, the professionals were very conscious about their dress. So, you could tell who they were, because they looked so different from everybody else. And I liked that, and I wanted it for myself. So I guess I knew way back then that I would be a college professor and work outside the home.

Making comparisons. I asked Annette if she unconsciously contrasted the traditional stay

at-home roles of the women in her family to the professional women she encountered in school when she made the decision to become a college professor.

I don't think I ever compared my mother and grandmother's roles to the professional women I saw in school. While I was impressed with them, I felt my mother and grandmother were great women, too. And because I knew that I was real special to them, I never questioned nor compared their roles with those of the college professors. In terms of being role models, each of them contributed differently to who I am.

She indicated that she realized at an early age that her mother chose to stay home to care for her, as opposed to using her college degree to pursue employment opportunities outside of the home. "It wasn't because she couldn't work outside the home because she could have if she wanted to. It was her conscious decision not to so that she could be there for me. My mother was my first grade school teacher, and she was also my first piano teacher, and I always had a deep respect for her." What Annette does not say, but I sensed the underlying tone in what she had communicated was, don't say anything negative about my mother or my grandmother because I loved them both dearly for how they esteemed me.

New definitions of work. While literature (Almquist & Angrist, 1971) has suggested that daughters of women who work outside the home are more likely to have careers outside the home as well, this did not apply to Annette because she viewed the activities that the women in her family performed as being as significant as the roles of the college professors. Her mother's and grandmother's community activism was an attempt to assist and transform a community of Black people. So although it was not "paid labor" per se, it was just as valuable.

Furthermore, Etter-Lewis (1993) found that the work-roles of the African American mothers of the women in her study did not always meet the traditional definition of work.

She indicated that some of these mothers “took active roles in their respective communities, and many explored their own talents while providing a nurturing and supportive home environment for their children” (p. 88). To Annette, the decision to work outside the home did not subtract from the regard she held for the women in her family because, to her, the women in her family lead meaningful lives. The professional women simply added another dimension to the definition of Black womanhood that she already had gained from the examples of the women in her family.

This finding alludes to the significant influence of extra-familial people on a child’s development. While the college professors would not be considered extended family members in the true sense of the term, they were considered a part of the Black community. Annette told me later that she believes wholeheartedly in the philosophy that it takes a village (i.e., a community of people) to raise a child. However, she indicated that “in our society, a community consists of not only people, but also government rules and regulations that exert authority over individuals’ lives.”

The power of choice. Nakia and Annette felt that their mothers and the other women in their lives provided them with positive images of Black womanhood and real life examples of what women could accomplish if they wanted, despite living in a male-dominated society. Their mothers taught them the power of choice and how a person should use that choice to benefit themselves and other people around them. Both of them credited the past teachings of their mothers and extended female family members with helping them to understand and cope with incidents of race and sex discrimination they encountered in later years. Nakia’s words spoken about her mother and the other women in her life capture the essence of her and Annette’s learning experiences that have become integral to their survival today:

“Whatever the world threw at them [Black women], they dealt with it. So, I knew that I would be able to do the same.”

White mother Black daughter: Who am I?

Although Juanita, Terah, and Iman all shared how the relationships with their mothers and extended female family members had influenced their identity development, the experiences of Juanita are unique because of her mixed ethnicities. Herring (1995) contended that the “socialization and developmental processes of interracial offspring can be considerably more complicated than that of non-biracial children” (p. 30). Therefore, by examining Juanita’s experiences within the context of the mother-daughter and extended female family relationship, we gain insight into some of the issues that adolescent females, particularly those of mixed ethnicities, may encounter in their search for identity.

By socio-cultural definition, Juanita is biracial because her mother is White and her father is Black (Herring, 1995). But there was never a time during any of our conversations that she acknowledged her biraciality. She defined herself as solely African American. It appears her decision was made in part due to the disdain she felt for her mother’s family who treated her family badly when she was a child because they were an interracial family.

Court restrictions and family rejection. During the early 1950’s when Juanita’s parents were married, miscegenation was prohibited in most states (Amott & Matthaei, 1996; hooks, 1984). In fact, it was not until 1967 that the U. S. Supreme Court struck down the last anti-miscegenation law in the nation, in the case of Loving v. Virginia (Leslie, Elam, Samuels, & Senna, 1995). When Juanita was growing up, opposition toward interracial couples was still widely accepted and upheld by the courts (Mama, 1995; West, 1993) and White Americans were often cruel to White women who associated with and/or married Black men. And her

mother's family sided with popular opinion and ostracized Juanita's mother from the family.

I grew up with my mother hurting because her family did not want to have anything to do with her. Sometimes she would be sad, and I would hear her crying. I always wondered why her family did not come around because I knew some of them lived in town. And once I remember hearing about out-of-town relatives who came in town to visit her sister who lived in the same area, but they did not come to our home.

The family's rejection of Juanita's mother was confusing and often very painful to Juanita, but at this point it was external to her identity development because she still did not fully understand what being biracial meant within the context of the larger society.

Gibbs (1989) found one of the issues in the development of identity for biracial children is how they come to understand who they are as racialized beings in society. The day Juanita learned that her mother was White was a rude awakening, and fostered feelings of anger and insecurity within her because at that point it interfered with who she had always thought she was as a Black child. Although she grew up within a predominantly White environment, her immediate surroundings were Black. Therefore, the traditions of Black culture were what she witnessed and used as a model. And by the fact that her parents, particularly her mother who was her primary caregiver, never indicated otherwise, she assumed that they were a Black family, and that her mother was simply lighter than the other Black people in the community.

There were a number of light-skinned Blacks in our neighborhood, so I assumed that my mother was just lighter than anyone else was. She had features like everyone else. My mother's eyes were dark and her hair was dark, too, and it was kind of tight and curly. It just never occurred to me that she was White.

Juanita had no idea that her mother's family was reacting to them because they were an interracial family. Juanita's experience is reminiscent of a similar experience shared by James McBride (1996), a biracial African American male who wrote about his identity

development, in a tribute to his White Jewish mother. McBride, who grew up in a Brooklyn project development indicated that he knew as a child that his family was different from the other families around them, but he never fully understood the impact of their being biracial until he was much older.

Understanding what biraciality means in society. Ladner (as cited in Herring, 1995) maintained that biracial children often encounter a number of issues surrounding their search for identity in a race-conscious society because their parents often make the decision not to discuss their ethnicity with them. He contended that “parents [often] handle this decision by denying the issue of race and color, by encouraging the racial and ethnic identity of the most obvious physical qualities, or by promoting a dual identity” (p. 30).

There appears to be truth to his assertion in the experiences of both Juanita and McBride. For Juanita, it is not known why her parents chose not to openly discuss the family’s mixed racial ethnicities. But it appears that her identity would have been shaped more by African American culture as opposed to biracial because of the surrounding Black environment’s influence on her development. However, it is important to note here that when Juanita was growing up, there were very few places where interracial families could freely live without interference from members of the dominant culture (Collins, 1998; Mama, 1995).

Juanita internalized these negative encounters with her mother’s family and as she grew older the pain she felt as a child was replaced with anger and resentment toward them.

The search for identity. As she became more aware of what having a White mother and a Black father meant to people in the broader community, she came face-to-face with questions regarding her own identity and her search for self became a real and conscious effort as opposed to something that naturally occurs. No longer was it just the fact that her mother’s

family did not want to associate with her family, or that her friends knew that her mother was White. The greater implication was that she realized that within the larger context of society there was a distinction made between Black and White people, and biracial in her case, and the prevailing perception was that being Black was not good.

Juanita's concerns are consistent with Herring's (1995) research on issues biracial children confront in developing their identity. He contended that "socio-cultural issues play an inherent role in the child's development" (p. 30) because children do not grow and develop isolated from the influences of the larger world.

During Juanita's exploration of books and other literature about Black culture, she came across a poem by Maya Angelou, which helped her appreciate herself as a Black female. She says, "I would read what she said about Black women and I would say, "Yep, that's right, I am a beautiful Black woman. I am a beautiful Black woman." She also read a number of Black history books but indicated that she liked the stories the best because they allowed her to escape into the lives of the characters.

I would try to find stories about Black children because back then, there was hardly anything available about biracial kids, and when I found something I would get so excited. I would go up to my room, close my door, and just sit there, and pretend I was the person in the story. I can't explain it, but it was almost like, I would be there. I would be away from my home, my family, and everything that was going on here, and I would become the kid in the story.

I asked Juanita why she never read books about White people, being that she is biracial. And she said, "I can't explain it, I just didn't." It was obvious that this was a difficult area of conversation for her, but I asked her to try to put her feelings into words.

Maybe it's the anger I felt toward the White side of my family. I never really thought about it, but I guess it's probably because I felt like that they shut me out. They didn't want anything to do with me. So why would I want to be like someone that wanted nothing to do with me; they didn't want to be around me, they didn't want to

associate with me, and they didn't want to act like they knew me. So why would I want to be like them?

This passage provides insight into the effect of racism on Juanita's development. She personalized her White family members' rejection of her family, and saw herself as the primary recipient of their disdain. Several times in the narrative she mentioned that their feelings are directed specifically toward her (i.e., they didn't want me, they shut me out, they didn't want to associate with me, etc.), which indicates that she internalized the rejection, and felt somewhat responsible for their actions.

It is not surprising for children to take inappropriate responsibility for problems that occur within their families (Sanford & Donovan, 1984), largely because children are not capable of putting fragmented contexts together to understand why people behave or act the way they do. And most children operate in a "me-centered" environment, and often believe that everything that occurs around them is in direct relationship to them (Sanford & Donovan, 1984). For example, when parents divorce, some children believe that it happened because they did something wrong, not realizing that many factors went into the dissolution of their parents' marriage. Sanford and Donovan's (1984) extensive research on women's development of self-esteem indicated that it is important for children to gain concrete information about how the world works if they are to develop a sense of realism about themselves and the possibilities that will be available to them in later years. The researchers note that "the more we know about the world, the better able we'll be to exercise control over our [own] fate" (p. 52). The fact that Juanita's mother, who was her primary caregiver, did not openly discuss her family's racist attitudes or the implications of what their being a mixed family meant within the context of the larger society obviously created in Juanita a



level of insecurity regarding her identity, and perhaps laid the foundation for her to dislike and/or distrust White people, who then were the object of the dissonance in her life.

The impact of racism on White mother/Black daughter relationship. As Juanita grew older, and her search for her identity deepened, her relationship with her mother sometimes grew strained and distant because she did not think that her mother would understand what she was feeling as a Black female. She and her mother did not openly discuss how she felt until her freshman year in college. Their conversation began over a report card marking.

This was the semester that I knew that I was going to get a 4.0. When my grades came in the mail, a professor had changed my grade to a B, and I just went berserk. I starting screaming and crying and saying, they're just racist, and if I were White this wouldn't have happened. They're just doing it because I'm Black. When my mother came home she heard me upstairs crying, and came up to see what was wrong. I told her, oh, you wouldn't understand, you're not Black. You don't have to go through what I go through. She sat me down very quickly and advised me that she knew far better than I ever could, and that she had faced a lot of discrimination by having Black children and living on the Black side of town.

Juanita's mother explained to her that, because she had Black children, neither the White or Black communities in town wanted anything to do with her, and that it had been hard for her to keep a job when Juanita was growing up because as soon as her employers found out she had Black children, she would be fired. Juanita said, "She told me things that I had not realized as a child that she had gone through. It was a rude awakening. Mother told me that I really didn't know what racism is. But I told her that I did."

The division that racism and classism creates between Black and White women is evidenced even in the relationship with Juanita and her mother. When they had the discussion about the grade, Juanita's first response to her mother was "You wouldn't understand, you're not Black." This statement is typical of how many Black women feel. They often compare their experiences of living in White America to those of their White

sisters (hooks, 1981). Naturally Juanita loved her mother and accepted her mother as White, but it appears that she resented the fact that within the context of the larger society, her mother's skin color would afford her privileges and access to opportunities that Juanita knew would not be open to her, simply because of how people felt about the color of her skin. Her parents' telling her as a child that her mother was "just mom" may have helped her manage the day-to-day events of a child's life in a racialized world. But as she grew older, and witnessed intimately how external White forces could impose upon her Black life, she developed an "us-against-them" mindset. And because her mother was a White woman, at particular points in Juanita's life her mother was categorized within the "them" group.

Despite the pain of the experiences Juanita had as a child, Juanita believes they have worked to her advantage in her adult life. "Those experiences allowed me to understand first-hand the severity of racism in society, and its power over people's lives. As a result, I think I am more empathetic toward biracial children, and certainly more tolerant of people's differences."

For all of the women in this study, the mother-daughter and extended female family member relationships were significant to their identity development, both constructively, and perhaps in some instances, less positively. Their relationships were consistent with narratives provided by other researchers on African American female identity development. Collins (1990) found that the mother/daughter relationship was a "fundamental relationship...[because] Black mothers empowered their daughters by passing on the everyday knowledge essential to survival" (p. 96). And Mulqueen (1992) contended that the "mother-daughter relationship is highly influential for female development and provides the continuing basis for the female as nurturer, caretaker, and other characteristics stereotypically

associated with femininity” (p. 73).

Naturally, the experiences of the women in this study do not represent the full range of developmental issues that may occur within the mother-daughter relationship for all African American women. Yet, because of the variance in their ages and their racial ethnicities, we gain useful information regarding issues that may be prevalent among some Black females during identity formation.

### **Public School System Influence on Identity Development**

Each of the women attended public schools during their formative years, and each of them had a very different experience. All of the women’s K-12 education experiences were introduced in the participant profiles provided in Chapter Four. Our discussion here will focus on: gender role counseling, resisting attack: I know who I am, roadblocks and gatekeepers, what segregation really meant, isolated and alone: the lack of a peer groups, and quiet retreat. These sub-categories will provide a general overview of the public education experience that impacted their development.

If you recall, Nakia and Annette attended school during the late 1940s and early 1950s under court-sanctioned segregation mandates, and Juanita, Terah, and Iman attended school in the mid-1960s through the early 1970s.

#### **Gender role counseling**

Nakia shared in her interviews that she “excelled scholastically all the way through school and was a college preparatory student during high school,” but received discouraging advice from her high school guidance counselor when she inquired about attending White colleges and universities.

He said very directly, “Why don’t you attend a Black college?” Or he’d say things

like, “Why would you want to go to college and get a degree when all you are going to do is stay at home and have children?”

Nakia provided her own interpretation of what was behind the counselor’s advice.

I think they [men] felt that women’s primary purpose was to have kids, so he was suggesting that my going to college would be a waste of everyone’s time, which clearly represents a sexist attitude. And then I think he was also being racist. He was saying, who do you think you are little Black girl to aspire to be anything other than a nurse or a teacher; because at that time, those were the primary career options available to Black women. And they usually went to Black colleges for their training.

While the counselor’s advice may seem contrary to what we expect from a school counselor, given that this was 1957, his reasons for recommending Nakia not attend college, per her interpretation, would have represented popular opinion regarding the roles of women. Most people in society assumed that men in general and White men in particular attended college because they were going to be the breadwinners in the family. Their wives would stay home to raise the children (Baruch, et al., 1983; Solomon, 1985), and African American women, like Nakia, would perform the domestic duties in these White homes (Rollins, 1985).

Solomon asserts that “by the mid-twentieth century, women’s participation [in education] belied or contradicted the stereotyped view of their functioning exclusively as wives and mothers” (p. 191). While Solomon’s comment is largely predicated upon a White male perception of the role of White women, it still conveys the common thought about women’s education during that time. In fact, Baruch et al.’s (1983) research indicated that in the 1950’s, Americans described women who chose to not to become wives and mothers with words like “selfish” and “bad” (p. 79).

#### Resisting attack: I know who I am

Fortunately, the counselor’s attitude did not negatively affect Nakia’s development. She said “What he said just made me angry, it didn’t say anything about me or my abilities. I

knew that I was going to college, and that I would take what appealed to me, so I didn't listen to him."

Nakia's family obviously contributed to her developing a positive self image, so when she encountered people outside of her immediate family who attempted to define who she should be, she did not internalize what they said. "I didn't take what he said personally, I know who I am, so what he thought didn't matter. Anyway, I'm sure he said things like that to the White girls, too. It was just a sign of the times."

Juanita, who attended high school approximately 20 years after Nakia and in another state, had a similar experience with her high guidance counselor.

Your high school counselor is somebody I felt you could trust for everything, and that they were going to help you get where you needed to be in life. I really ended up being very hurt by my counselor. He would help me as far as picking the classes I needed to graduate, but he discouraged me from taking the math and science classes that I needed to prepare me for college. As I told you, I always got As in geometry classes, as far as I went anyway, but at a certain point he kind of stopped me from taking those kind of classes. He would say, "You don't need to take that math class." And I would ask him, "But don't I need chemistry?" Because I knew enough to know that it was on the list of classes that students needed, who were preparing for college, but he would say, "No, you don't need that." Then he allowed me to participate in a tutorial program that meant I only had to attend school half a day. So I would leave school and go to the elementary school to tutor Native American children in reading. I thought he was doing me a favor. But when I got to college, I realized that he really hadn't done me a favor at all, he was sabotaging me. And it was very difficult that first year in college in the math and science classes because he had allowed me to stop taking them too soon.

#### What segregation really meant

Annette had a positive and rewarding secondary education experience. She attended predominantly Black schools, was recognized widely for her scholastic abilities, had a number of close friends, and participated in leadership activities in the student government. She was also musically inclined, which allowed her to participate in recitals and choir groups

in high school and the local community.

In her senior year, the federal government mandated the integration (i.e., desegregation) of public schools, and she was selected as one of the African American students to integrate an all-White school in the district.

Back then, integration meant taking three or four top students from the Black high school, the so-called “cream of the crop,” and placing them in a White school. White students were never transferred to Black schools. It was always “us” doing the integrating.

Integration of public schools occurred in 1954, as a result of the ruling in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*. Harley, Middleton, and Stokes (1992) stated that Thurgood Marshall, the attorney representing the parents in the case, argued that segregation adversely affected the self-esteem of African American students because it made them feel inferior to their White counterparts. The Supreme Court ruled in his favor and declared that segregation violated the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment. After the ruling, schools like Annette’s were ordered to desegregate “with all deliberate speed” (p. 325). While the *Brown* decision primarily involved the desegregation of public elementary and secondary schools, it also had implications for higher education, and many White colleges opened their doors to Blacks as a result of the ruling (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997; Wilson, 1989).

Drawing from our earlier discussion, we know that desegregation did not necessarily mean integration because most schools still did not incorporate integrated teaching methodologies and bi-cultural practices into the curriculum. Rosznagel and Vance (1982) contended that it is not logical to expect gains in a student’s self-esteem when desegregation is implemented in this manner.

Although Annette did not transfer to the White high school, being selected as one of the Black students to integrate the White high school undoubtedly served as positive re-enforcement to her self-esteem because it indicated that people thought she had outstanding scholastic abilities. She alludes to this when she says that they selected “the so-called cream of the crop” to integrate the white high school. She knew what people thought of her. Plus, she continuously received positive re-enforcement of her self-worth from family and community members.

What is interesting to note here are her feelings regarding Black students being used as the vehicle of integration. She said, “it was always us [Black students] doing.” What she appears to be saying is that there is always an expectation placed upon African Americans to go the extra mile, or perform some difficult task that is not asked of White people in society. Clearly this indicates that she understands the implications of being an African American in a dominant White culture.

Isolated and alone: The lack of a peer group

Of the two remaining women, Iman’s educational experiences provide an important lens to examine how race shapes peer relations for some African American females in predominantly White public schools. I asked Iman to describe her overall experience as a minority in the predominantly White public school system.

I liked attending school a lot, especially junior and senior high, but I was very uncomfortable in the environment. I had a few friends, but I think what I was feeling could be described as acute racial isolation. From the sixth or seventh grade onward, all the others kids were pairing up, you know, this kind of lovey-dovey stuff, and I was totally out of that, I didn’t have anyone.

There could be a number of factors (e.g., her shyness, academic achievement, etc.) to explain why she was unable to connect with the group, but based upon her discussion of race

relations in her community, it appears her being Black was the most salient factor that prevented her involvement. Iman's experience is consistent with that of other Black students in predominantly White school systems.

Clark's (1989) research on peer relations of Black adolescents indicated that Black students in White settings had difficulty connecting with a White peer group because socio-cultural factors (i.e., prior perceptions of race and class distinctions) often impeded the interaction. The students in that study used three alternatives to develop substitute support networks; the most favorable was developing peer relationships outside of the school where they attended. For Iman, this was not an option because the area where she lived had a very small population of Black people. Her alternative in her words was to become a "little intellectual." Overall, being an intellectual has long-term advantages. However, it can not fulfill the role the peer group plays in helping to develop social skills, particularly for people of high school age.

A comment is necessary about Iman's reliance on her scholastic activities to fulfill her social needs. What she does not say outright but alludes to on several occasions in our discussions, is that she is aware that her shyness was born out of the insecurity she developed from being denied entrance into the White peer group. It appears the more socially isolated she felt from her peers, the more she withdrew into her books. But she became caught in a vicious cycle, because the more she retreated into her studies, the more reclusive she became, and the less likely she was to become socially active.

In summary, the public school system (i.e., teachers, peers, institutional practices) is crucial to how students grow and develop their identity, because outside of the family unit, it is the largest socializing agent that students will encounter on their way to adulthood (Clark,



1989). Schools transfer knowledge, as well as expectations of societal norms. For African American students in predominantly White schools, the transference of information is often in contradiction to what students learn within their families as evidenced by the educational experiences of women in this study.

### **Conclusion**

As we have seen in the lives of the African American women in the study thus far, discrimination in any form is grossly offensive. And segregation was demoralizing because it sought to perpetuate the myth that Black people were inferior creatures, thus not worthy to drink out of the same water fountain, or sit next to a White person on a city bus. It sought to intimidate, and gnaw away at the core of Black people by dividing us from other female groups in society through social class structures (Reynolds, 1997) and constriction of our movements and civil liberties. And naturally, every social institution in the United States composed primarily of the dominant majority group played a significant role in perpetuating the mythology.

What have we learned from examining the narratives of the women in this study thus far? We learned that the family unit (i.e., parents, siblings, extended family members) serves not only as an incubator where Black children grow and develop away from the cruelty of the outside world, but it also serves as a tactical training unit that prepares Black females to survive within a society that has a long history of institutionalized racism. We learned how crucial it is to the Black female's self-esteem for her to have positive role models that help to contradict the negative and stereotypical images that are promulgated through the mass media that seeks to define her self-image and destroy her self-worth as a Black female. We learned that African American children, in general, are taught in public White schools that

they must de-value their cultural and ethnic heritage to assimilate into what is considered the dominant culture. In terms of education, we also learned that Black children are taught to value education and use it as a tool to transform whole communities, as opposed to empowering just themselves. We learned that African American females are taught about the resiliency of past African American people to fortify themselves against possible attacks from the outside world. But most important, we learned that we as a race of people, African Americans, have choices like everyone in a democratic society and that we can evoke those choices to change our destinies.

### **The Dimensions of Professional Identity**

In the first part of this chapter, we examined sub-themes common across the women's experiences that comprised the category of personal identity. Now I will turn our attention to their professional identities. The professional identity of each woman in the study was different, yet there were several sub-themes that emerged during data analysis that were common across all of the women's experiences in predominantly White institutions. When combined, these sub-themes define the category of professional identity. This section of the chapter will highlight those sub-themes which include: undergraduate college, transitioning from undergraduate college to work, combining marriage and career aspirations, professional career path, and experiences of African American women faculty and administrators.

I approach the examination of professional identity as though it is a separate and distinct feature from the women's personal identity, when in fact it is not. Britt (1997) conducted a similar analysis, wherein she investigated how psychotherapists understand their own self-care within the constructs of their personal and professional identities. The researcher indicated that she, too, understood that "it is artificial to separate personal from professional

identity,” yet it is done because “it is phenomenologically fitting, and [it] provides organizational clarity, [which] helps the reader to better assimilate and process the data” (p. 366). I agree with Britt. I think it would be unfruitful to our meaning-making, as well as confusing, to talk about a large multidimensional construct such as identity, without inserting some type of organized structure into the discussion.

The major focus of this study was to understand if or how race, class, and gender independently and/or collectively impact the academic experiences of the African American women faculty and administrators in this study. Central to that understanding is how the women themselves experience their academic roles. This brings me to the point that Britt (1997) was making when she indicated that it is “phenomenologically fitting” to organize personal and professional identity separately for the purpose of investigation.

Phenomenology refers to the meaning attached to phenomenon by the humans who experienced it (Peterson, 1992). A phenomenological approach to research allows the phenomenon under study to be deconstructed (i.e., separated or torn apart) for the purpose of in-depth analysis and interpretation. Peterson noted that although we appear to be, “people are not completely formed and static, but are always in the process of becoming” (p. 23).

Furthermore, the researcher contended:

We [i.e., people] create meaning in our world not by the things alone, but by our experiences with the things, the object world. Through our experiences, we form concepts and these concepts are not the things at all, but they are the meanings or structures forged by the mind in its experiences of the things....By reflecting on our experiences one can flesh out the processes of awareness that normally remain hidden and “see again” the phenomena [sic] as it emerges” (p. 24).

Therefore, the many aspects of the women’s identities (i.e., personal experiences) that are known prior to examining their current academic roles in the predominantly White

institutions, are useful because they help us understand how the women may ascribe meaning, and subsequently respond to the experiences they encounter within their institutional settings. To that end, before examining the five primary themes that comprise the core theme of professional identity, I will pause to highlight another theme (i.e., motivation for attending college) that emerged during data analysis that is not as significant to the women's professional identities, but provides additional information relevant to their overall personal identities.

### **Motivation for Attending College**

An analysis of the data indicated that all of the women in the study knew as far back as elementary school that they were destined for college. Whether the message was spoken or implied, all of them understood that it was an expectation of their families and others that they would pursue educational opportunities beyond high school, even though in most cases, the expectation did not coincide with the family's ability to assist the women financially. It was interesting that the motivations to attend college for the older women in the study were similar to the reasons pioneer African American women desired education in times past – race uplift, and the choice of a college education or domestic work. The younger women in the study had more contemporary motivations for getting an education. Juanita's mother was insistent that she attend college. Since she was a child, her mother had told her, "you're going to college." She not only intended for Juanita to go to college, but for Juanita to go on to law school as well. Terah had more personal reasons. She wanted to improve her standard of living in order to experience the American Dream that was purported to be available to educated people. For Iman, college attendance was a family tradition. The specifics regarding each of the women's motivations for attending college are presented in

the sub-categories presented below as contextualized narratives.

Choices: College education or domestic work

Nakia's mother, who never finished high school and was a domestic worker until her second marriage, constantly reminded Nakia of the choices available to minority women who lacked a college education. Her mother would say, "You have a choice as a Black female: you can either scrub floors, or you can get an education and become a teacher or a nurse."

Reminiscing about the value system she acquired from her family, Nakia said:

Some of the most important things that my family taught me were to work hard and not take welfare, respect my elders, which is something that is not taught today, and most of all, to get a good education, even though I was a female.

Nakia's mother was encouraging her to pursue education so that she would not have to become a domestic worker, too; and she was also trying to convey to Nakia the importance of being self-reliant and independent. Black mothers knew what lay in store for their daughters within a hegemonic and patriarchal society, and often encouraged them to educate themselves in order to confront the oppressive conditions. Collins (1990) contended that Black mothers attempted to ensure their daughters' survival by encouraging them to work. And education, which was used as a vehicle of advancement, could be seen as the mother's way of enhancing positive self-definition and self-valuation in Black girls.

The two choices of occupations Nakia's mother mentioned to her (nursing and teaching) are indicative of the primary professional opportunities that were available to Black women at that time (Higginbotham, 1994; Hines, 1989; Noble, 1993). Both professions have always been considered very respectable occupations in the Black community (McKay, 1997; Noble, 1993). According to Noble (1993), through teaching "a young woman could...escape the daily, often humiliating contact with white people [and] holding an acceptable and admired

position among her people often compensated for the degradation of segregation” (p. 330).

### Race uplift

Annette indicated the expectations placed upon her to attend college came from “three strong socializations in my life – my family, church, and community. No one ever addressed the idea that I would not go to college. They just knew that I would go, even though we didn’t have any money.”

Annette’s mother was a college graduate, so naturally the most likely assumption would be that she would follow in her mother’s footsteps. However, another level of interpretation would be that the expectation, particularly as she described it coming from the “three strong socializations,” is rooted in the philosophy of using education to serve a community of people (Perkins, 1981, 1983). Black females who had learning capabilities were encouraged to get an education for the purpose of uplifting the race, not just themselves (Collins, 1990; Noble, 1993; Perkins, 1981). Collins (1990) contended that “education was for the entire race, and its purpose was to assist in the economic, political, and social improvement of the enslaved, and later emancipated African Americans” (p. 148). Thus, Annette, like other women before her, was expected to bring the knowledge she gained through education back into the Black community to empower those who could not attend themselves, yet needed the information to become self-reliant and independent (Noble, 1993).

### Mother’s influence on decision to attend college

Juanita identified her mother as the primary reason for her attending college.

As far back as I can remember, my mother has said, “When you go to college, and when you go to law school.” I had no idea what college was, but I knew that I had to go because that’s all she ever said. Or, she’d say, “You’ve got to do good in school (i.e., elementary through high school) so you can get a scholarship because we can’t afford to send you, and you’ve got to go to college.” I didn’t even know what college

was, and there was no one [that] I knew who had gone that I could reach out to [and ask questions about it]. I just knew that it was this place that I had to go to because that's what my mom always said.

Her mother's admonishments to do well in school did not go unheeded. Juanita was an exceptional student all throughout her educational experience. And she did, in fact, receive an academic scholarship to attend college. Seginer's (1983) research on parents of school-age children found a favorable relationship to exist between the parents' educational expectations and the children's academic achievement. Parental expectation in the study was defined as the number of years the children attended school, and the occupations they were expected to engage in afterward. Furthermore, Boocock stated (as cited in Seginer, 1983), "It is clear that high achieving children tend to come from families who have high expectations for them, and who consequently are likely to 'set standards' and to make greater demands at an earlier age" (p. 4).

Juanita's mother was clearly the impetus behind her pursuing a college education. And surprisingly, she also pursued the occupational career goal that her mother had selected for her as a child. But because she believed that her mother only wanted her to become a lawyer to impress her White family members, practicing law was never her primary occupation.

#### A chance at the American dream

Terah was the only woman in the study who credited herself with making the decision to attend college. "I knew I was going to college, and I didn't think about it. The only question was, where was I going to go, and what was I going to major in." However, she said:

If I were forced to name someone, it would be my first cousin on my mother's side, who incidentally was the first person in our family to graduate from high school and go on to college, as the person who was most influential in my decision-making process.

Terah appears to have bought into the philosophy of there being this great American Dream, wherein education was the key that unlocked the doors of opportunity, privilege, and upward mobility (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997). She was very adamant in her pursuit of education, and intended to use it to catapult herself into a better life. Her determination to get an education may have also been rooted in her desire to escape from her family. As we read earlier, the relationship she had with her stepfather may have unconsciously influenced her decision to pursue education as a means to get away from home.

#### Family tradition

Iman's decision, on the other hand, was rooted in family tradition. Both her mother and father were college graduates and it was just an expectation that she would attend college as well.

It was understood that I would go to college, especially as the oldest child. I felt the pressure to set an example for my brother and sister. My parents said, "You have to go to college. You get as much education as you can." I also got it from my grandmother who had graduated with her high school diploma. She didn't go beyond that, but she was very insistent that I had to get as much education as I could. So that was kind of the attitude of my family.

As a second-generation college student, Iman would have been able to benefit from the experiences of her parents when she started college in 1983. The apprehensions first-generation African American students often experience would have been reduced because we can assume that her parents would have known how to assist her in making the transition (Fleming, 1984; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

These narratives indicate that for most of the women in the study, the decision to attend college was not made in isolation, but was a family decision. This finding is consistent with research conducted by Etter-Lewis (1993). The researcher indicated that for African



American women in her study, their parents had been significant in their making the decision to attend college.

### **Undergraduate College**

An interesting theme that emerged from the data regarding the women's higher education, was that four of them had attended predominantly White institutions throughout their educational experience. Annette was the only woman in the group who had attended a historically Black college as an undergraduate student. And surprisingly, their graduate and professional school experiences did not emerge as a significant theme in the data set, particularly since other women of color have written reports about their less than favorable graduate school experiences (hooks, 1981; Rendon, 1992, 1994).

Nakia, Juanita, Terah, and Iman all attended large predominantly White Research I universities for their undergraduate degrees. They, like countless others, encountered their share of opposition trying to receive an education, but they would not be considered among the pioneer female group to integrate White institutions. By the time they started college, the likes of Mary Jane Patterson, Fanny Jackson Coppin, Mary Church Terrell, Anna Julia Cooper, and many others had long before passed through the sacred halls of academe, and paved the way for them (Ihle, 1992). It was interesting, however, to hear the women in this study who, like the pioneer women, felt that they had an obligation to represent their race to the dominant group, who were sometimes in awe of their scholastic abilities and resistant to their resolve to get an education. These women, like the pioneer women, pushed the boundaries of the academy to make a space for themselves, and left a wider trail for other Black women to follow.

The sub-categories that will be explored in this sub-theme include: encountering racism in

university housing, classroom experiences of Black students with White professors, resiliency of Black students on White campuses, advantages of attending a large university, adjustment concerns of African American students on predominantly White campuses, and the role of African American support networks in college adjustment.

To situate the discussion that follows within an historical context, Nakia, the oldest woman in the study, started college approximately three years after the 1954 *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* decision. And Iman, the youngest woman in the study, started in 1983, 11 years after the federal government issued affirmative action mandates to increase the overall number of minorities at all levels of education (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997; Washington & Harvey, 1989).

Surprisingly, both Nakia and Terah attended the same university for their undergraduate degrees. Juanita and Iman also attended the same institution. All of the women had relatively pleasant experiences in college and indicated that they grew tremendously, yet none of them escaped incidents of various kinds of discrimination.

#### Encountering racism in university housing

Nakia indicated that it was obvious when she started college that “Black students were not really welcomed at the university; we were only tolerated.” She shared an incident that occurred in her freshman year when she was checking into the dormitory that obviously affected her greatly because when she discussed it there was still a lot of passion in her voice. The bold print is my effort to capture the emphasis she placed upon particular words.

I’ll never forget they told me that I could not share a room with a White friend of mine, even though we had both requested to room together. The guy checking us in looked at me and said, “**BLACK GIRLS CANNOT ROOM WITH WHITE GIRLS!**” I was very angry because I felt like he was trying to say that I was not good enough to share a room with her.

Nakia used anger, a temporary emotion, to manage this negative experience, as opposed to internalizing the implication of what the hall director was inferring in his remark. It appears that by the time she started college, she had been conditioned to expect acts of race discrimination in her encounters with White Americans and had learned how to manage the encounters in a way that permitted her to continue to function without allowing the incidents to affect her personally (Sedlacek, 1989).

Lena Wright Meyers in Black Women: Do They Cope Better? (1991) described how Black women use various methods to manage negative experiences that could otherwise affect their self-esteem. She offered the following definition of coping:

I define coping as alternative ways of dealing with the pressures of society. Hence coping helps to provide some explanation of resources used by Black women in adjusting to the various social pressures they experience in everyday life. This is to say that there is a causal relationship between what the Black woman thinks of herself, and coping. It is to suggest that feelings of self-worth lead to a greater ability to cope. (p. 3)

Because Nakia was confident in herself when she started college, the hall director was not able to affect her self-esteem. This is evident in her comment about what the hall director was “trying to say,” which indicates that she recognized that what he was saying was predicated on a racist image of Black women, tainted by classism as well. But she knew that she did not have to take what he said to heart because she knew who she was; had she had low self-esteem when she entered college, his comment would have served to further devalue her self-worth.

Nakia’s experience with the hall director is typical of the prevailing practices that were used against African American female students in higher education during the early 1950s (Mulqueen, 1992). While the Supreme Court’s decision in *Brown v. the Board of Education*

case resulted in a number of White institutions opening their doors wider to Blacks and other minority students, the ideology behind the separate but equal philosophy had by then become ingrained in the hearts of many White Americans, and into the infrastructures of most organized social systems in the United States (Higginbotham, 1994; Sokoloff, 1987; Washington & Harvey, 1989). Hence, the prejudicial and discriminatory practices that the philosophy promoted still persisted toward African Americans in virtually every sphere of their lives. And when the policy was not *de jure*, it became *de facto*, including policies and practices in institutions of higher education (Pinkney, 1969).

#### Classroom experiences of Black students with White professors

Nakia also shared the interaction that occurred in the classroom between Black students and White professors.

It was a struggle. We had to fight to maintain our dignity and to receive fair grades because the professors treated us with disdain. Most of the time they would not recognize your hand if you raised it up to ask a question. And if they did, you never knew what they were going to say. Whether or not they would try to discredit you in front of the class, or try to make you feel stupid in some other way. But in retrospect, I think all of those experiences made us all stronger. And I know it made us pull together more because we had to be there for each other. No one else was.

We can assume that Nakia knew how the professors felt about her being in their classrooms by their behavior. But they probably would not have considered their behavior as racist because it was a norm and accepted in society at large. Ballard (1973) contended that “like most other [W]hite Americans, faculty members were products of a racist society and found it difficult to adjust to the presence of Black faces in their classrooms—particularly when those students, contrary to the liberally acceptable integrationist stance, would appear actively disdainful and skeptical” (p. 71) of them as White people.

### Resiliency of Black students on White campuses

Another point of analysis is offered by Nakia's statement, "But in retrospect, I think all of those experiences made us all stronger, and I know it made us pull together more because we had to be there for each other." This statement is consistent with the feelings of other Black students who have shared with researchers their experiences on predominantly White institutions (Etter-Lewis, 1993; Turner, 1994a, 1994b). Of all the current writings available on the subject, Caroline Viernes Turner (1994a; 1994b) seems to have captured the essence of the students' feelings in her titles about their experience at White institutions – Guest in Someone Else's House: Student of Color, and Alien Students Alien Staff: How Awesome the Gap in Higher Education.

There was a 22-year gap between when Nakia attended in 1957 and Terah started in 1979. Yet the old cliché, "the more things change, the more they remain the same," describes the overall college environment for African American students during both of their periods of enrollment. Naturally, the enrollment of African American and other minority groups had increased by 1979 and the behavior of the majority group was not as overt, but the social climate remained relatively static, and Terah and her friends still felt as though they were unwelcomed guests.

### Advantages of attending a large university

Terah was a transfer student. She had initially attended another predominantly White university that was located in close proximity to the Black community where she grew up. The institution to which she transferred, on the other hand, was located further away from her home, in an isolated predominantly White environment that offered very little opportunity for regular contact with a Black community. Still, she enjoyed college life and indicated that the

experience helped her grow independent of her parents and provided her with the opportunity to interact with people from diverse cultures and socio-economic backgrounds.

I think one of the advantages of attending an institution the size of Ohio State is that you're introduced to a lot of people from many different backgrounds. As a result, you learn how to deal with other people. You learn how to deal with their attitudes, and how to function within different social environments. There were students there who had tons of money and could get whatever they wanted. They had nice cars, they dressed nice, and things like that. Then there were those who were like me, who didn't have a car, or a whole lot of money.

What she has described is the typical reaction of first-year students. College is often a person's first extended period away from home and familiar surroundings. It is a time of intellectual growth and self-discovery, and it is also a time when students begin the process of evaluating themselves and their values in relation to those of students around them; all of which can be intimidating and exciting at the same time (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Pounds, 1987).

#### Adjustment concerns of African American students on predominantly White campuses

The adjustment concerns of African American students on predominantly White campuses are often heightened because Black students in these environments have to "couple the normal concerns of entering first-year students (sharing a room with a stranger, and establishing new relationships, etc.) with those of having to adjust in an intellectual and social community that is often unprepared to accept their cultural difference" (Holmes et al., in press). Thus, a transition experience that may be considered "normal" for a majority student, becomes a significant event for a first-year minority student (Pounds, 1987).

When I first got to college, I was given a dorm room with three White girls. This was my first experience rooming with anyone, other than my family. On my way to the room, I thought, oh Lord, I'm already trying to deal with leaving home, and now this. I was there about a week and I moved out. It just so happened that there was another African American girl that had a room by herself, so of course I moved in with her.

In a residential university environment, assigning an incoming female student a room with three other females, who are all strangers to each other, is generally the norm. Residential living spaces are designed to foster interaction among college students. They are the places where most students develop professional networks and meet life-long friends (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). But the dynamics of that same scenario change when the students are of different ethnicities because of how race has influenced the interactions between different groups in society.

Terah was uncomfortable sharing a room with a group of White girls and they may have experienced some discomfort in the room with her as well. But, their discomfort would not have been at the level of hers because they would have been more comfortable in the environment itself and in the presence of the other two White roommates.

Pounds (1987) noted that the critical issue for Black students when they arrive on White college campuses is one of trust because they come with a historical experience of mistrust and/or uncertainty about White people in general, which would be consistent with Terah's background. Terah grew up in a predominantly Black area. Her primary interactions with White people would have been limited to exchanges in service-type industries and her understanding of them would have been, for the most part, shaped by what she had heard or seen through mass media. She had never had a close relationship with a White person prior to starting college, which is probably the case for a number of first-year majority students as well, but the significant difference is that majority students will come to college as welcomed guests and minority students will be involved as unwelcomed and/or barely tolerated visitors (Turner, 1994a).

### The role of African American support networks in college adjustment

Nevertheless, Terah did not experience the alienation and isolation that many African American students feel on predominantly White campuses because she already had a social support network in place when she arrived (Fleming, 1984; Holmes et al., in press). Her cousin was there, as well as her future husband with whom she had grown up. They both provided her with a small network of peers. However, she indicated that she was aware of her minority status on campus.

I knew that we were not a part of the big crowd. That we were kind of like this offshoot to what was going on. But that was okay because when you have just a small pocket of African American students on campus, there will be those who will cling together and form their own network, and that's what we did.

This theme emerged in a similar study conducted by Gwendolyn Etter-Lewis (1993). When describing the college experiences of the African American women in her study, Etter-Lewis indicated that the women had said they “banded together and created a rich, nurturing, social and intellectual environment which allowed them to be in control of their own educational growth,” (p. 79) because they knew they were outsiders within the larger White community, which is basically what Terah is saying.

Juanita and Iman, who had both grown up in predominantly White communities, did not have the same type of adjustment concerns that Nakia and Terah encountered during their first year of college. Nakia and Terah went directly from predominantly Black homes and school environments into a predominantly White institution. The home and school environments of Juanita and Iman had always been White, so it was not as significant for them to attend a predominantly White institution. However, I am not inferring that these women did not have adjustment and other environmental concerns, but rather, they may not



have experienced the culture shock to the level that Nakia and Terah did because of their home environments.

In closing, Nakia, Annette, Juanita, Terah, and Iman are to be applauded for their persistence in achieving their undergraduate academic goals. All of the “isms” that operate against African American women in society also operate against them within the sacred halls the academy. Nevertheless, African American women, like the women in this study, will continue to face whatever challenges necessary to improve our station in life, and to prepare the road for other women to travel.

In related studies researchers have found that African American students on predominantly White campuses across country have a number of experiences that majority students do not, which increase the likelihood that they will not receive a college degree (Fleming, 1984; Holmes, et al., in press; Jones 1993; Rendon, 1994; Turner, 1994a). Each of the women in this study has accomplished a goal that relatively few Americans ever achieve, and many only dream about. At the writing of this thesis, The Chronicle of Higher Education, Almanac Edition (1999) reported that as of 1990, approximately 35,409,169 (13.1%) students in the total U.S. population (270,299,000) had completed a four-year undergraduate degree. Of this number, African Americans as a group represented 7.5%, and African American women, specifically, accounted for 2.3% of total number for the group. You the reader, have been privileged to have had access to the undergraduate college experiences of five of those women.

### **Transitioning from Undergraduate College to Work**

The end of undergraduate education marks the beginning of early adulthood for most college students. College graduation is the time students begin the permanent shift away

from their parents' sphere of influence and direction to exert their independence with plans and ideas for their own lives (Josselson, 1996). Graduation from college also marks the beginning phase of the student's professional career (Chickering & Havighurst, 1981; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

Some college graduates start their careers knowing precisely what they would like to do and where they would like to be at specific age intervals. These people generally keep a five-to-ten-year plan ever before them to ascertain that they are staying on their designated courses. Others may have a destination in mind, but are open to experience a broad spectrum of career options that present themselves at various moments in the person's career progression (Havighurst, 1982). Still others leave college and go directly into marital/family relationships (Bernard, 1990). In any case, Chickering and Havighurst (1981) contended that "choosing and preparing for a career is the most challenging developmental task of all for the late adolescent and young adult" (p. 32).

None of the women in the study returned to their parents' homes after graduation from college. Both Nakia and Annette met and married their husbands while they were still in college, so afterwards they immediately started homemaking. Juanita went directly to law school after graduation, and married during her first year there, and Terah married immediately following graduation from college. Iman, the only single woman in the group, completed a five-year undergraduate program, wherein she received both the bachelor and master's degrees simultaneously, then went directly into a Ph.D. program. The married women continued to pursue their educational aspirations beyond the undergraduate level, and all of them received at least the master's degree. And all of the women, except Iman, had the experience of working in another professional role before they became faculty and

administrators at their current institutions.

### **Combining Marriage and Career Aspirations**

Selecting a mate and getting married, as the women in this study did, during or directly after college is considered a normal stage in development models for traditional age undergraduate women (Chickering & Havighurst, 1981; Wilson & Russell, 1996). Albeit, most of these models were developed with White female college students as the focus of consideration, the African American women in this study followed the current established patterns (see Bernard, 1990; Chickering & Havighurst, 1981; Havighurst, 1982). Nakia and Annette, the oldest women in the study, married while still in college. The most salient point that emerged under this theme is related to gender role expectation for women and their desire to pursue professional career.

I asked Nakia and Annette, particularly, to discuss how they came to pursue additional education and professional careers, because in the early 1960s when they graduated from college, women for the most part were still being socialized to believe that their husbands and children took precedence over their career aspirations (Baruch, et al., 1983; Wilson & Russell, 1996). In fact, Bernard (1990) contended that parental advice to college-bound daughters usually conveyed the message that the “normal expectation [was] that she would find someone to take care of her, while also stressing the importance of [her] being prepared to take care of herself in case she did not find a husband or her husband died or left her” (p. 262).

Nakia indicated that she was not one of the traditional woman:

My husband has always been very supportive of me. As far as he was concerned with my education, it was go as far as you can go. Next month we will be married 40 years, so we have kinda got this thing worked out now. I guess he got his liberal

attitude about women from his parents. Neither one of them had a college education, but they really promoted education. He was the first to go to college and complete his education in their family. But I guess you have to know me, too. He was very much aware of the fact that if I wanted to do something, in this case further my education, I was going to do it. That's not to say that I ignored his request about my life, but it's still my life. If I wanted to do something, I was going to do it, and he just had to adjust to that.

It was obvious by her tone of voice and body language (i.e., matter-of-fact speech, erect posture) that she felt very strongly about this issue. I asked Nakia, were not the women in her era supposed to be a little more submissive than what I was hearing from her, and she said quite pointedly:

I'm of the new model. I was raised to be independent. In fact, I didn't think that I wanted to get married at all. I didn't want to FIT into those little slots they had designed for women – going to high school, going to college, and getting married. I DIDN'T WANT THAT, I had my own ideas for my life. My husband and I had dated a while in high school, so he knew the kind of person I was before we got married. Actually, it wasn't until after we had been engaged for almost a year and a half that I finally agreed to get married. And in terms of me being a professional woman, I think the man wanted me to work. I've been working since I was 15 years old. I stopped out briefly when we were having our family, but for the most, I've been working. On our third child, I decided that I would stay home with the children. I thought I was going to go crazy. So he's very supportive of my working.

Annette's husband was also supportive of her educational and career aspirations.

However, how she positioned herself in the marriage was quite different from the stance Nakia took.

He and I met in college and got married. But he got a good job before he graduated and started working. Now, I was a traditional female-oriented woman, so when I finished school, I told him that I would not go on to get a master's degree until he finished his bachelor's degree. It was important for me that my husband be a leader in all areas of our life. I encouraged him because it was very important to me that he graduated from college. He graduated in May, and I enrolled for Master study in 1970, and so did he. We graduated with our master's degrees two years later at the same time. I don't know whether he felt he owed that support to me or not, but he and I worked very, very, very closely, and we shared educational goals. On the surface, the narratives would imply that the roles these two women played within

their respective relationships contradict each other. Nakia appears to be the assertive and self-centered one of the two, while Annette is gentler and places her husband's educational needs above her own educational desires. Both of these assessments are true because each relationship has been influenced by sociological gender role expectations constructed for women.

La Frances Rodgers-Rose (1980) in the Dialectics of Black Male-Female Relationships suggested that "the relationship between Black men and women does not take place in a vacuum. They act out their behavior in a society, which has clearly defined role behavior. Men are supposed to be aggressive, [and] women passive" (p. 251). With this definition in mind, our surface observation would automatically lead us to believe that Nakia's behavior is inappropriate. However, this is precisely why there is a need for theoretical orientations such as feminist standpoint epistemology, because it allows Black women to step outside of the controlling images that have been created by a White male patriarchal system to define women's social movements (Collins, 1990; Rodgers-Rose, 1980).

The interpersonal relationship of Black women and men is much different than the images that have been advanced by White sociologists and other researchers who have purported that Black women dominate and lead Black men around (Rodgers-Rose, 1980). Because of the history of race and social class discrimination in America against Black people in general, the intimate relationship between Black women and men has often had to be a source of comfort, mutual respect, and support because in the larger society they were both being victimized. Yet, this assessment does not negate the fact that in the past some Black men have also sought to dominate and control Black women (Collins, 1990).

Another level of interpretation is that these women are operating from the gender role

perspectives they learned within their families. As you may recall, Nakia's mother, who performed domestic work until her second marriage, was adamant that Nakia educate herself, so that Nakia would not have to become a domestic worker like her mother. As she indicated, the messages she received from her family were that she should strive to be self-reliant and independent of other people. And her mother, who had lived a denigrated life under the influence of White males in power, had been her primary role model. Therefore, Nakia's socialization by the time she started college in 1957 would have been framed by the perspective that White Americans oppressed Black Americans, and men dominated women. And she knew that she did not want that for her life.

A different social climate and family atmosphere, on the other hand, influenced Annette. Naturally, there were still systemic rules that governed the lives of Black people because she grew up under Jim Crow, but her family was able to maneuver more freely than Nakia's family because of their community relationships. With regard to gender roles, Annette reported that her mother and grandmother took care of the home, and her father and grandfather were the wage earners. This was her gender role socialization, which explains her saying that she was a traditional female-oriented woman in her relationship with her husband. And while the women in her family were social activists and community leaders outside the home, within the family unit they would have taken the lead from the men in the family.

These narratives indicate that both Nakia and Annette matured into women like their primary role models, which is consistent with female development. Ladner (1971) contended that "conceptions of emerging womanhood are transmitted from generation to generation...[And while there may be a] variety of role models for these girls to choose from,

they were still restricted, more or less, to emulating and following certain patterns of their mothers and other women in their immediate environment” (p. 120).

### **Professional Career Path**

Iman was the only woman in the study who became a faculty member through the normal progression of academic preparation. Each of the other women except Juanita, who had worked in her academic discipline for a time, had held positions that were academically related, but not within higher education. And while all of the women took different paths to their respective colleges and universities, a common thread ran through each of their narratives. As I analyzed the data, I was taken aback at how specific dimensions of their personal identities (i.e., high self-esteem, self-confidence, race pride) constructed in childhood were so much a part of their adulthood. For example, throughout Annette’s public school education, she served as the representative model of the Black to the White community. In her professional experiences, there were many times that she was the only minority in the work setting, thus again she served as the model African American person. And her self-esteem was very high in childhood because of the validation she received from her family, as well as her scholastic and leadership abilities. The same level of confidence is evident in the narratives of her pre-academic employment experiences. Below the women describe the paths they took to their current academic positions.

Considering Nakia’s family background, it is not surprising that she selected a service-type profession that would allow her to assist people. It is obvious that her past has influenced her and that she has developed a deep sensitivity to marginalized groups in society.

I had been a social worker for a rehabilitation center that had people labeled as

“mentally ill.” I say labeled because I don’t like labels. But I had that job for a while, and it was okay until it got too difficult to do. So I started doing workshops in the community on women and diversity issues. A woman from the college attended one of my community workshops and she asked me to do a workshop for the displaced homemaker program. I did, and then when an advisor position opened up in the program, I asked if I could fill the job, and was hired. I later transferred to another campus in a director position, and did that for awhile. Then this position opened up; I applied and got it. So I brought a lot of experience to my current role. I’ve been here now for 11 years.

Annette, the designated African American role model, continued her established pattern of representing the Black race in the various positions she held before becoming an academician. It appears the lessons she learned in her family regarding interacting with people of diverse cultures and ethnicities have proven to be one of her greatest strengths.

I taught in segregated schools back in my hometown. Then in the 1970s, the district began to desegregate the schools. They started with the instructional side of the school, and I was picked to integrate a White school, which was probably one of the most economically privileged schools in the district. We were all excited, and I wasn’t frightened because we were told that they had selected the best teachers in the district to integrate these schools. Now, I know that I am an excellent teacher, but I had mixed feelings because we had also been told that the system would select the best of Black culture and move us around to use us as an example. I also had reservation with leaving because I felt I should stay on and do more for our Black students who needed someone to be there for them. When I moved into that desegregated school, my life sort of took on a different direction. It’s like, I never moved back into the total Black setting again. Though I went on to teach at a Black college. But that comment has bothered me and probably has guided what I have done in my work with minority students.

After I got my doctorate degree, I became the first African American female to work in the Department of Education in a certificated position. So I represented every African American in the whole world to these people. After I had been there for 15 months, I applied for three administrative positions that became available. They offered me the lowest level position, but that was all right, because I became the first African American to have an administrative position with the Department of Education in the State. I broke ground in the workplace with regard to African Americans in decision-making roles. Years later another African American female came to head up the second highest position at the top. After that I went to the university. But it’s interesting, when I was in the seventh grade, I received my first new textbook, and there was a reference to the university in it. I went home and told my mother, one day in the future I am going to be Dr. Annette Jones Ross at that university. I have been in my current position for approximately 13 years.



Throughout Juanita's childhood, her mother was insistent that she was to become a lawyer, which turned out to be a self-fulfilling prophecy. Despite the roadblocks put in her way by her high school counselor, who discouraged her from taking college preparatory classes, Juanita completed her undergraduate education, and went on to complete a three-year law degree program in two years.

After I graduated from law school, I got a job at the company where my husband was employed, as a law clerk. I wasn't sure if I wanted to work there at all, so I just took the clerk position to kind of see if there was any kind of law that I wanted to practice. I found that I liked doing litigation work, so I did that for 5 years. Then my husband and I moved back here. When we came back, I could not get a job with the university, so I did consulting work for about seven to eight years for a number of out-of-state companies and law firms. They would fly me in and out, and that was fine.

Terah indicated in an earlier narrative that she always knew that she would be a health care professional. She, too, fulfilled her dreams. And the spirit of determination that was birthed in her as result of the rejection she experienced in childhood continued to propel her over the obstacles that arose to keep her from reaching her goal.

I actually worked for a regional hospital for five years after I graduated from college. I was the supervisor on weekends when the regular supervisors were off, and I was also one of the clinical instructors. I really liked the teaching part of my job; I enjoyed working with the students. So I decided to start looking for a position here at the college. The first position I applied for at the college, I didn't get it. I was told that I needed more experience, so I waited a couple of years and built up my skills, and tried again. But, I didn't get that position either. I didn't even get an interview. The third time I applied, I got an interview, and I got the job. I started working at the university about nine years ago.

In summary, as shown by the preceding narratives, there are many paths that African American women take to faculty and administrator positions in higher education. Academic preparation is certainly a key ingredient to goal attainment. However, the experiences of the women also indicate that persistence, determination, and a willingness to be the lone

minority in a majority environment are also necessary for some African American women who seek professional success.

In the final section of this chapter, I will present narratives that relate to the academic experiences of the women in this study.

### **Academic Experiences of African American Women**

The academic experiences of the women in this study are central to understanding if or how race, class, or gender influences their academic roles. So, naturally, this was a significant theme that emerged during data analysis across all of the narratives of the women at some point or another. Several sub-themes emerged that comprise the core theme – the role of race in hiring and types of appointment, supervision conflicts, gender politics, classroom politics, promotion and tenure review, and strategies women use to manage stress in the academy. As you read what follows, keep in mind that two institutional types are being discussed here. Nakia and Terah are employed at a two-year comprehensive community college, and Annette, Juanita, and Iman are employed by large Research I universities.

#### **The role of race in hiring and types of appointment**

Race played a role in Annette and Iman being hired for their current positions. My discussion within this sub-theme will focus on their feelings about being token Blacks and targeted hires, split academic appointments of Black women on White campuses, and the tenure trap for Black women with split appointments and dual roles.

**Token Blacks and targeted hires.** I asked Annette if she knew at the beginning of her employment that she was a targeted hire, and she indicated that she did not. She did not understand the implications of her employment status at her institution until much later. The

words capitalized are used to capture the emphasis Annette placed on certain words when she described her understanding of her employment status at her university.

I really was not aware that there were hidden agendas when I first went to my institution. I had a true love for my university, and I thought they meant me well. But I truly believe they took advantage of me. I HAD TO BE AN AFRICAN AMERICAN. I HAD TO BE AN ETHNIC MINORITY. I WAS A FEDERAL DOCUMENTATION, AND ONCE I SATISFIED THAT, I JUST BECAME A QUOTA FOR THEM. I don't want to give you the impression that my institution doesn't appreciate and utilize ethnic minorities because they have been good to me and for me. But, I think my minority status was misused as well as abused.

Annette is hurt and disappointed that the institution she had longed to work at since she was in the seventh grade allowed race to be the primary factor in her employment. She thought that she had been hired because of her qualifications, not because she filled a minority quota. Throughout Annette's life, she has been recognized for her personal, scholastic, and professional abilities. She said, "When I graduated from college, I was hot stuff, everybody wanted me." The self-esteem she developed as a child is still very high, and she is self-confident in her abilities. Therefore, it must have been very disheartening for Annette to learn that race relations in the United States had tarnished her professional relationship with the university she loved. Annette's hiring experience is consistent with other Black women who were hired by predominantly White colleges and universities to satisfy affirmative action mandates (Moses, 1997). And Black women were often considered the ultimate hire because they satisfied the institution's need to hire members of targeted minority populations, and their race and gender fulfilled the requirements for two categories. Unfortunately many African American women who were hired through affirmative action mandates were "tokens Blacks" in their institutions and did not gain full acceptance and participation rights similar to members of the broader White academy community (Fleming,

et al., 1978; Washington & Harvey, 1989).

Iman, unlike Annette, knew during the interview process that she was being hired because of her minority status.

I started at my institution fall 1993. The first year I was a temporary person, and fall 1994, I became a tenure track assistant professor. I knew that I'd been hired as a diversity appointment to expand the number of minorities in the department. As a result, I didn't go through the whole interview process. The reason they said was, "we know your record, and we need you to diversify the department."

I asked Iman if anyone had come right out in the open and said this to her, or was it simply implied. She looked at me with an incredible expression on her face, and said, "Yes they did. And it's hard because I know the department needs to be more diverse but it's like, can we use some tact here."

The administrators of Iman's department were correct in their assessment of her ability to succeed as a faculty member. She told me, "I knew I was qualified to be a faculty member regardless to how I may have been hired."

All along, the evidence has suggested that Iman is more than capable of managing the responsibilities of an academic role. As far back as high school, she described herself as "a serious intellectual." However, by the administrators superseding the normal hiring procedures to bring her into the department, the message is sent to the broader community that her intellectual contribution is secondary to her racial identity, which is sometimes the perception White faculty have of faculty of color in White institutions (Anderson & Sullivan, 1997; Collins, 1998; Fleming, et al., 1978). Turner et al. (1999) contended that White colleagues of faculty of color often "expect them to be less qualified or less likely to make significant contributions in research" (p. 31) because of the hiring procedures used to bring them into the institution (i.e., their departments).

As a result of Iman being a targeted hire to satisfy the department's diversity requirements, no consideration was given to the cultural perspective or intellectual thought that Iman would bring to her new academic department. She said:

While they technically expanded to have me in the department, I don't think there was a lot of consideration given for my personality. Nor do I think that there is a lot of expansion given for viewpoints that fall outside of the majority – the majority being White male in their early 50s. I'm glad to have been hired because I think it makes a difference for the students in the department. But the fact that I am the first non-White hire in my department since its existence says a lot about the department. And they don't seem to be aware of the implications of having been all White and mainly male.

Iman was hired for the purpose of filling a minority presence in the department.

Therefore to the White male group in power she was a token Black woman, and as such, Iman was considered a "silent partner" in the department. The White males who inevitably would have had to approve her faculty appointment are the same men who would silence her if she attempted to interfere in how they planned to run the academic unit. As a token hire, Iman was expected to go along with the status quo.

Iman's employment at the university placed her in a paradoxical position. On the one hand, it is a significant accomplishment to be employed by a major Research I institution. People outside of the university would have no idea that she was a targeted hire; therefore she would be recognized and respected by peers and colleagues outside of the institution as an up-and-coming tenure-track assistant professor. The paradox is two-fold: one, because Iman was a targeted hire, she may be viewed negatively by her department peers who would undoubtedly know how she was brought into the department. Moses (1997) contended that because of the special hiring considerations some African American women receive (i.e., affirmative action), they are generally "stereotyped, resented, [and] even treated with

disrespect because they are perceived as less qualified” (p. 25) than their White colleagues. Two, how Iman is perceived and subsequently regarded by her White department colleagues could be significant to her professional and personal identity.

If you recall, Iman felt alienated and isolated in high school because she was unable to establish peer relations with the White students in high school. Earlier in the chapter when she discussed her college experience she said, “I was still very serious in college,” which can be interpreted to mean that she still had a very limited peer group, if any, during her college experience. If the lack of a connection to a peer group continues in her professional life, as it has in the personal, the isolation and alienation she experienced will be exacerbated. Thus, Iman will continue to retreat into herself, as she has in times past, which would not be healthy for her psychologically.

Split academic appointments and dual roles of African American women. When I first started meeting with Annette I noticed that she sometimes appeared to be rushed and in a hurry. There were times during our interviews that she would have to leave the room for a moment, and others times when I felt as though we were racing against the clock. I finally asked her what was going on and why it appeared that she was often very busy. What follows is my interpretation of how she expressed the roles that some African American women play at predominantly White colleges and universities.

It’s very overwhelming because my time is split in three pieces. I’m 50% in one place teaching, 40% in an administrative role working with college-bound minority students and their parents, and 10% on another special project. And it’s tough because I have activities and assignments for all three of them. I also do research and that keeps me very busy; so you see, that’s a full load. The good part about it is, part of my research comes from those areas, too.

First, I believe the institution is taking advantage of Annette’s minority status. Rather

than spread the responsibilities for minority students across a broad number of people, including White faculty and administrators, the minority students have been channeled to the lone minority faculty member. Additionally, a number of the minority students Annette worked with were first-generation college students. This meant that the level of assistance Annette would have had to provide to the students and their parents would have been substantial because of their limited knowledge of entrance requirements. Second, the split appointment and dual roles that Annette is expected to perform negatively affected her in the tenure process.

Because of Annette's concentration on the service activity, she failed to meet the requirements needed for promotion and tenure.

I think doing so much service cost me negatively in my academic professional career when it came time for promotion. I'm not tenured. My main area of deficiency, and I shouldn't say the word deficiency, but I deal with reality, was published research. It's been interesting because when I first arrived on campus, I felt as if I was the university's private documentation for minorities. I was on every committee, council, whatever, you name it. So the service component of my professional life far exceeded the other components. Teaching is my first and only love, and those two areas were first and research was secondary. But when it was time for my review, the research component became primary. So that's what got me. I was very disappointed because the university used me in the service area, but when I needed the university, they university didn't come through for me. I felt like I should have been tenured, because a person can't do everything, and the kinds of things I was doing, I should have been granted it, but the university said, "No." I will resubmit my portfolio again in the fall because I've done what was suggested.

Annette was in a catch-22. The institution needed the high level of service she provided.

When I first started at my institution, I was probably on every committee, and I attended every meeting. I was just everywhere. Many times I was the only Black person on the committees and a lot of times the only Black at the activities. I became a pioneer, sort of like an ethnic pioneer.

But they also expected her to maintain the same level of research and writing as her majority colleagues who probably did not provide the same level of assistance she provided to ethnic

minority students on campus. Her indicating that she was involved in a lot of committee work and service activities is consistent with reports by other researchers who have noted that African American women at predominantly White institutions are often encouraged to participate in a number of campus-wide service-type activities (Turner et al., 1999). The high visibility would have been beneficial to Annette's academic career at the institution in terms of her developing professional contacts. But high visibility often leads to high levels of stress, as well as burnout and low levels of research productivity, which is precisely what happened to Annette.

In conclusion, it is ironic that in times past, Annette's and Iman's racial ethnicity would have been the very thing that kept them out of the academy; now it is the very reason both of these women were hired in their respective institutions (Fleming et al., 1978). I believe that deep-rooted bigotry resulting from race relations in the United States, particularly as it relates to the participation of Black women in education, is evident in these narratives. And historical uses of race and sex discrimination against Black women, although now more subtle, are still being used when it is to the advantage and/or gain of the dominant White male culture (McKay, 1997). In this instance, the gain would be having a Black female presence in their various academic departments.

### **Supervision Conflicts**

Nakia is responsible for the student service division at her community college. Her position often brings her into contact with the general public and people from the predominantly White community where the college is located. In her academic role she supervises a professional staff, as well as clerical support personnel. The sub-categories that will be used to discuss Nakia's experiences are: Black administrators/White employees, how



social class influences role supervision, and lack of supervisory support.

Black administrators/White employees

Nakia described an incident she encountered in a meeting with a community person and members of her staff. The purpose of the meeting was to make preparation for an upcoming community-college event. (Note: The bold is used to capture the emphasis placed on certain words:

A discrepancy arose with two **White** women about the level of authority I had in my role as director. During the meetings, any suggestions I would make, they always had something better to suggest. And I had been trying to accommodate them because I wanted the community person to have a good impression of the college.

At this point, it appeared that the women joined forces to create an antagonistic meeting environment.

It got to the point that the two of them started meeting outside before our meetings, then they'd come into the meeting and they would fight against me. In one meeting one of the women starting yelling at me, as if I was somebody she could give orders to. So I looked at her, and said, "Please lower your voice." I said, "We can discuss this without all of this," and she said, "**WELL WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?**" And I said to her, "**MY TITLE SAYS DIRECTOR.**" I've forgotten the exact issue that we were discussing, but you could see from her face that she was **VERY, VERY ANGRY**. And it was just because I was resisting what they wanted to do.

Nakia's experience with the two women described in this narrative clearly bespeaks issues rooted in race and class privilege. The women were at odds with her because she is a Black woman, and had more authority to operate than they did. In addition to that, she would not concede her authority and become silent in the meetings to allow them to have their way in planning the event. While the literature is steadily growing regarding issues confronting African American and other women of color at predominantly White institutions, rarely does it address the issue of race relations between Black and White women in the academy (Amott & Matthaei, 1996; McKay, 1997; Mulqueen, 1992). Normally the perception is given that

woman come in the academy, feminist women that is, for the sake of eradicating sexism in all of our lives. But Nakia's narrative indicates that there is reason for concern about how women of different ethnicities relate to each other in the workplace. Her narrative also dispels the myth of there being a presumed "sisterhood" out there that brings all women together, because it does not exist when race or class privilege is a factor (Davis, 1983; hooks, 1984). With regard to the latter, hooks (1984) noted, "We are taught that our relationships with one another diminish rather than enrich our experiences. We are taught that women are "natural" enemies, that solidarity will never exist between us because we cannot, should not, and do not bond with one another" (p. 43).

#### How social class influences role supervision

Nakia's narrative also emphasizes how social class plays a role in shaping the relationship between Black and White women. The White woman thinking by virtue of her skin color that it was permissible for her to speak to Nakia in that tone of voice, is rooted in the history of how White women treated Black women during slavery (Bennett, 1993; hooks, 1981). And her specific words, "Who do you think you are?" meant, "I am a White woman, and therefore automatically you as an African American woman are beneath me in status; therefore, you should do as I say." Under the fallacy of the true cult of womanhood, some White women were idealized as being better than other women (hooks, 1981; Lerner, 1981). And the fact that there were other people in the room when she displayed this unprofessional behavior is also consistent with history. White Americans' ill-treatment of Black women, and Black people in general, was never a private affair; it was often very public, because it heightened their desired sense of power and control (Collins, 1990; Davis, 1983; Wilson & Russell, 1996).

### Lack of supervisory support

I asked Nakia how the incident was resolved, and she said:

The two women went to the dean and told him that I was being antagonistic and resistant, so we had a meeting with him. **AND HE JUST SAT THERE WHILE THEY YELLED AT ME. HE JUST SAT THERE!** And I said, “Now wait a minute, this is supposed to be an institution where professionals are, and I consider myself to be a professional. I do not like people raising their voices at me, and if we can’t discuss this in a civil way, then I won’t participate in the meeting.” And the dean said, **“WELL THAT’S YOUR JOB!”** So I picked up my things and left, because I will not lower myself to yell the way they were yelling, or put myself on that level. The dean later called me in and said, “Well, I don’t think that was very good of you to walk out like that.” And I said, “I don’t think it was very good for you to have sat there and allowed those two women to yell at me.” In the end, the dean wanted to turn the event we had been planning over to someone else, and the campus provost said, “No, you can’t do that because it is under her jurisdiction.”

If any of the White participants in this incident were asked to interpret what had transpired in these meetings, they probably would not attribute it to race. It would undoubtedly be attributed to Nakia’s assertive behavior, and not the fact that she is a Black woman with positional authority resisting the plans and ideas of White women. A reason for this is that a number of White Americans have lived their lives for so long from the advantage point of their skin color privileging them that they often fail to consider race as a motivating factor of their actions; especially in a country that has systematically and historically discriminated against Black people (Frankenberg, 1993; hooks, 1981).

Another point of interest is the calm demeanor Nakia maintains in the face of these difficult confrontations. And she does not appear to take it personally. It is as though acts of racism have become commonplace in her life, and she has built up a wall of resistance to keep the offenses from entering into her personal psychic. If you recall, as far back as undergraduate school when she had the encounter with the resident hall director when checking into the dorm, she did not lose her cool, per se.

## **Gender Politics**

Iman is a tenure-track assistant professor in a virtually all-male department. She indicated that there are two other women who have close associations with the unit, but the predominant faculty are White males. Her relationship with her department colleagues is distant and she does not feel as though she has any department allies. Nakia, on the other hand, is an administrator who in her position interacts with a number of male colleagues who dominate the working environment. She, too, feels as though she does not have many allies and that her race and gender distance her from the men in the institution. The sub-categories in this section will focus on: feelings on being an African American female administrator with White male colleagues, relationship with male colleagues, schmoozing games, and why Blacks resist game-playing.

### **Feelings on being an African American female administrator with White male colleagues**

Nakia believed that race and gender affect how her White male colleagues perceive her ability as a female administrator.

I don't feel like the White males in the department respect me as female decision-maker. But I think that it's more than just me being a female, I think it's also that I'm a Black female decision-maker. It's like they think you have to be inferior to them. It's not like you can be on the same par [or] the same level, no matter if you both are at the same grade level. That's been my experience.

Nakia's narrative indicates that the perception held by White men of African American women and sexism have converged and impacted the type of work relations she has had with her White male colleagues. The White males viewing her as a deficient decision-maker because of her race and gender is not unusual; a number of administrative women have reported having similar experiences with White male colleagues in the academy (Kawewe, 1997; Moses, 1997).

### Relationship with males colleagues

Iman is having difficulty adjusting to the male-dominated culture in the department. She described the department relationship dynamics:

There is not a whole lot of collegiality in the department. We basically just get together at faculty meetings. We don't have a common space outside of our offices where people come together to talk, like the microwave [oven area], or places where people take coffee breaks and just hang out for a few minutes and talk. It is all very privatized; you have to go into someone's office to talk. I think it's about power, and it's also about people having agendas. I've had students to come into my office and say, "Oh, I just want to talk" but that is not common among faculty members.

The underlying issue here could be the way in which women and men experience their professional identities. Women are relational and operate in connection with other people. Men, on the other hand, are more individualistic and competitive in nature. Therefore, their need to form collegiate relationships may not be the same as it is for women in the workplace (Josselson, 1996). But an additional layer for Iman could be, that as an African American women faculty in a majority environment, the need to establish professional relationships in the department may be compounded because of the limited opportunities in the broader community. But because of the gender make-up of the department, Iman may not be able to establish these connections, which could mean that she will experience isolation in her department (McKay, 1997).

Schmoozing games. Iman believed that the expectation of senior-level faculty regarding graduate students and young professors was that they should esteem them. While she indicated that she respects their contribution to the discipline, Iman did not believe that she should have to play suck-up games to get ahead in the department.

Some people schmooze a lot, and I'm not a schmoozer. There's another young woman I know who volunteered with her mentor's kids' softball team. I like kids, but I'm not going to hang around a senior-level professor's kids to get close to them.

I also think my experience in the department would be different if I played the cupie doll role, or if I sucked-up to people. My mind won't even allow me to go there. That's not how I want to be seen. I'd like to have friends in my department, but I'm not going to do any of that stuff to be someone's friend.

Throughout Iman's narratives, we have seen that it is characteristic of her to view herself as a serious intellectual. Playing a demure female role for the sake of getting along with her male colleagues would contradict who Iman is within the construct of her identity. It would almost be as though she were a traitor to herself.

Why Black women resist game-playing. I thought it was interesting that Iman indicated that her mind would not allow her to entertain the possibility of playing gender games to get ahead in the department, and I asked her to elaborate.

I think the legacy of what it means to be Black in America makes it difficult to play suck-up games with White Americans. I know people in my family who have done it for the sake of their children, to keep a job. It's like a sacrifice you make for something explicit, but inside you still have your pride. I feel like I need to maintain my self-respect because that is the one thing that keeps me going. I just can't see myself doing the baby-sitting or things like that [for my White senior-level colleagues]. And there are some things that echo so strongly within me that say, I will not play the Mammy role, or I will not play the Jezebel role to get ahead. I know what [some White] people think about Black women, and I will not allow myself to feed into their stereotypical images.

This narrative illustrates how race, class, and gender constructions have impacted the relationships of African and White Americans in higher education. Regardless of what the implication may be for not participating in the department's gender politics, Iman will not take part in perpetuating negative cultural images that have been created to devalue Black womanhood. The Jezebel and Mammy images were created to de-value Black women (hooks, 1981). The former represented a Black woman who was implied to be unable to control her sexual appetite. And the latter was designed to represent a Black woman who cared more for the needs of White families she worked for than she did her own. The latter

also represented a supposedly asexual woman who nobody, particularly White men, wanted to couple with. Both images were created during slavery, and Black women have been trying to live above them in every sphere of our lives since (Collins, 1990; Mama, 1995; Lerner, 1981; Vaz, 1995). In terms of playing gender politics in the academy, it may be easier for some White women to play these types of gender games and still retain their self-respect, partially because the labels and images that were attached to their personification were much less denigrating than those for Black women (hooks, 1981).

For Iman, the primary issues are of self-valuation and self-respect. What you think of yourself is what will be portrayed to others, and it subsequently gives them license to treat you accordingly. The image Iman has of herself is that of a serious scholar, and that is how she desires to be perceived by her male colleagues. Furthermore, Iman indicated that she is conscious of what she does because, above all, she needs to maintain her self-respect. She indicated that it is the one thing that keeps her going. Collins (1990) indicated that in a society that regularly disrespects women, and Black women particularly, it would behoove all women to value and respect ourselves, and demand respect from others, men in particular. Iman believed that her academic contribution should be enough to earn the recognition of her colleagues in the department. Therefore, she chooses not to de-value herself in order to esteem anyone else.

### **Classroom Politics**

Annette, Terah, and Iman are the only women in the study who come into regular contact with students in the classroom. Annette and Iman are assistant tenure-track professors at Research I universities, and Terah is an instructor at a comprehensive community college. Terah indicated that her experiences with students have been very positive and rather non-

descript. She said, “ because of the intensity of the nursing program, students don’t have time to get bogged down with issues related to me being a Black instructor. There just isn’t time for that kind of stuff.” Of the remaining two women, Iman has had the most notable experiences, probably because of her age being close to that of some of the students in her classes. The sub-categories in this section are: experiences of being a young Black female professor in a White classroom environment, feelings on being a Black professor in a White classroom environment, and thoughts on student reactions to teaching multiculturalism in the classroom.

Experiences of being a young Black female professor in a White classroom environment

Iman discussed an experience she had with a White male student in one of her classes.

The student appears to resent the fact that she is Black female in a position of authority over him.

I found myself being challenged a couple times and it doesn’t matter how diverse or homogenous the class is. I remember one student in particular, a White male. I think he didn’t like women [because] so much of his stuff was ragging on women. Actually it was kind of scary because some of the things he said were way out there and degrading. And I think he felt freer to be more lippier and aggressive saying really what was on his mind because I was a young Black woman.

Iman’s feelings regarding the male student in the classroom are shared by other women faculty in higher education. Bernice Sandler (1993) in Women Faculty at Work in the Classroom, or, Why It Stills Hurts To Be a Woman in Labor found that female faculty have experiences in the classroom with students that male faculty would never encounter. She found the experiences of the two faculty groups to be so diverse that, working in conjunction with Roberta M. Hall, she coined the term “chilly climate” to describe the overall negative experiences that some women have in academe. Sandler contended that male students in



particular had difficulty with female professors because of the “anomaly of a woman having public authority. [And] the more male-dominated the discipline, the worse the problem is” (p. 5). Iman’s problem is probably accentuated because she is a Black professor who is even more an anomaly at a predominantly White institution.

Feelings on being a Black professor in a White classroom environment

Iman indicated that she is very conscious of herself as an African American faculty member on a predominantly White college campus in the classroom.

The race thing is always there. So, I have to be very careful of not jumping to conclusions about what students may think about me in my mind. Because there is a part of me that says, well, I guess this is what happens in a university that is whatever percent White. So, I try to hold off a bit because otherwise I would go into a fit, [and say] “Oh no, I’m stuck in this class with all of these conservative White kids.” But I realize that that is also a part of the job that I do here, too.

What Iman is saying is that she wrestles with trying to remain fair and consistent in her attitude toward the White students who sometimes challenge her right and authority as a professor, simply because she is Black. She recognizes that it is a part of her responsibility as an educator to engage students in viewing perspectives outside of what is comfortable and normal for them. And in some cases, that challenge is just her being at the head of the class.

Annette indicated she tries to bring race-related issues into the open to provide students with an opportunity to allow her to assist them in answering some of the questions they may have about African American people.

I tell my classes that I know that some of them may not want to be in the class because I’m Black, and I let them know up front that I know that. But I say to them, this is your opportunity to pursue a number of things. So while you’re in this class, you can throw anything at me professionally, and I will deal with it and professionally toss it back to you.

Annette’s approach is more direct than Iman’s in dealing with issues related to race, class,

or gender. However, Annette is a more seasoned professional than Iman, and has developed confidence in her teaching role.

Both of these narratives indicate the need for a diverse campus community. Not only does having faculty of color in predominantly White institutions benefit them, but it also enriches the lives of majority students as well. Generally, majority college students are from majority social environments. College may be the first time any of them have an opportunity to encounter African Americans in face-to-face dialogue. By Annette creating a classroom environment where students may raise issues and concerns, some of the prevailing myths and stereotypes will undoubtedly be destroyed.

#### Thoughts on student reactions to multicultural teaching in the classroom

Iman indicated that she tries to infuse race, class, and gender issues into her classroom lectures and homework assignments, often to the dismay of some of her White students in class.

I try to be conscious of race and class, and maybe gender when I write my lectures because I think students need to be exposed to a wide variety of thoughts. But I am aware of White students who really resented having to read Black consciousness material. When we specifically dealt with topics of race, all the White students were going, "Why do I have to read about it." Some of them would be sitting in class going, "Hey what's going on?" Others would be sitting there going, "Oh, my god, she's talking about race." But I've been trying to move them in the direction to think about what race is, and how people use race, and what my views are on what race is.

Iman is attempting to guide students in becoming critical thinkers. By having students deconstruct race and other socially designed constructs that are used in society to separate and divide ethnic cultures, students will be learning how to evaluate their beliefs, which is also a part of the educative process in college.

In conclusion, the classroom experiences of the African American women have indicated

that they make a significant contribution to the intellectual life of the academic community. The chief purposes of education are to help students develop cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills needed to be successful in life beyond the college environment. An academic community that is void of representative members of all groups in society will hinder the students' growth and development, because knowledge is socially constructed in the histories of people whose lives have created it. Without input from different groups in society the knowledge transmitted to students will undoubtedly be one-sided.

### **Promotion and Tenure Review**

Annette and Terah were the only women in the study in tenure-track positions. Annette's experiences were emphasized in a previous section; below I discuss Terah's tenure review process. The sub-categories that will be discussed are: annual promotion and tenure review, and departmental support for untenured junior faculty.

#### **Annual promotion and tenure review**

At our third interview session, I noticed that Iman looked slightly upset, so I asked her if there was something wrong. She indicated that she had just had her yearly review.

I just finished my review and it was very stressful. My teaching is considered fine, but I'm not getting the academic publishing done. I'm supposed to get a book published. That means I'll have to go further underground and just come up to teach my class, and may do a couple of other things. And I really feel angry that there are not more Black faculty because if there were, not just at the assistant professor level, but people with tenure, then if somebody like me wanted to just sit in their lab and work, they could.

Iman is upset because she feels that if she distances herself from the students in the department, there will be no other faculty of color available to assist them. This is a concern that has been stressed by other women of color in predominantly White institutions (Burgess, 1997). They feel a real or imagined sense of responsibility to the minority students at

predominantly White colleges and universities. Moses (1997) indicated that African American women find it difficult to balance their competing obligations. She stated that because Black women tend to engage in more teaching and counseling of minority students on White college campuses than their White counterparts, they sometimes do less research and write fewer publications than their White counterparts as well, which hurts them in the long run. Iman is frustrated because, having been a minority student on a majority campus, she realizes that minority students need to connect with minority faculty members. She indicated that she knew that she would have to make some decisions in the near future if she intends to remain in her current position.

One thing that I was told during my yearly review was that I should cut back on the service. Cut it out completely. And I have mixed feelings about the recommendation to stop the service activities completely. Obviously they [White Americans in the department] don't feel that service to minority students is a necessary component of my faculty role. But, I think that the service is an important component of my appointment. And unless there is a final push [from the department administration] I'm not going to stop it. I am aware that I am making a choice here, and I don't intend to let my service activity cause me to fail. And I know the greater implication here is that I must decide whether or not I want tenure at all, because if I quit, I'm going to be taking myself out of academia.

#### Departmental support for untenured junior faculty

I asked Iman if anyone in the department had offered any assistance in helping her succeed in achieving promotion and tenure. She indicated that they had said, "If you ever need anything, we're here for you." Iman indicated that when they said that, "It sounded weird, almost quasi-romantic." She interpreted these comments to mean, "Now leave me alone, because I've said the right thing [to you]." In other words, Iman believed that the person conducting her review was saying what was politically correct to say, but actually meant, "You're on your own." The lack of assistance (i.e., sponsorship) with which Iman is provided by the

White senior-level males in her department is consistent with the experiences of other African American tenure-track assistant professors. Burgess (1997) contended that sponsorship is crucial to untenured junior faculty because senior faculty assist them in locating and securing research funding, developing research proposals, and introducing them to members of the old boys network, all of which are important for successful movement through the tenure process.

### **Strategies Women Use to Manage Stress in the Academy**

By our fourth interview, it was obvious that most of the women had endured a significant amount of stress working at their respective institutions. Iman was seeing a doctor, and Annette appeared frustrated and disappointed in her institution. I asked the women to discuss how they managed the obvious strain that being in a White institution was having on them. The sub-categories in the section include: religion, counseling, and exercise.

#### **Religion**

Nakia indicated that her faith was the primary reason she was able to encounter the various forms of discrimination in the academy and not internalize the incidents or become bitter.

You have to find ways to survive all the stuff you encounter in these types of institutions. Basically, something that helps you get up every morning and come to work, something that gets you through the day without allowing all of the environmental stuff to upset you. For me, it's been my faith. I'm very involved in my religion, and it is what keeps me going. I think it has to be something outside of the institution that you can hold onto that keeps you, because if you don't, the racism and sexism, all the other stuff you encounter here will drain you.

Nakia indicated that she tries to see the good in people.

I know this may sound altruistic or even Pollyannaish, but I don't want to see racism and sexism and all that in people. I want to, as we say in church, go beyond their outer exterior and the good in people. So that is what I look for. But 9 times out of 10, what I find is what I don't want to see.

### Counseling

Iman indicated that she was not managing the stress of the environment very well and had sought professional assistance.

I have not been managing things very well, and I ended up going to see a psychologist, because all of it was driving me crazy. I was carrying around so much stuff in my head. I found it very difficult to separate the classroom/environment from me being an African American women in a White setting. It lead me to internalizing a lot of stuff which caused me a great difficulty in writing. I've started working out, trying to do more physical stuff. And I've also stopped using my home as another work site. Surprisingly that has helped a lot, even if it means that I have to go into the office on weekends. I don't have work waiting for me on the kitchen table when I get home. That's a little thing, but it's important. And I've also come to the understanding that my work is not the sum total of who I am.

### Exercise

Terah indicated that she worked out on her lunch hour to relieve the stress, or had lunch with her husband.

As an African American in a White setting, you're always on guard. I can never really let my hair down, or just relax that way I would like to. It's like you're always a little tense. And I know it would be different if I were in another type of setting because there would be that common understanding about things. Here you worry about what you say, and what you do, because someone is always judging you. So, it's kind of stressful. I generally work out on my lunch hour, so that helps.

The women in these narratives have selected a variety of methods to relieve the stress they acquire from working in predominantly White institutions. As indicated in Iman's and Terah's narratives, some of the stress may be self-inflicted. Terah not being able to relax could be a result of the climate for Blacks at her institution, but it could also be a result of her insecurity in relationships. And Iman could be dealing with issues that began long before she entered the academy as a result of her growing-up experiences in her predominantly White community. Nevertheless, the combination of social and historical events create stressful working environments for some African American women in White institutional settings.

## **Conclusion**

In this section of the chapter, we examined the professional identities of the women in the study, and we now have a general understanding of the paths the women took to arrive at their respective institutions.

What have we learned from examining the narratives of the women at this point in the study? Foremost, we learned that Nakia, Annette, Juanita, Terah, and Iman are brave women. They exposed intimate details and painful experiences of their past to provide us with an opportunity to examine how African American women develop their personal and professional identities within a racialized society that is notorious for discrimination against women in general, and Black women more specifically.

In terms of their professional identities, we learned that many of the women in the study attended college for some of the same reasons that many of the pioneer African American women attended almost 100 years before them. Some of these women attended college because getting a college education provided an alternative to becoming a domestic worker. It was a means to assist in uplifting the Black race, and it offered a chance at having a piece of the American dream that everyone purported education to offer. But attending college was also a risk for the women in this study, because it meant that they would have to leave the safe enclave of their families and venture out into a harsh world that was not ready to accept their racial and ethnic identities. Thus they experienced racism and sexism without the shield of their parents and other loved ones to protect them. But just as the pioneer women survived, they did, too.

We learned that by the time African American females leave their families they have been conditioned to anticipate acts of racism and other forms of discrimination from White

Americans. But we also learned that Black females have various coping skills that allow them to manage racism and other acts of discrimination without these experiences eating away at the very core of them. We learned that out of necessity and desire African American women combine marriage and careers. And that gender roles that are considered “traditional” or “normal” do not always apply to African American women because of the impact that race relations in the United States have had on the Black family. We learned that African American females follow the same types of professional career paths as everyone else; they seek professions that align with their personal identities. And unfortunately, we learned that the African American women in this study have had unpleasant academic experiences similar to those that other Black women have reported in earlier studies.

### **Conclusion of Chapter**

In conclusion, the women in this study are educated women by every definition and standard created by the forefathers of institutions of higher education in America (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997). And they would also be considered by every definition of the word successful. But even after having obtained some of the highest academic credentials that are bestowed upon individuals by the higher education system in the United States; Nakia, Annette, Juanita, Terah, and Iman are still not beyond the grasp of various forms of discrimination that continue to permeate the infrastructures of many White institutions in this country (Etter-Lewis, 1993).



**CHAPTER SIX**  
**SUMMARY, EMERGING THEORY, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**  
**FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

In this chapter, I will provide a general overview of the study including a brief synopsis of each chapter; summarize the grounded theory through the discussion of significant themes that emerged from analysis and coding across each of the participants' lives; answer the specific research questions that guided the study using the women's narrative text; and finally, discuss the implications of the findings for African American women in higher education and for future research.

**Overview of the Study**

As discussed in Chapter One, the purpose of this study was to investigate the academic experiences of the African American women faculty and administrators who participated in this research. I was particularly interested in examining their experiences within the context of race, class, and gender because extant literature suggested that these constructs shape the academic roles of African American and other women of color in higher education (Collins, 1998; Miller & Vaughn, 1997; Thompson & Dey, 1998; Turner, et al., 1999). However, I was more interested in gaining a perspective that represented their lives as opposed to using theoretical orientations that might have nothing to do with the women in this study. To accomplish that end, I used the grounded theory approach in qualitative research, because this method allowed me to generate theory derived from the data that "fit" the women's actual experiences (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

I believe the results of the study are significant because they contribute to the limited body

of knowledge available on African American women in predominantly White institutions using a grounded theory approach.

Chapter Two introduced selected literature to provide a framework to contextualize historical and social influences that have shaped the experiences of African American women in society in general, and in higher education more specifically. The literature suggested that race relations in the United States adversely affect the academic experiences of African American women more significantly than they do White women, White and Black men, and other men of color. Furthermore, evidence suggested that the experiences of African American women are shaped primarily by issues related to race and gender. However, we would be remiss to believe that social class is not as salient as race and gender, because social class status was the mechanism used in the cult of true womanhood to separate and isolate White, Black, and immigrant women when the persona of womanhood was being shaped and class divisions were being instituted in society (Giddings, 1984; Hines, 1993; Lerner, 1981).

Extant literature was also reviewed that described theoretical and conceptual models that expand our understanding of influences that affect racial identity development (Cross, 1991) and female identity development (Josselson, 1987, 1996). The assumption was that who these women are within the various dimensions of their personal identities will ultimately influence how they experience their professional academic roles.

In Chapter Three, I discussed the research methodology used to structure the study and facilitate the emergence of grounded theory. I outlined how the women were selected for participation and provided details on the interview protocol; I also offered an explanation of how grounded theory is validated. The chapter closed with a discussion of the limitations of

applying the results of the study to other African American women in other predominantly White institutions.

Chapter Four introduced the five women who participated in the study across four common categories, which established the foundation for further explorations presented in Chapter Five. Two of the women were employed by a comprehensive community college, and the remaining three were employed by Research I institutions. The participants' ages spanned the decades between 30 and 60. It was assumed that the diversity in ages would provide a rich description of how some women interpret their identities at various stages in their lives. For example, I guided the discussion using selected narratives to provide the reader with background information on how Nakia and Annette, the oldest women in the study, felt about growing up during segregation and Jim Crow; and Iman, the youngest woman in the study, shared how growing up in a predominantly White environment without a significant peer group connection affected her psychologically. And all the women emphasized the significance of their families in helping them develop their ethnic and cultural identities in the midst of a larger racialized society.

In Chapter Five, I continued to present the women's narratives through analysis and interpretation of the core category (i.e., identity) and accompanying sub-categories that emerged from examining the interview transcripts across all participants.

Personal identity was the category used to conceptualize the women's developmental experiences. It was comprised of three related sub-categories: family's influence on identity development, the mother/daughter relationship, and public school education experiences. Professional identity was used to conceptualize the women's career experiences. It included five related sub-categories: undergraduate college, transition from undergraduate college to

work, combining marriage and career aspirations, professional career path, and experiences in the academy. The two categories, along with accompanying sub-categories, represented the differences and commonalities in the women's lives that were salient to our understanding of their current academic roles within the context of race, class, and gender. Throughout the discussion, I interjected extant literature from Chapter Two to deepen our understanding of the specific topical area being presented. Now, I turn your attention to a discussion of the grounded theory that emerged during data analysis.

### **Emerging Theory: Interpretations of a Woman's Life**

Through data analysis and coding, several categories emerged that described the core category of identity. When combined, these categories defined the core category as the contextual influences that constructed the identities of the African American women in this study. Strauss and Corbin (1990) defined core category as "the central phenomenon around which all the other categories are integrated" (p. 116).

Research has indicated that an individual's identity is the consolidation of many dimensions that operate independently and collectively to distinguish her or him from other individuals in society (Chickering & Havighurst, 1981; Josselson, 1996). And while it sometimes appears that individuals or groups share the same dimensions of identity, it is only because identity is shaped within cultural and historical contexts that affect each individual or group in society (Josselson, 1996). For the African American women in this study, the dimensions of identity that seemed to influence their development most were: (1) the family unit; (2) mothers; (3) the public school education system; (4) undergraduate college education; (5) race and social class relations in the United States; (6) active search for identity; (7) self-definition; and (8) societal contexts.

I should also mention that the dimensions of identity identified here will not represent each woman in this study. Strauss and Corbin (1990) contended that “occasionally one comes across a prototypical case, one that fits the pattern exactly. However, usually there isn’t a perfect fit. One tries to place cases in the most appropriate context, using criteria of best rather than exact fit” (p. 139). The categories are described below, and where appropriate, narrative text is used to illustrate the women’s understanding of how these influences contributed to the construction of their individual identities.

### **Family**

All of the women in the study recognized the significant role their families (i.e., parents, siblings, and extended family members) had played in shaping their identities. Regardless of whether they felt that all of their experiences in their parents’ homes had been positive, each of them attributed her family with assisting her in developing values, morals, resiliency, pride in ethnic heritage, and a sense of self-worth. They also credited their parents with helping them understand what being African American meant within the larger context of society. Nakia said, “My parents told me that it would not always be easy for me as a Black woman, but that there were still opportunities that awaited me, if I worked hard.”

Terah was the only woman in the group whose relationship with her parents had affected her adversely. She indicated the relationships she had with her natural father and stepfather and mother growing up had resulted in her being insecure in relationships in her adult life. “I know my insecurity came from my relationships with my parents. I don’t know why my stepfather acted like he did toward me, but I’m sure it has had an impact on me. And I believe if I would have had a different type of relationship with my real father, I would be more open than I am today.” Annette, on the hand, who felt loved and treasured by her

family, developed a strong sense of self-confidence and self-esteem. Annette indicated, “It didn’t matter that we were poor, I knew that they loved me, and I loved each one of them dearly.” These examples suggest that families have a significant impact on how women develop self-esteem and self-confidence as children. They also indicate that females who lack a strong attachment to their parents as children may be insecure in relationships as adults.

### **Mothers**

The mother/daughter relationship was particularly significant to the older women in the study who had grown up during segregation and experienced other overt forms of discrimination against Black people. Both Nakia and Annette gave credit to their mothers for instilling in them a strong sense of self-worth. Their mothers represented a contradictory view to the negative images that were being promulgated through mass media, especially television, about Black womanhood. The women also indicated that their mothers had instilled in them the need to assist in building up the Black community, as well as assisting people who were less fortunate. Nakia indicated that her mother had also taught her an invaluable lesson about hate. “For all that my mother had gone through, she still didn’t hate people for how they had treated her. She told me when I was young, “It takes more energy to hate than it does to let the offense go, because hate eats away at your heart.”” Nakia indicated that she never forgot those words of advice, and had used them many times over the years, and had passed them on to her children. This finding suggests that even though people encounter various forms of discrimination, they have the ability to choose how to manage it.

A difficult period in Juanita’s life occurred when she learned that her presumed light-

skinned Black mother was actually White. As she began a conscious search for identity, she sometimes acted resentful toward her mother, who was blamed for not telling Juanita that she was White. "My mother knew how I felt, but she did not allow that to become an issue with us. On the rare occasions that it came up, it was generally me who pressed the issue. I really appreciate her for allowing me the space that I needed to grow." This finding suggests that the role of a White mother in helping her bi-racial daughter develop ethnic identity may not be a pleasant experience for either of them. But because of the mother's love and desire to assist her daughter in developing into a well-adjusted young woman, the mother is sometimes willing to undergo personal stress to see that her daughter's developmental needs are accomplished.

The narratives indicate that the mothers of the women in this study were the women's primary female role models. Annette said, "My mother and grandmother were strong Black women, and I wanted to be just like them as I got older." Nakia indicated, "I had a deep respect for my mother because I recognized that she took a lot of stuff off of people for the sake of providing for me and my brother." Juanita said, "One thing that my mother always said was, that it was important to be honest. And that if someone asked you to do something and you did not want to do it, that it was important not to make up an excuse to try to get out of it, but to tell the person that you simply could not do it. That was important to her."

The narratives also indicate that the women in the study whose mothers did not work outside of the home still perceived their mothers' contribution to the family to be just as significant as the mothers of the women in the study who did work outside of the home. The mothers of Annette, Juanita, and Terah did not have traditional work-for-pay employment outside of their homes. Yet they were active in other ways that the women in the study

deemed important to the family, as well as the larger communities where they lived. All of the women's mothers, regardless of the form of work they performed, encouraged their daughters to pursue employment opportunities that would provide them with financial freedom and security as adult women. This finding was significant because it contradicts research that indicated daughters of stay-at-home mothers would more than likely become stay-at-home mothers as well (Almquist & Angrist, 1971).

### **Public Education School System**

All of the women in the study excelled academically throughout their educational experience, and received various scholarships and merit awards to attend college. Each of the women credited her parents and other family members with assisting her in realizing her secondary educational goals. This finding could suggest that African American children who grow up in family units that value education and place high expectations on scholastic achievement will do as well as White children who have similar family support, assuming they are able to overcome racial impediments within the public school system itself.

Furthermore, Nakia, Juanita and Iman attended White schools throughout their educational experiences. Of the three women, Iman had the most difficult experience in school because she was unable to establish peer relations with the White students in her school. As a result, she felt very socially isolated and alone throughout junior and senior high school. Contrary to popular belief by members of the Black community, this finding suggests that not all African American children who grow up and attend school in predominantly White environments assimilate into the dominant culture simply because of their close associations. Some African American children in White environments experience isolation and alienation because race relations in the larger society prevent the establishment



of cross-cultural relationships, as was the case with Iman.

The overall experiences of the women in the White public school systems suggest that some African American females may not receive adequate counseling regarding college attendance and career planning. Nakia and Juanita's experiences, particularly with the White male guidance counselors who attempted to discourage them from attending college, indicate that gender and race may impact how Black females are assisted in developing their professional identities.

Juanita's elementary school experiences indicate that even when public schools are desegregated, students themselves sometimes maintain a segregated racial environment. Juanita said, "We didn't play with White kids at school. They played on their side of the playground and we played on ours. So, there was not a whole lot of interaction between the two groups." This finding suggests that by the time Black and White American children enter the public school system they have already been indoctrinated with racial dogma at home, and have been influenced by the larger society to perpetuate separate social spheres.

Finally, while the family unit primarily influences who children will become as socialized adults, the public school system is also a significant contributor to the students' development. For the women in this study who attended White public schools, there was a conflict and confusion with the cultural values they were taught at home and the ideologies school agents (i.e., primarily teachers) advanced. Juanita indicated she constantly challenged the White school teachers who presented material that depicted African American people as less favorable human beings than their White counterparts. Juanita, who is biracial and grew up in a predominantly White environment, learned a significant amount of her information regarding Black people through reading Black literature, but she was also in touch with her

father's side of the family who provided another site of contradiction to the material presented by the White public school teachers. This finding suggests that some African American children who attend White public school systems may experience frustration and/or confusion because of the conflicting cultural and social messages they receive from their family and school agents, but it does not necessarily indicate that Black children will readily accept the messages presented in school as being more valid than what they have learned from their parents.

### **Undergraduate College Experience**

The undergraduate experience was the time when most of the woman made the permanent break away from the influence of their parents. Terah was conscious that the separation was occurring in her life and indicated, "my undergraduate experience allowed me to test my own wings and become independent of my parents. No one was around, so I had to make decisions for myself; it was great." Iman, who was more connected to her parents than Terah, particularly because of her limited peer relations in her predominantly White high school, still remained close to her parents during her college experience and sought their advice in making college-related decisions. Iman said:

I wasn't by myself in making the decision about college majors. I talked to my parents quite a bit. My mother indicated that I should pursue whatever it was that made me happy. Her philosophy was that you should get a degree, but the degree does not necessary determine the course of your life. My father on the other hand, who is an engineer, thought that I would make a good scientist, and was mildly upset when I decided to leave the field of science.

These examples suggest that the level of parental involvement in college may be predicated on the relationship that exists between the parent and child prior to college enrollment.

When there is a strong attachment it may continue during college, and perhaps delay the

separation from parents that normally occurs for young adults in the United States during the college experience. And when the close attachment is not present, as in the case with Terah, college students may begin the separation from parents much sooner.

College exposed the women to a larger scale of race and sex discrimination than they had been accustomed to before, but it also introduced them to people of diverse cultures and ethnicities and the challenge of intellectual reasoning.

Each of the women, except Iman, met her husband while in college. Iman did not develop an intimate relationship; academics was her primary focus. Iman said, "I was really bookish and really serious [in college]. I did a five-year undergraduate program then went directly to graduate school and got my Ph.D. Getting the master's degree was kind of just in the process." For Iman particularly, attending a predominantly White college may not have been in her best interest socially as well as psychologically. Having grown up in a predominantly White environment in virtual isolation because of racial relations in her community specifically, and society in general, it appears a more diverse college community, or even a historically Black institution may have assisted her in developing a more gregarious personality. However, this is not to imply that attending the types of institutions I have suggested here would not have created additional kinds of adjustment concerns for Iman. In particular, a predominantly Black college environment could have very easily been perceived similarly to a White environment by an African American who is not accustomed to being in a Black setting. This finding may suggest that some African American children who grow up in an "all" environment of any type may have social adjustment concerns in the environment, as well as outside of the environment if they choose to leave it.

### **Race and Social Class Relations in the United States**

All of the women in the study were acutely aware that race and social class relations in the United States, particularly between Black and White Americans, had influenced how their identities were shaped. Many of the women indicated that there was not a time when they were growing up that they felt especially comfortable in the presence of White Americans because they knew what White people thought of them as Black people. Nakia indicated that, "It is difficult to be free as a person when you are always under the spotlight and judged because of the color of your skin." Nakia said, "You have to mentally prepare yourself to be in their [White Americans'] presence, and I hated living like that. Now I don't care what they think about me, but as a kid it was draining." Annette indicated that although she had more interactions with White Americans growing up than most of the African American children in her school and neighborhood, she was not deceived as to the nature of those relationships. She said, "My first experience interacting with a White person was probably in elementary school because I was one of the Black children who would be asked to participate in their programs. But the thing is, even though I was there, I knew that we were still segregated." Annette indicated that, "You [as an African American person] just knew your place and you didn't get out of your place." These examples reveal the level of mental stress that African American children must endure simply by living and growing up in a majority dominated society. They suggest that Black children must consciously and constantly negotiate their developmental movements within a society that, for the most part, have already judged and categorized them as inferior.

In terms of the influence of social class on the women's development, all of the women recognized the strong influence that social class status had in shaping their personal identities

as African American females growing up and living in a White male-dominated society.

Annette indicated that having to sit in the balcony of the movie theater when she was growing up was primarily based upon race relations, but it could not be discussed separate from social class status because that was a large part of it, too. Iman said:

One of the things I've developed in coming into my own is a kind of class analysis. I think economic class is really important, and growing up in a rural predominantly White town in the Midwest without a lot of money was rough. But, I also think living in the Midwest provided me with a good understanding of how social class divisions structure the lives of people. So, I'm not really impressed by all the talk about the Midwest having the best schools, or that it is this, or that it is that, because I know that there is murder happening there, there are serious class inequities, and severe economic problems that aren't being dealt with, that people on the outside really don't know about it.

### **Active Search for Identity**

All of the women in one way or another confronted the issue of identity. For Juanita and Iman, the search was conscious and aggressive. These two women grew up in predominantly White environments that offered very little diversity. Both of them indicated that they read books and other literature to gain a sense of what being Black meant. Iman said, "I did a lot of reading about other Black people who grew up in places where there was a limited number of Black people. It helped me understand that some of what I was feeling was real, and that I wasn't imagining things." For Juanita, another level was added because of her mother being White. For Nakia, Annette, and Terah, the process of understanding who they were conformed to the normal process that most late adolescent youth encounter forming their unique identities. Because these women either lived in predominantly Black communities, or interacted regularly with Black Americans, their search was not as conscious as those of Juanita and Iman. This finding suggests that the images and models within the social environment where children grow up play a significant role in assisting female African

American women to develop their identities.

### **Self-definition**

The women in the study could have very easily conceded to the construction of Black womanhood that they received daily from vehicles of popular culture, but they did not. They had very strong opinions regarding not allowing external forces to define who they were, and how they should live their lives. Nakia indicated, “I never worried about what someone else thought about me. It matters more to me, what I thought about me. I have tried to live my life in such a way that when I look at myself in the mirror, I feel okay with me.” Terah indicated that “people will always have something to say, so it is best that you not listen, and live your life according to your convictions.”

For Nakia, that included what other African Americans thought about her as a light-skinned woman. She said, “There is this false thinking that light-skinned Blacks have more advantages than dark-skinned Blacks. And I know that some Blacks think that Whites are more comfortable around light-skinned African Americans, but I have not found this to be true. I certainly have not had any career advantages because of my complexion. In fact, being light-skinned has created disadvantages within our culture. I have seen some people project roles on me, with respect to the type of person I should be because I am light-skinned. People have sometimes inferred that I think that I am better than them because I am light-skinned, so it has not been an advantage.”

### **Societal Contexts**

The women in the study recognized that society in general has a significant influence on how identity is shaped because it is within the domain of society that individual identities are acted out. And growing up within a racist and sexist society meant that some people were

accorded certain liberties and freedoms because of their race, sex, and class, while others are not. Furthermore, the women also recognized that members of the White society were largely responsible for creating gender role expectations for people in general. But they understood that those roles were not indicative of the roles that African American women played within the various spheres of their lives. This finding suggests that while White Americans attempt to impose a set of norms and practices upon all members of society, some groups in society have their own set of norms and practices. As a result, there is no one set of norms to which everyone subscribes.

### **Research Question Findings**

In this section of the chapter, I answer the specific research questions that guided this study. The questions were rather straightforward. I wanted to know if the issues and concerns of African American women in predominantly White institutions, to which I had been introduced through literature during my graduate coursework, were really applicable to a broad range of women in a variety of White institutional settings. To explore this phenomenon, the following four research questions were developed to guide this investigation:

- Does race play a role in shaping the academic experiences of the African American women in this study?
- Does social class status play a role in shaping the academic experiences of the African American women in this study?
- Does gender play a role in shaping the academic experiences of the African American women in this study?
- Do race, social class status, and gender operate independently in the lives of the African

American women in this study, or is there an interaction that exerts influence over their academic roles?

The women's narratives and extant literature from Chapter Two will be used to answer these research questions.

### **How Race Shapes the Academic Experiences of the African American Women in this Study**

Metaphorically, race appears to be the environmental setting, the background canvas per se, that the academic experiences of the African American women in this study were etched upon. If it is true, as Josselson (1996) posited, that the construction of identity cannot be understood separate from the historical and social contexts in which it is construed, then it stands to reason that the experiences of the African American women in their respective predominantly White institutions would have to be shaped and influenced by race relations in the United States; primarily because institutions of higher education are microcosms of the larger society, made up of members of the dominant majority and minority groups.

Historically, members of the dominant majority were opposed to having African American people in general, and females more specifically, as members of the academy. The narratives revealed that some White Americans in higher education continue to create opposition that prevented the African American women faculty and administrators in the study from engaging freely in all areas of the academy. The academic experiences of the women in the study indicated that race is the most salient factor that shapes every experience that the women in this study had.

Furthermore, in this study, personal and professional identities were separated out as two distinct categories, because to discuss a large multi-dimensional construct such as identity is



often difficult, and inserting an organizational structure adds clarity to the discussion. But in reality, the personal is the professional because people do not separate themselves into distinct categories when they enter the workplace. Therefore, certain characteristics of an individual's identity may come to the forefront more than other characteristics. But the underlying scope of their identity, inclusive of prevailing ideologies and beliefs, is still present and intact, and available for use within any contextual situation; racism does not escape anyone in the academy.

### **How Social Class Shapes the Academic Experiences of the African American Women in this Study**

The influence of social class in the lives of the women in the study was not as easily discernible as race; nevertheless it was present and contributed to how their academic experiences were shaped. In using the metaphor of race as the environmental setting on which the experiences of the women were etched, social class status would be the subtle hues that color the experiences the women had.

Some of the women felt that social class issues occurred in their academic roles in two very distinct ways. First, it was evident in the perceptions held by their White colleagues or people they interacted with in performing their academic roles. In this instance, the women felt that their colleagues treated them as though they were less qualified and/or inferior to their White male and female counterparts simply because they were African American. This finding was consistent with numerous reports from other African American women in similar settings (Etter-Lewis, 1993; Kawewe, 1997; Thompson & Dey, 1998).

Second, some of the women struggled with being members of the new middle class, having left their respective Black communities for employment and lifestyles perceived

widely to be indicative of middle-class White Americans. Here they dealt with psychological issues, which could explain why some of them remained in predominantly White institutions at the risk of great mental stress. Annette indicated:

I got a lot of flak from members of my family, members of the extended family, and even friends because I did not go back home after I finished college. And it has been a hard thing to deal with. There were those who said, "You should have come back [to the Black community] because you were sent to prepare yourself to come back and help the others." But, there were also those who said, "We knew that because of the different kinds of experiences you were going to have, that you would not come back."

Annette indicated that these issues precipitated the level of service that she had provided to African American and other minority students at her institution.

This has been a motivation for my work with minority students. Don't misunderstand me, I love all students. But because I relate so to African Americans, I want to make certain that they know they have someone at the university they can relate to. Primarily my work on campus has involved issues regarding civil rights, diversity, and multiculturalism because I've always felt I went to college to get a degree to go back home, and I didn't go back. So, it makes me feel like I really am giving back to the African American community.

These findings suggest that some African American women at predominantly White colleges and universities may experience stress in performing their academic roles because of social class issues rooted in their separation from the Black community.

### **How Gender Shapes the Academic Experiences of the African American Women in this Study**

Because of the long history of various forms of discrimination in America against African American women particularly, it is virtually impossible to conceive that traces of deep-rooted sexist ideologies do not permeate institutions of higher education. Continuing the metaphor, African American women in predominantly White institutions are often viewed as charcoal caricatures incapable of making a serious contribution – inaudible, voiceless, silent. The

perceptions held by the women in this study indicated that White males in authority discounted their service contributions to minority students, took advantage of their minority status when it was convenient, and viewed them as less competent than other members in the academy. In Research I institutions, promotion and tenure are based upon research, writing, and service. For African American women in White institutions, service is a large component of their activities. Yet, it is held against them when they are reviewed for promotion (Moses, 1997). In other instances, the women were hired by their institutions because they satisfied diversity hiring needs in the department, not because of the intellectual contribution that they would make to the university (Turner et al., 1999). By being Black and female, the women in the study represented a two-for-one hire for their academic departments and administrative units. As such, the women were not recognized by White male power-brokers as having a credible role in the department, and in some cases were seen as voiceless participants (Collins, 1990). These findings suggest that the roles played by some African Americans in higher education are only figurative.

#### **How Race, Class, and Gender Intersect and Influence the Academic Roles of African American Women in this Study**

The experiences of the African American women in this study have indicated that race, class, and gender sometimes operated independently, and at other times, collectively, to shape and influence the academic experiences of the women in the study. Of the three constructs, race and gender were most paramount in shaping their experiences. How social class operated was the least noticeable and prevalent of the trilogy, but we would be remiss to believe that it, too, did not have some influence in shaping their experiences, particularly when one considers the relationship that many Black and White Americans have had over the

years in other social and institutional settings.

The manifestation of how the constructs operated was largely dependent upon the circumstance or particular situation. For example, Annette and Iman being hired in their academic departments to fulfill diversity requirements was clearly predicated on race, and perhaps gender as well. And then race and gender intersected to influence the experiences that Iman and Nakia had with their respective White male colleagues. Some of the experiences that Iman had with the White males in her department can be attributed to how she was hired, but gender differences were also the salient reason that she was unable to establish peer relations with the male group. On the other hand, Nakia's decision-making ability was questioned because her White male colleagues did not perceive her, as a Black female, as being as competent and capable as they were in making decisions at the institution.

### **Discussion and Implications**

This research was undertaken in an effort to understand if or how the constructs of race, social class status, and gender influenced the academic experiences of the African American women in this study. A critical step toward that understanding was the examination of life events that shaped the women's personal identities, which subsequently influenced their academic roles. At the onset, identity was not the focus of this study. However, it became obvious during data collection and analysis that who these women were within the context of their identities was salient to our understanding of the influence of race, class, and gender on their academic roles; especially given the historical roles these social constructs have played in shaping the lives of people of African descent in the United States. Jones (1997) contended that "a need exists for research on the multiple dimensions of identity

development among women and how women experience their own identities” (p. 376). By exploring identity within the context of the women in this study, we gained a clearer understanding of events that may explain why some African American women have successful experiences, and others less favorable in predominantly White institutions. The implications of the study include the following:

### **Research**

- As discussed earlier in the study, there is a dearth of empirical research currently available regarding the experiences of African American female students, faculty, and staff in higher education. This research raised the awareness of influences that affect identity development in the African American women faculty and administrators who participated in the study. However, additional research is needed in the area of identity development because who we are within the constructs of our personal identities before we enter the academy will largely determine how we manage our academic roles and the experiences we encounter. Ideally, future studies would approach the examination of identity development in academic women from a grounded theory perspective to build upon this research, as well as to develop theoretical and conceptual frameworks that fit more closely to the actual experiences of African American women in higher education.
- African American women faculty and administrators at selected Research I universities and comprehensive community colleges were the focus of this study. It would be helpful if additional research were conducted with women employed at historically Black and private institutions to determine if the experiences are similar for women across institutional types. For example, at historically Black institutions do women just encounter sexism, or does racism also shape the experiences of some African American women, particularly when

consideration is given to the differences that are made in the Black community with regard to people of varying degrees of skin tone? Equally important in studying African American women at historically Black institutions would be how social class affects the women's experiences, particularly when consideration is given to how some African Americans who have achieved middle-class status (i.e., senior-level administrators and faculty) perceive other African Americans in the academy.

- The narratives of the African American women in this study indicated that they perceived that their White colleagues considered them as less creditable than themselves because of how they were hired by their academic departments. However, the voices of White faculty and administrators have not been heard. It would be helpful in future research if interviews were conducted with selected White colleagues of African American women faculty and administrators to understand precisely what their concerns are regarding their Black female counterparts.
- For faculty in higher education, promotion and tenure are the lifeblood of the academy. Women in this study had serious concerns and experienced considerable stress as a result of the tenure process and the expectations placed upon them by their academic departments. Naturally, because of its significance, achieving tenure is generally a stressful event in anyone's academic career. However, additional layers of stress may be added to the experiences of African American women in predominantly White institutions because of issues related to race, class, and gender. To more fully understand the process that tenure-track African American faculty undergo, additional research is needed to examine how they matriculate and manage the tenure process. Special emphasis could be placed upon the women's pre- and post-tenure experiences. This would be helpful because it may reveal

impediments created by both the women and the institution during this often-stressful experience.

### **Predominantly White Institutions**

- African American women at predominantly White colleges and universities often participate in high-volume campus-wide service activities. Therefore, universities may need to reconsider the criteria used to evaluate African American women during the promotion and tenure review. The service component should be considered a significant contribution to the institution, particularly if there is a lack of critical mass of African American faculty at the institution.
- The narratives of the women in this study indicated that their respective predominantly White institutions relied heavily upon the services of Black faculty and administrators in assisting minority students in adapting to their campus environment. It would appear that more emphasis should be placed upon involving White faculty and administrators in mentoring minority students. Generally, when minority students attend predominantly White institutions they are from minority-specific environments. Hence the social nuances they may need to succeed in the world beyond college may be supplemented best from their engagement with White professionals. This recommendation does not negate the significant contribution professionals of color at White institutions make to minority students; rather it suggests that both groups are equally needed to prepare the future leaders of society.
- There is often considerable discussion regarding the need to create more inclusive campus communities. Inclusive means that everyone is welcomed in the academy and differences are anticipated and embraced. However, the narratives of the women in this study indicated that they did not feel as though a “free” space was made available in the academy to allow for

their individual personalities. They felt as though they were expected to fit into an already carved space that was designed primarily to house a male member of the majority group. To assist African American women in becoming full participants in their academic departments and the community in general, department chairs and senior-level administrators may need to develop support programs for faculty of color. Support could be structured in the form of department and college-wide mentors, professional development opportunities, and community support groups to help the women in establishing professional as well as personal peer relations.

- Administrators of predominantly White institutions must increase the number of African American women faculty and administrators at these institutions. Increased numbers will not only allow faculty who are more inclined toward research and writing to produce scholarship necessary for promotion and tenure, but it will also allow faculty inclined more toward teaching to have that freedom as well.

#### **Recommendations for African American Women in Predominantly White Institutions of Higher Education**

- African American women must have a clearer understanding of how they will be measured for promotion and tenure before they engage in significant levels of service activity that, while needed, will generally not result in their being promoted or tenured. If the information is not readily forthcoming, it should be requested early in the employment process.
- African American women will need to develop strong survival skills if they are to remain psychologically and physically healthy as members of predominantly White institutions. The women in this study used various forms of therapy to manage the stress that was associated with their being Black women in White institutions. Ultimately, the method used is



immaterial; rather having a plan in place is more important because the narratives indicated that it was easy for some of the women to become consumed by the events that transpired and the expectations involved in fulfilling their academic roles. For single women in particular, there is a significant risk of allowing the professional identity to supersede all aspects of their personal identity, primarily because there may be no one who will continuously draw their attention away from the academy. Therefore, it may be crucial to establish personal relationships with members outside of the academy who provide needed reality checks.

- African American women must have realistic expectations about employment at predominantly White institutions. The women's narratives in this study, as well as other narratives from extant literature, have indicated that in some instances Black women will need to work harder than their White counterparts to prove themselves as viable and competent professors and administrators in White institutions. If they know this prior to employment, then the impact of some of the experiences will be minimized because they will be anticipated events.
- Some African American women will need to be more aggressive than others in seeking support networks in their universities. If support is not available in the immediate department or division, it may be necessary to look for other individuals throughout the academy community who will assist them in meeting their personal and professional needs. This may mean that some African American women will need to be more open to establishing relationships with individuals outside of the Black community.
- Because some predominantly White institutions are comprised of people in society who may have unfavorable perceptions and stereotypical images of African American women, it is

important that Black women in these institutions have a strong sense of their self-worth and ability because validation may not be forthcoming in the academy.

- African American women should make a practice of keeping a log and/or tenure file over the course of their employment documenting service requested by members of the academic community to be presented as a component of their professional activities in their tenure portfolio.
- Women in general may not be inclined or accustomed to publicizing their accomplishments. African American women in particular may feel uncomfortable because they perceive publicizing their talents, skills, and academic accomplishments as being boastful and arrogant. But a method is needed wherein publications and achievements are shared with the academic community because it will dispel the perception that Black women are incapable of producing creditable scholarship.

### **Conclusion**

At the very beginning of this thesis, I wrote, “the journey to traditionally White institutions of higher education for women, African American women in particular, and minority women in general, has been long and arduous.” To me, this was an eye-catching statement used as the opening line in the research proposal that I had submitted to my dissertation committee, who had the authority to veto or approve my request to conduct this study. When I wrote the statement, I had some knowledge of the experiences of African American women in higher education because I had engaged with literature over the course of my graduate program. But my depth of understanding was nowhere near the knowledge I have acquired since undertaking this study. I now have first-hand information to support that

opening line with research I conducted myself.

I had indicated that I would use the research experience as an opportunity for reflexivity and self-examination regarding some of the events that had occurred in my own life and academic career as I investigated the experiences of the women in the study. In doing that I presented portions of my biography across the four categories that were used to introduce the women in the study. I wanted my standpoint to be visible so that readers would have an opportunity to draw more informed conclusions to what I was presenting through the women's narratives in the study.

It was a pleasure interacting with all of the women who participated in this study. But this research was a very difficult undertaking for all of us involved. As I reflect upon the findings of the study that unfortunately supported extant literature, I am saddened and embarrassed that today, as an intellectual community, we are still wrestling with many of the same issues that were paramount in higher education many years ago. At the writing of this thesis, as a society of people, we are less than 120 days away from the new millennium. And at this point in history, people of African descent are more than 130 years beyond the January 1, 1863 signing of the Emancipation Proclamation. But today, in one of the most powerful and industrialized nations on the face of the earth, Black and White Americans are still contending with racial issues in the United States. But I have hope and am encouraged that the advances that have been made in times past will continue to propel us forward as a society of people and a community of scholars. I close this study with a quote I found in a compilation of speeches made by the late Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. (King, 1984). Dr. King's words eloquently expressed my feelings after having conducted this research, "There

is little hope for us until we become tough-minded enough to break loose from the shackles of prejudice, half-truths, and downright ignorance” (p. 30).

**APPENDIX A. HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL FORM**

Last name of Principal Investigator Holmes

**Checklist for Attachments and Time Schedule**

The following are attached (please check):

- 12.  Letter or written statement to subjects indicating clearly:
  - a) the purpose of the research
  - b) the use of any identifier codes (names, #'s), how they will be used, and when they will be removed (see item 17)
  - c) an estimate of time needed for participation in the research
  - d) if applicable, the location of the research activity
  - e) how you will ensure confidentiality
  - f) in a longitudinal study, when and how you will contact subjects later
  - g) that participation is voluntary; nonparticipation will not affect evaluations of the subject
- 13.  Signed consent form (if applicable)
- 14.  Letter of approval for research from cooperating organizations or institutions (if applicable)
- 15.  Data-gathering instruments

16. Anticipated dates for contact with subjects:

First contact

Fall, 1997

Month/Day/Year

Last contact

Spring, 1999

Month/Day/Year

17. If applicable: anticipated date that identifiers will be removed from completed survey instruments and/or audio or visual tapes will be erased:

Month/Day/Year

18. Signature of Departmental Executive Officer

Date

Department or Administrative Unit

*JL H Elbe*

1/28/98

ELPS

19. Decision of the University Human Subjects Review Committee:

Project approved

Project not approved

No action required

Patricia M. Keith

Name of Committee Chairperson

10-2-98

Date

*PMKeith*

Signature of Committee Chairperson

**APPENDIX B. INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

DATE

NAME  
TITLE  
INSTITUTION  
ADDRESS  
CITY, STATE, ZIP CODE

Dear XXX:

I am conducting a study on the experiences of African American women faculty and administrators currently employed at two- and four-year predominantly White institutions in the Midwest region of the United States. A colleague who thought you might be a good candidate to participate in the study gave your name to me.

My primary goal as the researcher is to understand your academic experiences from your perspective as opposed to what I may or may not perceive your experiences to be. I envision our relationship to be one of collaboration and mutual exchange. It is my hope that our one-on-one interaction will provide the necessary freedom to allow you to discuss your experiences within a safe and confidential environment.

Participants in the study will be anonymous and pseudonyms will be used when describing your academic experiences to maintain confidentiality. As the principal researcher I will be responsible for deleting names and any other identifying characteristic that may inform readers of your true identity.

If at any date within six months from the time of your participation in the study you would like to cancel the agreement and receive your taped interview data back, your written request will be acknowledged. After the initial six-month period, all interview data will be considered the property of the principal researcher and subsequent claims by the respondent will be forfeited.

It is anticipated that the data for this study will be collected between August 1997 and January 1999. The first interview should last approximately 90 minutes and there will be three subsequent interviews of 60 minutes each. A fifth interview will be tentatively scheduled and arranged only in the event additional information and/or clarifications are necessary. In any case, I do not anticipate that you will suffer any personal discomfort or risks as a result of participating in the study.

Your involvement in this study would be greatly appreciated. The primary benefit to you includes helping predominantly White institutions achieve a greater understanding of issues confronting African American women faculty and administrators today.



If you would like additional information, please do not hesitate to contact at Monday through Friday between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. at (515) 294-9631 or after 6:00 p.m. at (515) 296-7318.

Otherwise, your signature below is acknowledgement that you have consented to participate in this study.

Sincerely,

Signature of Research Participant

Date

Sharon L. Holmes, Ph.D. Candidate and Principal Researcher  
Educational Leadership & Policy Studies  
Iowa State University

Date

**APPENDIX C. INTERVIEW GUIDE**

## Interview Guide

### I. Background Information

#### A. Family history (or primary caregiver's)

- a. how would you describe your family upbringing?
- b. what family traditions are most memorable to you?
- c. tell me about your grandparents?
- d. did you grow up within an extended family-type setting?
- e. were your grandparents sharecroppers?
- f. what kind of values did you learn from your family?
- g. what is your birthday?

#### B. Birthplace

- a. when and where were you born?
- b. is this where your family were born and raised?
- c. are you an only child

#### C. Educational background

- a. where did you attend college?
- b. what are some of your most memorable experiences?
- c. was this your first experience away from home?
- d. what was the setting like for blacks?
- e. what is the educational background of your parents? siblings?
- f. was it expected that you would attend college?

### II. Attitudes Toward Work

#### A. How did you get your first job?

- a. what did the work entail?
- b. how old were you?
- c. did you expect to keep it for a long time?

#### B. Who was the greatest influence on you with regard to developing a work ethic?

- a. did your mother work outside the home?
- b. did you grow up thinking that you would work outside the home?
- c. did you mother or grandmother work outside the home?

### III. Academic Career

#### A. Tell me about your current position

- a. what is your job title
- b. how long have you been in this position?
- c. did you seek out this opportunity?
- d. had you developed a career path to lead you to this position?
- e. where does your position fit within the department or organization chart?
- f. what is your level of responsibility?
  1. do you supervisor others?
  2. does the university support your positional authority?

#### B. Tell me about your socialization process

- a. were you provided an academic mentor?
  1. is your mentor male or female?
  2. what type of relationship do you have with your academic mentor?
- b. how did you learn the expectations of you in this current position?
  1. describe your relationship with your academic colleagues
  2. describe your relationship with your chair or your supervisor

#### C. Describe how you feel about your presence at the institution

- a. describe an event or occasion that signaled to you that your presence was valued by the institutions
- b. describe an event or occasion that signaled to you that your presence was not valued by the institution
- c. describe what you like most about your job?
- d. describe what you like least about your job

#### D. Describe your minority status at the institution

- a. are you the only African American female in your department or division?
  1. are there other minority in your areas?
  2. how do you feel about the minority status of your institution?
  3. describe your feelings about the minority representation at your institution

### IV. Intersection of Personal and Professional Life

#### A. How does your husband/significant other/family feel about your career goals?

1. does he/she/family support what you are doing?
2. does what you are doing impact your children lives

- B. Describe an instance in which your professional and personal lives converged, or complemented each other especially well
  - a. what do you attribute this to?
- C. Describe an instance in which they diverged or didn't fit well together?
  - a. do you ever experience conflict between your values and the expectations of the position?
- D. Have you ever made personal sacrifices or accommodations in order to achieve/fulfill professional goals? Give example(s)
- E. Have you ever made professional sacrifices or accommodations in order to achieve/fulfill personal goals? Give example(s)

**APPENDIX D. DATA CATEGORIES AND SUB-CATEGORIES**

**Dimensions of Personal Identity****Family's Influence on Identity Development**

Family's influence on developing self-esteem

The family transmits resiliency of Black heritage to next generation

Effects of negative parent-child relationship

**The Mother/daughter Relationship**

Valuing differences

The importance of self-definition

Strength of Black womanhood

Outsider/within: Confiscated knowledge of White Americans

Othermothers: Positive images of Black womanhood

Making comparisons

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**Transitioning from Undergraduate College to Work****Combining Marriage and Career Aspirations****Professional career path****Academic Experiences of African American Women**

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- Split academic appointments and dual roles of African American women
- Supervisor Conflicts
  - Black administrators/White employees
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  - Departmental support for untenured junior faculty
- Strategies Women Use to Manage Stress in the Academy
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