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# Upward Mobility: Experiences with Families of Origin Among College-Educated African American Women

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**Upward mobility: Experiences with families of origin among college-educated African American women**

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## ACKNOWLEGDEMENTS

ABSTRACT

Research indicates that a significant number of African American women from lower-class statuses work hard to become upwardly mobile. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the interpersonal experiences of upwardly mobile African American women, particularly their interactions with their family and community of origin. The purposefully selected sample was composed of 13 African American women holding various positions at a Midwestern university. To maximize variation of experiences, respondents were graduate students, faculty members, and staff. The primary data collection method was in-depth interviews along with examination of supplemental materials which included respondents' journal entries, e-mail exchanges, field notes, and researcher memos. I analyzed the collected data following the procedures of open, axial, and selective coding. A theory emerged from my interpretation of data gathered to answer the research question "What is the process by which African American women from working-class families manage relationships with members of their family of origin during and/or following the attainment of a graduate degree?" Evidence from this exploratory study suggests that the women develop a bicultural identity out of necessity after being confronted with conflicting experiences and worldviews. The emergent theory highlights the changes that occur in the women's lives and some of the conflicting life experiences they have with their family of origin as they progress through academia. The theory also describes strategies used by the respondents to manage their emerging bicultural identity. The attainment of a bicultural identity allows African American women to function in their life as well-educated women and to retain string ties to their family and community of origin.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction of the Problem

Women and people of color from lower-class statuses work hard to become upwardly mobile. Research suggests that the process of upward social mobility is motivated by a desire for personal, and also collective, gain (Higginbotham & Weber, 1992). Among African American families, collectivist values are instilled from birth, and there is a strong emphasis placed on family connectivity. African American family values include a strong sense of mutual sharing and responsibility, caring for each other, and sharing material goods. Such family values are often at odds with the values of Western culture, which tend to value individualism. In comparison to individuals who adopt more Western ideals of independence and self-reliance, African Americans may experience unique challenges as they gain independence from their family of origin and maneuver through different life stages and social class statuses.

Higginbotham and Weber (1992) state that there is a need for research that expounds upon the downside to upward social mobility when it comes to interactions with the family of origin. Upwardly mobile African American may receive requests from their family of origin for financial contributions, job leads and material goods, such as computers or cellular phones. Higginbotham and Weber found that upwardly mobile African Americans felt overtaxed by the demands of their family of origin, but they failed to provide any recommendations about how upwardly mobile individuals can effectively deal with the demands of the family while maintaining close relationships. McAdoo (1978) found that upwardly mobile family members either gave in to the demands of their family or limited

interactions with the family and severed the reciprocal cords that bind family members. Although other authors have identified some cost of upward mobility in terms of psychological well-being (Cole & Omari, 2003), there are no recommendations for how to cope with the resulting psychological distress. Thompson (1986) felt that there was a need to hear the stories of African American women who had overcome adversity to provide perspectives that could be used to motivate and inspire other African American women. Therefore, assuming that a college degree is one clear marker of upward mobility, this study explored African American women's experiences with their family of origin following the attainment of a college degree and the ways that upward mobility may affect interactions with the family of origin and these women's psychological functioning. This research also focused on the ways women cope with the tensions, internally and in their overt behaviors toward family members.

<div style="text-align:center">Background of the Study</div>

For those who may have found the means for upward mobility, their experiences may not all be success stories. An illustration of acute and chronic stress experienced by many upwardly mobile African Americans is the story of Leanita McClain, a journalist famous for her writings about the challenges facing the Black middle-class. McClain was born into poverty and through attaining a formal education, was able to achieve middle-class status (Campbell, 1993). She moved away from the neighborhood in which she was born to a predominantly White neighborhood where she was not very comfortable. In October, 1980, in Newsweek's "My Turn" column (as cited in Campbell, 1993), she wrote,

> It is impossible for me to forget where I come from as long as I am prey to the jive
>
> hustler who does not hesitate to exploit my childhood friendship. I am reminded, too,

when I go back to my old neighborhood in fear—and have my purse snatched—and sit down to a business lunch and have an old classmate wait on my table. I recall the girl I played dolls with who now rears five children on welfare, the boy from church who is in prison for murder, the pal found dead of a drug overdose. . . . Sometimes when I wait at the bus stop, I meet my aunt getting off the bus with other cleaning ladies on their way to do my neighbor's floors."

McClain felt guilty for moving away from her family and friends, and ashamed for being fearful of the place she grew up (Campbell, 1993). She felt awkward in her newly attained middle-class status and felt that she had turned her back on her people. In addition to feeling disconnected from African Americans, McClain did not feel fully accepted by the dominant culture. Despite her credentials, awards and middle-class status, she struggled to be respected by her White counterparts (Campbell).

As a result of the pressure of being an upwardly mobile African American, McClain committed suicide. It was reported that she was severely depressed because of feelings of alienation from other Blacks and condescension from Whites (Collins, 2000). Her story raises questions about the meaning of success, the psychological price of living in multiple worlds, and the problems associated with upward mobility.

### Purpose of the study

Social mobility is defined as movement that places a person in a social world significantly different from the one in which he or she was socialized during childhood (Broman, 1989). Although researchers have begun to see the importance of exploring upward mobility among African American individuals (Sellers, 2001; Winthrob, 2001), little research to date explores how upward mobility affects African American family relationships. There

does not appear to be any research to date that discusses the psychological consequences of upward mobility and effective ways to cope with those consequences. Research consistently documents that African Americans rely heavily on extended family networks for emotional and financial needs (Aschenbrenner, 1975; McAdoo, 2007; Taylor, Jackson, & Chatters, 1997), but little is known about the effect of such interdependence on the functioning within family systems where an individual moves out of the family's world through upward mobility.

Within the African American family system, women have a unique role of being responsible for the outcomes of the family (McAdoo, 2007). African American women have been described as the "glue that holds the African American family system together" (Taylor, Jackson, & Chatters, 1997). African American women are often the caregivers of younger siblings when parents are not available. African American women are also often responsible for providing care to aging parents and other more distant relatives. For these reasons, it is likely that their experiences with upward mobility will differ from those of men and individuals belonging to other racial groups.

In addition to the roles African American women hold within their families and communities of origin, upwardly mobile African American women may also be students or hold professional positions that come with additional roles and expectations. Upwardly mobile African American women understand that out of necessity to survive in America, they must become bicultural, where they are able to understand and internalize the fundamentals of more than one culture – their culture of origin and the dominant culture in which they work. Upwardly mobile African American women face the challenge of

managing their multiple roles and often their bicultural or dual identities that emerge as they progress through college and earn advanced degrees.

The aim of this research was to explore the subjective experiences of African American women who are upwardly mobile and the ways that upward social mobility and bicultural identity development affects interactions with the family of origin. Another important purpose of this study is to make recommendations for maintaining upwardly mobile African American women's psychological well-being in a way that allows them to maintain healthy ties with their family of origin. Because of the limited research on this topic, especially from African American women's perspectives, data collection was important to understanding their unique experiences with upward mobility as well as bicultural identity development and management.

<div align="center">Rationale for the Qualitative Approach and Research Questions</div>

Qualitative research methods are a valuable means of gaining in-depth knowledge about people and their experiences. Qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world by studying people in their natural environment while attempting to make sense of and interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). A naturalistic, qualitative approach to research allows participants' experiences to be portrayed in their own words.

Acceptance of qualitative research projects is increasing among academics in psychology (Azar, 2008), and a recent article indicates that within the field of clinical and counseling psychology, there is a need for well-designed qualitative research projects and that qualitative research dissertations are increasingly common. As a graduate student conducting a qualitative research project, I was committed to utilizing research methods that

would engage respondents in conversations, where a more complete exploration of their experiences could occur. I actively worked to search for patterns and themes in data gathered through semi-structured interviews. Creswell (1998) states that the use of qualitative research "…takes the reader [or researcher] into multiple dimensions of a problem or issue and displays it in all of its complexity" (p. 15). The findings provide thick, rich descriptions that capture the experiences of the college-educated African American respondents.

Using a qualitative approach, this study incorporated the methodology of grounded theory as a way of assessing family-related experiences of college-educated women from working class backgrounds. To more fully understand their experiences, I utilized data grounded in the field to formulate a theory regarding bicultural identity development among college-educated African American women from working-class backgrounds. The four research questions that guided the study are presented as follows:

1. How do African American women view upward mobility?

2. What are the family-related experiences of upwardly mobile African American women?

3. What strategies do these women use to manage their family-related experiences?

4. What strategies do these women use for dealing with the emotions engendered by interactions with their family?

## Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons. First, several researchers document the importance of studying African American family systems and the unique roles of women, yet rarely do they address the complexities of managing these multiple roles. Secondly, while there are some researchers who discuss the process of upward mobility, few authors have

captured the downside of upward mobility, specifically how it affects interactions with the family of origin. An upwardly mobile woman who comes from a collectivist background will likely have a markedly different experience than someone who holds more individualist values. For these reasons, I am interested in exploring how upward mobility affects interactions with the family of origin among African American women.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter summarizes literature relevant to the experiences of upwardly mobile African Americans. Initial discussion describes the African American family system and the collective nature of family interactions. By providing information on the African American family system, I hope to illustrate the interwoven nature of this collectivist culture. I then introduce education as means for upward mobility and explore the bicultural identity that emerges as African Americans create new professional roles. Lastly, the benefits and struggles of upward mobility are presented along with evidence of the need for coping strategies that may help when dealing with family-related experiences.

*African American Group Membership*

Within the African American community, as within all communities, there are rules to which group members must adhere. Some of these rules are explicitly stated and others are simply engrained in African Americans from the moment of conception. One of the first rules one learns being a member of the African American community is to be cautious of the intentions of "others" (Fordham, 1996). From the standpoint of many African Americans, "others" are individuals who belong to other racial groups. White individuals make up the dominant culture and are thus the "others" that many African Americans identify. African Americans are members of a marginalized group who have experienced a great deal of racial and economic oppression, and for this reason are distrustful of people outside of the African American community (Lawson, 1992). African Americans have found that in order to protect the stability of the group from the threat of others there must be an alliance across members that is impenetrable by non-group members.

In order to fully understand the need for such an alliance, there must first be an understanding of the history of African American oppression, and the unique relationship that exists between African Americans and the dominant culture. Because the history of oppression among African Americans is beyond the scope of this paper, I will only briefly discuss African Americans' relationships to poverty and to the dominant culture.

In America, for many generations, African Americans have resided in poverty-stricken communities characterized by overcrowded, multigenerational housing situations and extremely high unemployment rates (Jackson, 1991). Even if not impoverished, many African Americans grew up in communities that were segregated from the dominant culture. These African American communities, which are often economically deprived, are often rich in support and nurturance (Hill, 2003). Through residing in such a community, African Americans learn, both directly and indirectly, the value of family relationships and shared help, while simultaneously learning to be distrustful of the dominant culture (Fordham, 1996). African Americans are often taught to rely solely on family, close friends and other members of the African American community (Jackson, 1991).

The strained relationship that exists between African Americans and the dominant culture dates back to slavery where the power differential originated (Burlew, Banks, McAdoo, & Azibo, 1992). As a result of oppressive economic and social conditions, along with institutionalized racism, African Americans have struggled to make a place for themselves within the American culture (Benjamin, 2005). In the years since slavery, many African Americans have not been able to escape their oppressed status.

Although there are many problems associated with growing up poor and segregated, including being viewed as inferior by members of the larger society, some researchers have

acknowledged that good can come of such a situation (Hill, 2003; McAdoo, 2007). One positive outcome of being raised in such a segregated community is the strength of family relationships. Hill (2003) found that low-income families usually have stronger kinship ties than middle class families.

Strong kinship bonds can be seen in the ability of African American families to maintain extended family ties (Hill, 2003). These strong kinship ties are characterized by a reliance on kin for economic and emotional support, and reciprocal sharing of resources among family members. African American extended families are often very close knit and usually live in close proximity to each other, if not in the same household (Davis, 1993). For this reason, multigenerational housing as well as residing with cousins, aunts and uncle is not uncommon. Research indicates that close contact serves as a protective factor for the family system against the external threat of "others" (McAdoo, 2007).

Among African American families, collectivist values are instilled from birth. African Americans have a tradition of mobilizing resources within the family and community to ensure the survival and health of individual family members (Burlew, Banks, McAdoo, & Azibo, 1992). Collectivist values include giving priority to the needs of the family rather than focusing solely on individual needs and wants. Many African Americans from impoverished communities are very ambitious and driven to find ways to leave poverty behind. Fundamentally, it is the family, rather than the individual, that needs to escape poverty (Biblarz, Raftery, & Buccur, 1997). Within many African American family systems, from birth, a high value is placed on achievement (Hill, 2003). African Americans are taught to work hard to achieve their goals and to let nothing and no one interfere. Because of this value, many African Americans are very achievement-oriented and hard working.

African Americans are also raised believing that the family extends beyond blood relatives. Wilson & Tolson (1990) stated that Black families go beyond blood kin to develop mutual support within the wider community. Friends and neighbors are incorporated into the family, and become like kin. In the research literature, these individuals are termed "fictive kin" (Inglehart, 1994). They share responsibilities of promoting success among the African American community and hold each other accountable, similar to the way relatives interact. For many African Americans, the "family" consists of the entire African American community (Hofferth, 1984).

*African Americans and Upward Mobility*

Because African Americans are a marginalized group, many members of the African American community feel that improving the status of the group should be a common goal among members, which includes getting out of poverty and changing the ways that African Americans are viewed by the larger society. Many African Americans strive to show that the stereotypes associated with the group are not true (Kennedy, 1980). Being seen as unmotivated and uneducated are stereotypes associated with African Americans and it is up to the members of the group to disprove these stereotypes.

One way to earn respect from the larger society and to show that stereotypes associated with being African American are not true is to personally succeed. African Americans who do not reside in poverty and who have successfully earned and maintained middle-class status provide examples that contradict the stereotypes. These individuals have overcome adversity to succeed in a society where the odds were stacked against them. Educated African Americans challenge the stereotypes that exist about African Americans

and offer proof that African Americans can survive in a society that presents many barriers to their success (Bullock & Limbert, 2003).

For many members of the African American community, attaining a formal education represents a success for all African Americans (Williams et al., 2000). If African Americans want to change their status, attaining an education is really the only option (Winthrob, 2001). Now, more so than ever, African Americans are entering college and receiving degrees from institutions of higher education. In 2006, 18 % of African Americans over the age of 25 had a Bachelor's degree (U.S. Census, 2006). In the same year, among African Americans over the age of 25, 1.3 million had earned an advanced degree, such as a master's or doctorate (U.S. Census, 2006). These numbers have increased dramatically since 1970, when only 5% of African Americans over the age of 25 had earned at least a Bachelor's degree and many fewer had advanced degrees (U.S Census, 1970).

Fordham (1996) explored the academic experiences of African American students who have experienced racial discrimination from the dominant culture. Her goal was to identify themes that emerged from students' experiences. She compared the experiences and attitudes of students who succeeded and those who struggled academically. She found that high achieving students seemed to dismiss the evidence of racial discrimination and use it as motivation to prove the racists wrong. It seemed that they wanted to prove that African American students could perform in ways that were comparable to White students (Fordham, 1996). By contrast, the underachieving students seemed to see discrimination as a reason to oppose and resist the dominant culture's attempts to influence them. They resisted formal education by being late, skipping school, and refusing to participate and cooperate with their teachers.

For high achieving individuals, academic success represents a direct challenge to the beliefs held about African Americans in addition to providing a means for escaping poverty (Bullock & Limbert, 2003). Through attaining an education, many individuals are able to reach middle-class status (Benjamin, 2005; Hill, 2003; Kronus, 1971). For African Americans who grow up poor, being middle-class represents comfort and increased opportunities. Beyond the economic benefits, middle-class status affords individuals greater access to resources, such as high quality health care, day care and schools for their children.

Research further indicates that women with more education are happier, have higher self-esteem and are less emotionally distressed than those with less education (Bumpass & Aquilino, 1995). For upwardly mobile African Americans, middle-class status is associated with exposure to greater diversity in terms of activities, food and people (Hunter, Sundel, & Sundel, 2002). Among women interviewed by Crohan et al. (1989), an education allows access to higher status occupations, which are associated with feelings of control and greater satisfaction with work and life.

An individual who shows that he or she is making headway in mainstream society is often looked upon with favor by the extended family because the individual shows that success is attainable (Hill, 2003). Witnessing the success of an upwardly mobile family member can instill hope in relatives, both older and younger (Murray & Mednick, 1977). For older generations, success may say that "a change is coming" where African Americans are no longer a powerless group of people (Ostrove & Cole, 2003). Younger generations may become inspired by a relative's academic success and start to work toward a similar goal.

Although research consistently shows that the African American family structure supports achievement (Hill, 2003), in some segments of the African American community

upward mobility is associated with "abandoning your roots" (Fordham, 1996; Staples, 1985). Upwardly mobile individuals are sometimes perceived as compromising their Black identity for mainstream success (Staples). This may be because upward mobility represents a physical and psychological separation from the African American community (Sellers, 2001).

An upwardly mobile African American must cross into unfamiliar territory where the rules are not the same as the rules within the African American community. In order to be successful, an upwardly mobile African American must learn the rules of belonging to another group (Scott, 2002). Not only are the rules different, but they are set by the dominant culture, which many African Americans were raised to not trust.

Upwardly mobile individuals are seen as belonging to two groups. They belong to both their African American family system as well as to the dominant culture, which requires them to be bicultural. Being bicultural means having the capacity to function effectively and comfortably within two distinct cultural contexts (Velasquez & Velasquez, 1980). As bicultural beings, African Americans are highly aware of the discrepancies between the mainstream culture and their ethnic culture (Scott, 2002). Consider the individualism/collectivism dimensions. African American families, although they vary widely, are similar in some ways to traditional African families where high value is placed on collectivism and self-sacrifice. By contrast, the dominant culture adopts Western values of independence and self-reliance (Parham & Parham, 2002). Time orientation is another domain in which the values of some African Americans may differ from the values of the larger society. Within the larger society, there is a value placed on being future focused. Some African Americans, particularly those from lower class backgrounds, are not likely to focus on the future or make plans for the future because they are concerned with surviving

the present day. Managing the contradictions of the two worldviews may pose a challenge for upwardly mobile individuals.

*Biculturalism*

As the African American women in this study became upwardly mobile and left their working class backgrounds, they were faced with the challenge of maintaining personal lives in the Black community while simultaneously creating careers in predominately White environments. Although the challenge for these women was to manage the tensions between two cultural worlds, this project only explored only one aspect of the African American woman's experience: the bicultural phenomenon and its relationship to the ways African American women manage relationships with members of their family of origin.

In order to understand the bicultural identity of African American women it is important to examine W.E.B. DuBois' (1903) concept of double consciousness. DuBois coined the term double consciousness to describe the external and internal intrapsychic dynamics that resulted from living in an oppressive society (Bell, 1990). The society boasts equal opportunity for all, but African Americans are systematically denied access based solely on the fact that they are Black. Because of skin color, African Americans are perceived as second class citizens and inferior to Whites by the larger society (Bell). DuBois wrote:

The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with the second sight in this American world, a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of the world that looks on

amused in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (1903)

Because of the long strained history between African Americans and Whites in this country, African Americans have internalized opposing and often conflicting identities (Blackwell, 1981), and as bicultural beings, upwardly mobile African Americans are aware of the power and privilege differences between African Americans and White people (Blackwell, 1981). When African Americans move professionally, economically, politically, and educationally into the dominant culture, they understand that they are in many ways being awarded access to an exclusive group - the White group (Spaight & Whitaker, 1995). This is not to say that they become White or that they are devoid of the oppression and discrimination associated with being ethnic minorities, but rather that they are made aware of and gain access to certain rights and privileges traditionally reserved only for members of the dominant group – White people.

As a bicultural identity develops, African Americans consistently struggle to create a sense of self in the face of conflicting cultural experiences, where their identity is comprised of disparate components (Phelps, Taylor, & Gerard, 2001; Ross, Reynolds, and Geis, 2000; Williams, Dilworth-Anderson, & Goodwin, 2003). According to the bicultural perspective, there are mutual rewards and resources available to members of multiple cultural groups (LaFromboise, Hardin, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993). It can be empowering to belong to two groups where membership in each group offers unique resources, rewards and opportunities. Rather than having to abandon one's own culture of origin for academic and professional

success, a person can intentionally, select to use the resources from both cultural contexts enabling him or her to fully integrate his or her bicultural identity.

Research indicates that individuals can be bicultural without being biculturally competent (LaFromboise et al., 1993). The distinction is that being bicultural simply means identifying with two cultures, whereas bicultural competence involves effectively navigating the two cultures while minimizing psychological consequences. LaFromboise et al. suggest that in order to attain bicultural competence, people must develop a set of skills which include (a) knowledge of cultural beliefs and values, (b) positive attitudes toward both majority and minority groups, (c) bicultural efficacy, (d) communication ability, (e) role repertoire, and (f) sense of being grounded.

Knowledge of cultural beliefs and values can be understood as being "aware of and knowledgeable about the history, institutions, rituals, and everyday practices of a given culture" (LaFromboise et al., 1993, p. 403). Culturally competent people know, appreciate and internalize the basic beliefs of each culture in which they are members. To be biculturally competent, people must hold positive attitudes towards each group because without positive attitudes, people will be limited in their ability to feel good about interacting with a group that is the target of negative feelings. It is hypothesized that through contact with and gaining information about both cultures people can develop positive attitudes (LaFromboise, et al.).

Bicultural efficacy is defined "as the belief, or confidence, that one can live effectively, and in a satisfying manner, within two groups without compromising one's sense of cultural identity" (LaFromboise et al., 1993, p. 404). Holding this belief helps people develop and maintain effective interpersonal relationships in the two cultures and enables

them to persist through periods of rejection from one or both of the cultures (Rozek, 1980).
Communication ability refers to individuals' effectiveness in communicating ideas and
feelings to members of both cultures. Role repertoire refers to the range of culturally or
situationally appropriate behaviors or roles required in each culture. LaFromboise et al.
(1993) suggest that the greater the range of behaviors or roles that the individual has
mastered, the higher the level of that person's cultural competence. Lastly, groundedness
refers to individuals' establishment of stable social networks in both cultures that provide a
sense of identity and belonging. This sense of being grounded in both cultures enhances
individuals' personal and cultural identities in a manner that enables them to cope with the
pressures of living bicultually (LaFromboise et al.).

*Code-Switching*

Code-switching is something that happens when a person has internalized two
cultures and has compartmentalized his or her identities (Blackwell, 1981). Code-switching
occurs as women shuttle back and forth between their cultural contexts since each cultural
context is perceived as distinct and separate. Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) define code-
switching as the process of shifting between dialects, languages and styles of communication
in order to meet the conflicting demands and expectations of different groups. Code-
switching, sometimes called shifting, may also involve altering one's behavior in the
presence of certain groups. In order to avoid or minimize conflict, African American women
often have to adapt themselves to accommodate others. Research indicates that because of
the convergence of racism and sexism, African American women may code-switch more
often than members of most other ethnic groups (Scott, 2002).

The need to code-switch for some African American women is born out of a fear that they will be negatively perceived by people with whom they are interacting, particularly members of the African American community (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003). When a person chooses to pursue an education, which is considered by some to be a privilege of belonging to the dominant culture, his or her Black identity may be challenged by members of the African American community (Benjamin, 2005; Fordham, 1996). This is because the behaviors required to obtain upward mobility, such as earning an education, are often associated with assimilating into the mainstream culture (Burlew, Banks, McAdoo, & Azibo, 1992). African Americans may become concerned that one of their members is becoming too immersed in the values of the dominant culture and thus losing sight of the values of the African American community.

Adopting the values, beliefs and style of speech of the dominant culture is perceived by some members of the African American community as "selling out" (Fordham, 1996). This represents "allying with the other" which is a sign of betrayal to some members of the African American community (Fordham). Failing to be humble and appearing to be flashing one's success in the face of others who have not achieved to the same degree is also a sign of disloyalty to some members of the African American community. To be labeled "bourgie" means that there is an air of arrogance about the person, which implies "I am better than you" (Fordham). Code-switching is used by many successful African Americans as a way to avoid being misperceived as a sell-out or as bourgeoisie (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003).

To put the family at ease and prove that they have not lost their Black identity, African American women will "shift" (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003). This may mean shifting from speaking Standard English to speaking in African American dialect when

interacting with African Americans, or it may involve withholding information about oneself, like an academic success, to avoid making others who are not experiencing the same success uncomfortable. For many African American women this process of code-switching is easy and not very burdensome. Some have reported that it is actually natural and occurs outside of their awareness (Scott, 2002). However, for others, the process creates stress.

Shifting can be both adaptive and maladaptive. According to Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003), when a woman uses shifting to explore different parts of herself, which are all genuine parts of who she is, she is considered to be adaptively shifting. Shifting is also advantageous when it is used to help individuals make connections with people who are different. Although code-switching can help with forming and maintaining relationships, it can have negative effects on a woman's psyche (Jones & Shorter-Gooden). Code-switching is considered maladaptive when a great deal of energy goes into creating an acceptable outer façade, and the shifter realizes that she is being everything for others and nothing for herself. It is at this point that shifting has become harmful and may cause a woman's sense of self to falter. As a result of the pressure of code-switching, African American women may also become susceptible to psychological distress including symptoms of anxiety and depression. Women may experience feelings of low self-esteem and self-hatred as they work to accommodate others (Jones & Shorter-Gooden).

*Downside of Upward Mobility*

Using autobiographies of two African American authors, Cole and Omari (2003) explored and presented what they call "the hidden cost of mobility" (p. 785). The hidden costs introduced by the authors include stressors that relate to interactions with the family of origin, including the effects of moving away from the family of origin and the expected

resource sharing. Although upward mobility may provide some security and well-being, it is often accompanied by feelings of guilt and grief associated with those left behind in poverty (Cole & Omari, 2003). These topics will be discussed below.

One downside of being upwardly mobile is separating from the Black community both literally and figuratively. Because upwardly mobile African Americans integrate various aspects of the dominant culture into their personal identity, they may find that it is harder to relate to members of their culture of origin. The physical distance between the college-educated relative and members of the family and community of origin may lead to relatives and friends feeling uncomfortable with each other. As upwardly mobile African Americans become more and more immersed in the dominant culture, they may become more and more detached from their Black community (LaFromboise et al., 1993). This process of upward mobility may leave the college-educated woman in limbo - a place where she is not fully accepted or comfortable within her culture of origin, nor is she fully a member of the dominant cultural group, causing her to feel like an outsider within each group (Proudford & Thomas, 1999).

Additionally, as upwardly mobile African Americans migrate out of the Black neighborhood, they may experience feelings of guilt and shame as a result of abandoning their loved ones and family members (Cole & Omari, 2003). Having greater opportunity for occupational and geographical mobility, middle-class family members may move far away from their relatives (Hill, 2003). A more symbolic separation may occur as African Americans attain middle-class status and begin to align with a different social class, which may include adopting more individualistic and conservative views (Hochschild, 1993).

Another difficulty associated with being upwardly mobile has to do with maintaining the African American family tradition of sharing resources (Cole & Omari, 2003). Upwardly mobile individuals who identify as belonging to the middle-class may not be much better off financially than their working-class counterparts, despite what family members may believe. In comparison to the wealth of White Americans, African Americans earn significantly less. The U.S. Bureau of the Census (2006) reveals that while the median income for Whites is $50, 673, the median income among African Americans is only $31,969. This median income was less than that for all other ethnic groups in the U.S.

For many upwardly mobile African Americans there is an expectation within the family system that resource sharing will take place. Although an upwardly mobile person may have greater access to resources, research indicates that many upwardly mobile individuals do not actually have assets to offer their relatives (Collins, 1983). When assessing the shared help strategy used by African American families, Higginbotham and Weber (1992) found that upwardly mobile African Americans often felt overtaxed by the demands of their family because resource sharing was rarely reciprocal and demands were unrealistic given the upwardly mobile individual's limited resources.

*Coping*

For upwardly mobile individuals, it is imperative to find ways to cope effectively with the multiple stressors associated with upward mobility. Psychological distress can result from a number of sources for a person who is changing social statuses. There can be pressure to code-switch, distress resulting from being physically distant and ideologically different from their family of origin, as well as distress related to feeling overtaxed by the family. There is literature available that discusses adaptive coping for work-related stress among

African American women (Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001; Turner & Meyers, 2000), but none that speaks specifically to coping with stress stemming from relationships with the family of origin.

Research consistently shows that African American women effectively use religion and prayer as primary means for coping with stress (Hill, 2003), but for some women in some situations, this may not be enough. In terms of coping with stress related to the family of origin, McAdoo (1978) stated that upwardly mobile individuals can either give in to the demands of their family, or limit interactions with the family and sever the reciprocal cords that bind family members. Neither of these suggestions appears to be adaptive because both lead to even more emotional distress. Should an upwardly mobile woman chose to give in to the demands of her family, she may have to sacrifice her integrity and may experience resentment towards her family over "giving in." Limiting interactions with the family may not be optimal because of the emotional isolation that may result from severing ties. For these reasons, adaptive ways to cope are needed.

*Present Study*

This study was designed to explore family-related experiences of upwardly mobile African American women. Another goal of this study was to explore the process of bicultural identity development and its impact on family-related experiences. A third goal was to uncover the different ways that African American women cope with family-related tensions that may result from upward mobility. Internal coping strategies, as well as overt behaviors towards family members, were assessed.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY, DESIGN, AND METHODS

The purpose of this study was to explore the interpersonal experiences of upwardly mobile African American women, particularly their interactions with their family of origin. I was interested in exploring the ways that African American women cope with changes in their social status along with their interactions with their family of origin following a change in social status. This chapter outlines the epistemology, theoretical framework, methodology, and methods of data collection and analysis that were implemented to meet the goals of this study. The criteria and process for respondent selection is also presented along with information about the pilot study interviews. Lastly, I present information pertinent to the trustworthiness of the information obtained in this qualitative research project and a discussion of ethical considerations.

Epistemology and Theoretical Framework

Epistemology conveys the way one understands the world or one's theory of knowledge. According to constructivist epistemology, people construct understanding through their own unique life experiences (Crotty, 1998). The basic interpretive approach to learning asserts that researchers should immerse themselves in the world inhabited by those they wish to study, with emphasis placed upon understanding how individuals construct and interpret their reality (Esterberg, 2002). The interpretive theoretical perspective provides a framework for understanding how the African American women in the study interpret and understand their experiences with their family of origin and how a change in social status may have influenced their relationships. I was particularly interested in understanding how African American women feel that their experiences of upward mobility affect their

relationships with their family of origin and how their interactions with family members affect their psychological functioning.

The research questions that guided the study are as follows:

1. How do African American women view upward mobility?

2. What are the family-related experiences of upwardly mobile African American women?

3. What strategies do these women use to manage their family-related experiences?

4. What strategies do these women use for dealing with the emotions engendered by interactions with their family?

The qualitative paradigm most appropriate for this research is constructivism. A basic tenet of constructivism is that there is no universal truth waiting to be discovered. Instead, constructivists believe that knowledge is created through active engagement of individuals with each other and their environments (Crotty, 1998). Constructivism was appropriate for this study because I wanted to understand, through dialogue with the participants, how they made meaning of their upward mobility as it related to their family of origin. Constructivist researchers address the "process" of interactions among individuals.

<div align="center">Methodology and Design</div>

Grounded theory is one of several types of qualitative research methodologies that fit well with constructivist approaches to research, which include ethnography, phenomenology, life histories, and conversational analysis. Grounded theory as a methodological approach was developed by sociologists Glaser and Strauss (Strauss and Corbin, 1990), and is a method of conducting qualitative research that focuses on creating a conceptual framework or theory generated through the relationships among concepts. The theory emerges directly

from the data. With grounded theory, researchers "go beyond descriptive studies into the realm of explanatory theoretical frameworks" (Charmaz, 2006). According to Glaser and Strauss (as cited in Charmaz, 2006, p. 5), the defining components of grounded theory practice include:

- Simultaneous involvement in data collection and analysis

- Constructing analytic codes and categories from data, not from preconceived logically deduced hypothesis

- Using the constant comparative method, which involves making comparisons during each stage of the analysis

- Advancing theory development during each step of data collection and analysis

- Memo-writing to elaborate categories, define relationships between categories, and identify gaps

- Sampling aimed toward theory construction, not for population representativeness

Grounded theory has evolved in the last 10 years to a more constructivist approach (Charmaz, 2006). Constructivist grounded theory is noted for being less structured while placing emphasis on the values of the researcher and how the researcher's biases can affect the data (Charmaz). From this perspective, data should drive the development of a theory. The constructivist approach to grounded theory research offers flexible guidelines for analyzing data because from the constructivist perspective researchers should engage respondents and ask them how they construct their realities (Charmaz). An objectivist approach to grounded theory prescribes a systematic way of analyzing data from which a

single substantive theory will emerge from the relationships among the concepts (Charmaz; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).  This approach to grounded theory research offers specific steps to coding and analyzing data. As a novice grounded theory researcher, I was drawn to the structure of the objectivist approach, but this study primarily used a constructivist approach.

Through using the grounded theory research method, I constructed a theory that was inductively created from the information provided by respondents about the phenomenon. The theory that emerged is not a formal theory that can be generalized to larger populations. In grounded theory, the theory that emerges is only appropriate for the phenomenon under study. In this case, the theory was developed specifically for first-generation college-educated African American women managing a dual identity and relationships with members of their family of origin.

True to the assumptions that underlie qualitative research methods, I found my research design to be an emerging design and noted that it was evolving and changing while I was interviewing my 13 respondents. From the very start of this study, I concurrently collected and analyzed data. All data was reviewed and coded, and to be sure that I did not impose themes and that the themes actually emerged from the data, I used a constant comparative approach to analyze the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).  Creswell (1998) describes the constant comparative method as a process by which the researcher continuously sorts and compares emerging categories until no new aspect of the categories can be identified, or until the categories are saturated and further exploration yields no new information.

The goal of grounded theory is to "generate or discover a theory, an abstract analytical schema of a phenomenon, that relates to a particular situation" (Creswell, p. 56). In the following sections, I will explain how a grounded theory emerged in this study.

<div align="center">Method</div>

I sought to construct a theory of upward mobility among African American women through face-to-face interviews, including observations, and supplemental materials offered by respondents. Creswell (2003) states that interviews and observations are the basic methods of data collection used in qualitative research studies.
Each of these methods will be discussed next.

*Interviewing and Observations*

Because this study was focused on exploring the meaning that respondents make as a result of their experiences, I selected interviewing as the main method of data collection. Interviewing is a form of communication where there is an exchange of information and ideas between two people through questions and responses (Esterberg, 2002). For this study, I conducted semi-structured interviews because they work well "to explore a topic more openly and to allow interviewees to express their opinions and ideas in their own words" (Esterberg, 2002, p. 87). This format allowed me to listen attentively to the participants' responses and to follow their lead (Esterberg).

When interviewing participants, the interview protocol (See Appendix A) was used as the starting point. Because qualitative inquiry requires that researchers remain flexible and open to new information that emerges during interviews, the specific questions changed somewhat over the course of the study. The general topics explored were limited to those in

the interview protocol, but some additional questions were added and other questions were deleted, depending on the information that emerged in the interviews.

I observed the women during our face-to-face interviews. A major advantage of direct participant observation is that it provides the researcher with a here-and-now experience (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As the respondents reacted to information discussed, I observed and analyzed their physical and emotional reactions to interview questions and the content they shared. I also spent a considerable amount of time observing the interview environment in respondents' homes and offices and discussing observations with respondents. Portraits and artifacts located in the respondents' workplaces and homes were examined to add to the richness of the data. For example, when meeting with one woman whose office was decorated with many African artifacts, I commented on the decor which led to the respondent pointing out her favorite pieces and sharing information about them.

*Journals and Supplemental Materials*

To triangulate the data, respondents were asked to reflect on their experiences with upward mobility and their family of origin in a journal. I asked them to reflect specifically on their life experiences and to offer reactions to their change in social status. I was also interested in understanding how their self identity and family relations were affected by their change in status. Esterberg (2002) reported that journals can provide important information about what individuals think and feel and so to get at their experiences, I asked the women to reflect on the following questions:

1. What does it mean to be educated?

2. What is the role of education in your family?

3. How is your education viewed in your family?

During the initial interviews, I asked the women about their comfort with journaling about their experiences. I asked them, if they did not mind, to spend some time reflecting on their experiences with upward mobility and any changes that they have noticed in their family interactions. These reflections were either emailed to me or brought to our next meeting. One respondent indicated that she was too busy to journal. She offered her curriculum vita to show how her scholarship and research to date was focused on the unique experiences of African Americans.

By analyzing the journal entries, I gained further insight into the women's lives and gained a better understanding of the way that they have come to understand their education and resulting upward mobility. Although journaling was the primary form of supplemental materials, many of the respondents also offered supplemental materials including family portraits, poems, and documents showing scholarship. One respondent who was taking a class on professional identity development at the time of data collection forwarded me both her mid-term and final assignments for the class to provide further information about her experiences. Her supplemental materials included a photo diary on self-identity she created for a class.

Field notes and memos were also used as supplemental materials. At the start of data collection, I began writing memos. Memos are notes about the data, and the processes of data collection and analysis. Memo-writing constitutes a crucial method in grounded theory because it prompts the researcher to analyze data and codes early in the research process. I wrote memos about how I coded the data, the emerging categories, and the story the data told. By writing about and generating hypotheses about the data, I was able to deepen my understanding of the data. Two sample memos are provided (see Appendix B).

During the interviews and following each interaction with the women, I also wrote field notes regarding my observations. I wrote descriptions of the women's reactions to content discussed and interpreted what the evidence meant. The field notes from the observation acted as detailed records of the respondent's reactions during our interactions. In my field notes, I was able to document when a respondent displayed reactions that might not have been captured by the audiotape recorder. For example, one respondent teared up as we discussed strained family relationships. I documented the intensity of her emotional reaction and this information provided evidence of her felt experience.

Since the conception of this study, I explored my own biases and expectations for the data. Considering that I had experienced changes in interactions with my family of origin since going away to college, I had many expectations for the outcome of the study that needed to be set aside. Merriam (2002) used the term "bracketing" to refer to this process of acknowledging biases and expectations. Researchers are encouraged to do this bracketing before starting to work with data to ensure that themes can emerge naturally without the influence of past knowledge or expectations (Esterberg, 2002). By bracketing I acknowledged my relation to the topic of investigation, and also acknowledged how my past life experiences both hindered and facilitated different forms of understanding. In an attempt to be completely transparent, I will share my personal experiences and biases that truly shaped the interpretation and data analysis in the current study.

### Researcher as an Instrument

As the primary researcher for this qualitative inquiry about the experiences of upwardly mobile African American women, I had an integral role in the data collection process, as well as the analysis and interpretation of the data. For this reason, it is very

important for me to state my background and biases in relation to this research topic. This is an important step in qualitative research because it allows the reader to understand how my opinions and views may have influenced the research process (Merriam, 2002).

I am an African American woman who was born into a lower-class family. My mother was 16 years old and single when I was born. She was still living with her mother in an impoverished all-Black community for the first 3 years of my life. My mother's sister, 2 brothers and their children, my 4 cousins, lived with my grandmother as well. We were all very close knit and the adults would pool together resources to ensure that the bills were paid, and that we children ate meals regularly and had clothes for school.

When I was 3 years old, my mother and I moved into our own apartment about a block away from my grandmother's house. My mother worked hard, yet struggled to provide for me on her own. My mother relied heavily on my paternal grandparents and her family of origin to help us financially. After years of borrowing money from my paternal grandparents, my mother sent me to live with them because they were better off financially. They took me in and my entire life changed. I went from being in an environment where everyone was living in poverty to a place where working professionals were all around. Additionally, my grandparents started talking to me about college and often explained how a degree could change my status in life.

Fueled by resentment and fear of being poor, I decided that I needed to go to college. Considering that no one else in my family had gone on to college, there was no one who could help me prepare for my academic career. I conducted research and talked to many professionals about my plans. In 2000 when I began college, I moved away from my family and into my first dorm room. I worked hard during the school year and summer to make

money so that I would not have to move back home. I wanted to be independent. Throughout my college years, I spent some weekends back home, but for extended breaks, I would stay on campus.

As a result of going away to college, the interconnectedness that I had always shared with my family started to change. My cousins who grew up with me started teasing me for "talking White" and challenged me about the ways I chose to spend my time and money. I remember feeling like a poor, Black girl from the ghetto who didn't belong in college, but also felt that I couldn't go back home. I didn't feel accepted at home for choosing to go away to college, nor did I feel comfortable at school. I felt I had no way to cope with this. No one, not even my family members knew the emotional turmoil I experienced as my multiple identities were challenged. I became determined to make it on my own.

I earned my Bachelor's degree in 2004 and my Master's Degree in 2006. I am currently pursuing my doctoral degree. My academic successes have set me on a road towards upward social mobility. Through attaining a formal education, I am hoping to move from lower-class status to middle-class status. I am working so that I can leave poverty behind, and hopefully someday, help my family of origin escape poverty. As of right now, I do not have the means to bring my family out of poverty, but I don't think that my family fully understands this.

Shortly after I left home to go away to college, my family members began to make requests for me to make financial contributions to the family. At first, the requests were for small monetary donations. To these requests, I would often say yes. Then the requests increased to relatives in my extended family asking me to co-sign for apartments for them and their children. To these requests, I often struggled to find the appropriate response. I did

not feel that it was wise to risk my credit score by co-signing for things I could not guarantee would be paid for.

The largest request came when my younger brother asked me if he could move to live with me. Again, I did not feel comfortable agreeing to this request. Although I had a 2-bedroom apartment, I did not feel that I could parent a teenage child while working on my degree. I expressed my reservations to my mother and brother and they understood why I had to say no. For me, saying no meant that I was abandoning my family when they needed me and also abandoning family traditions of helping each other out. This feeling of abandoning my family caused me extreme emotional distress.

Through exploring my experiences, I found that I was experiencing feelings of guilt for leaving my family in poverty while I worked to change my social status and I felt resentment towards my family for not being more understanding of my journey. My family cannot understand my process or the experiences that I have. They have no idea what a dissertation is and why I have been working on it for years. What they do know is that I have another life I have to concentrate on.

My bias in being an upwardly mobile African American woman was that I viewed upward mobility as a very complex process laced with both positive and negative aspects. At the start of this study, I believed that the negative consequences of being upwardly mobile have devastating effects on the psyche of an upwardly mobile person and negatively impact relationships with the family of origin. For these reasons, I believed it was imperative that African American women acknowledge the negative feelings associated with being upwardly mobile before they could fully appreciate all the good that comes with upward mobility. Over the course of data collection and analysis I consistently assessed my interpretations to ensure

that I was not focused only on grief, anger, and loss. For the most part, the stories shared by the women were stories of courage, hope, and innovation.

Realizing my unresolved feelings towards my family is what prompted my interest in this topic. I wanted to explore the experiences of other African American women working to change their status and to understand if they were experiencing the same feelings I was; further, I wanted to know how they coped because at times I am at a lost for adaptive ways to deal with these family-related challenges.

## Respondent Selection

Respondents for this study were 13 African American women, each of which whom was raised in a working class family and each of whom has gone on to earn at least a Bachelor's degree. The process of selecting respondents in qualitative research studies is an intentional process, where the respondents are individuals who "have the information, perspectives, and experiences related to the topic of research" (Gay & Airasian, 2000, p.139). The decision to interview college-educated women from working class backgrounds was based on the assumption that education facilitates the transition from lower class to middle-class status. Professional African American women who have earned at least a Bachelor's degree were purposively recruited for this study along with African American women who are in graduate school earning master's or doctoral degrees.

## Respondents

Three women served as subjects in a preliminary pilot study, which is described in Appendix E. Each of the women interviewed during the pilot phase served as a respondent in the final analysis and was interviewed at least one more time following our initial interaction. The other women selected to be a part of this study all identified as first-generation college

students, although many of them had family members who had attended college for some amount of time, but had not graduated. The respondents in this study had not only graduated from college, but many were working towards or had completed advanced degrees. Two of the respondents were graduate students working towards their Master's degree, 3 were working towards earning their doctoral degree. One woman was working after earning her Bachelor's degree. The remaining 7 women had graduated with their either their Master's or doctoral degree and were working in their respective fields.

The women ranged in age from 31 to 62 years old. Table 1 presents respondents' pseudo names, their age, current degree and the data collected in relation to each woman's participation.

  
Table 1. Pseudo Name, Approximate Age, Highest Degree, and Data Provided by Respondents

| Respondents | Approximate Age | Degree Attained | Data Gathered |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1. Glenda | 47 | Masters | 2 interviews and supplemental materials |
| 2. Sylvia | 36 | Bachelors | 2 interviews and supplemental materials |
| 3. Jayne | 41 | Masters, ABD | 2 interviews and supplemental materials |
| 4. Dorothy | 48 | Masters | 2 interviews |
| 5. Lidia | 50 | Bachelors | 2 interviews and supplemental materials |
| 6. Regina | 34 | Doctorate | 2 interviews and supplemental materials |
| 7. Priscilla | 62 | Doctorate | 3 interviews and supplemental materials |
| 8. Brenda | 42 | Doctorate | 2 interviews |
| 9. Francesca | 37 | Doctorate | 1 interview |
| 10. Tasha | 34 | Doctorate | 1 interview and supplemental materials |
| 11. Lauren | 31 | Masters | 2 interviews and supplemental materials |
| 12. Dorian | 53 | Doctorate | 1 interview and supplemental materials |
| 13. Beatrice | 25 | Masters | 3 interviews and supplemental materials |

Respondents were asked during interviews about their willingness to provide a biographical statement about them to be included in the paper. Two respondents provided a biographical statement. For the respondents who did not provide such an introduction, I wrote one based on the information gathered from their interviews, observations, and supplemental materials. These biographical sketches are presented below. The first two were written by the respondents themselves.

Glenda

My name is Glenda Miles and I am a single African American female in her late forties. I have been working professionally in academic administration in the midwest for almost twenty years. Neither of my parents hold high school diplomas, however, they impressed upon their five children the importance of an education and even college. Myself and my three siblings all left home after high school to attend college and all of us graduated with bachelor's degrees (two with advanced degrees). I live in a completely different environment than the one that I grew up.

Having grown up in the rural south when most of my classmates and cousins were going to work in the textile mills after high school, obtaining a college degree was very important to me. While there's nothing wrong with that type of work, I knew that it was not for me. I had the strong feeling that if I held a college degree, I could teach school and be like the teachers who I had in school who were very special and held a high position in the community. I also wanted to make my family proud of the fact that I was bold enough to leave home, graduate from college, and secure a job that was respected. Today, I feel so fortunate to have accomplished my goals.

Sylvia

My name is Sylvia and I am a 36 year old African American female, the oldest of four from an inner-city in the Midwest. I have a Bachelors degree in Political Science, am going into my ninth year as a Student Affairs Practitioner and have recently started taking classes towards my Masters. I was raised in a blue collar working class family and currently our combined household income is almost double what my families' was growing up. Changing socioeconomic status has had a huge impact on my life. Although, I have more

money, I am very money conscious; I look for the best deals and sometimes feel guilty buying things that are not a necessity. I am much more conservative with my spending than my parents were. Living in a big city, there is a lot of pressure to keep up with the Jones, even if you are poor or lower middle class.

Having this degree can sometimes separate me from my family in ways that I didn't think about until I began working and needing advice and guidance professionally, that my mom could not provide. Sometimes it's lonely when your parents don't know what you know. Or they start to feel like you don't need them anymore because you are so "smart" or "educated". I feel like you need your family and parents even more during this process so you don't lose perspective.

I was ok with being told that I thought I was better than my neighbors and community when I returned home during college years. I knew I didn't think that way and I knew that going to college was important not only for me but for my community as well. I refuse to dismiss how I grew up (from the inner city, familiar with the streets and hustle, all my memories and friends that I grew up with, my neighborhood, drug dealer boyfriends, drunk uncles, dressing ghetto fabulous, shrimp huts, crack heads, etc.) I am now many of the things I dreamed of being as a young girl in the ghetto (a wife, mother, homeowner, in a profession where I am making a difference, community servant, etc.) I give much credit to my mom, step dad and women in my community, they taught me to work hard, to persevere and to live up to my potential.

<div align="center">Jayne</div>

Jayne is a 42 year old PhD candidate. Jayne worked full-time before returning to school to earn her Master's. Jayne reports feeling "totally" supported and explained how she

lived with her mother as she transitioned from professional worker to student. Her family understood the significance of her returning to school and did all that they could to ease her transition. Because of the family support she received, and still receives, Jayne knows that her family is her primary source of support. Although they may not understand the specifics of her journey, they keep her encouraged and focused on the outcome of this whole process.

Jayne admits to struggling to find balance in managing her academic priorities and her allegiance to her family system. What helps her is to put things into perspective is to remember that success in academia is only one of her life goals. To ensure full satisfaction at the end of her journey, she has to stay committed to all parts of herself and give each piece its due time and attention. She shared, "I know it's hard but sometimes you have to put the books down, and do something for yourself…Go home for a weekend, re-energize and come back rejuvenated and ready to work."

<div align="center">Dorothy</div>

Dorothy is a 48 year old PhD candidate at Iowa State University. She is currently attending school full-time and working as a graduate assistant, which is her primary source of income. Although Dorothy grew up in a working class family, her parents worked hard to make sure that all of their children received a private school education. Although she was the first in her immediate family to earn a college degree, she had many extended relatives within her family who had earned degrees.

Dorothy reported that she earned her bachelors when she was in her early 20s. She worked for many years between her bachelors and her master's education, and then returned to school because she found that she could not affect change the way she wanted to without

having a doctoral degree. She shared, "After my divorce, I had no reason to not come back. I always knew I needed that piece of paper, I just avoided it as long as I could."

When her family found out that she was coming to school, their concerns seemed to over-shadow their excitement. Everyone was concerned about her having to "downgrade" her lifestyle and challenged her decision to make sure that returning to school was what she wanted to do. She recalled, "I felt misunderstood and small. I needed support, but what I got was "what are you going to do for money? We are really going to miss your big house!"

Now that she is at the end of her academic journey, she and her family are closer than ever. Dorothy's family respects her for making a move that she believed was best for her. They all realize the sacrifice she made and understand now how smart a decision it was.

Lidia

Lidia is a 50 year old program coordinator at Iowa State University. She is currently a full-time employee while working towards her Master's degree. Lidia is a wife and mother of 5 and is originally from Iowa. She was born into a "lower-middle class" family where her father worked fulltime and her mother stayed home with the kids. Lidia recalled a childhood where she was taught "knowledge is power" and although she was encouraged to be "well-informed" about history and current events, she was not directly told that college was an option. Because neither of her parents was college educated, they did not expect her to attain a formal education. Instead they encouraged her to be knowledgeable about the world in which she lives.

Lidia grew up in a predominately White community and reported intentionally seeking out ethnic minorities to befriend. Growing up as a child during the Civil Rights movement really shaped her perception of what it meant to be Black in America. She

explained how despite the media's negative portrayal of African Americans, she grew up very proud of her heritage. She also explained how important it was for her to create a social network that looked like her. Lidia, like many of the other respondents, valued the connectedness of relating to those from a similar background and explained that even today, as she works at a predominantly White institution, it is her interactions with others like her that really fortify her. As she progresses through school, it is these relationships with her family of origin, church community and social networks outside of the university that really serve to "ground" her.

<div align="center">Regina</div>

Regina is a 34 year old faculty member. She is from a large metropolitan city where her parents still reside. Regina reported that her parents were the first Black family to live in their neighborhood, but said "the neighborhood turned increasing Black, you know, due to White flight." Because all of this happened before Regina was born, her family made sure to educate her about her family and community history.

In Regina's family education was very important to her parents, "and so out of all of the neighborhood kids, my sisters and I were the only ones who went to Catholic school, where you have to pay tuition." Her parents wanted her to receive the best quality education so that she could go on to be whatever she wanted to be. For Regina, this predominately White environment was not ideal and so she was more than happy when her Catholic school closed down and she was forced to attend public school with her friends from her neighborhood

Regina attributes her earning a doctoral degree to the teaching of her Catholic schooling and her parents' undying support of her academic goals. She admitted that it has

been hard to maintain friendships with her childhood peers and reported having cousins who distance themselves from her because of the differences in their life experiences, particularly going off to college and earning an advanced degree. She explained when she does talk to old friends or family members from back home, she struggles to know what to talk about. She shared, "It's just hard to have those conversations because I don't normally share much about what is going on with me."

<div align="center">Priscilla</div>

Priscilla is a 62 year old faculty member, teaching and conducting research here at Iowa State University. She reported, "I come from a very poor community and a very unique community of about 5 thousand African Americans…we are surrounded by White suburbs…the whole community was created out of discrimination and racism and not allowing us to move in other parts of the metropolitan area." In her community, Priscilla was surrounded by a strong neighborhood support system comprised of extended family members and "non-blood relatives." Displaying very strong pride in her community, Priscilla reported she wrote a book about her hometown, where she shared the stories of multiple neighbors who had succeeded academically. She expressed being proud to be an addition to that legacy.

Priscilla is a first generation college graduate. As an academic who is member of the African American community, she acknowledged "there are challenges in dealing in an all Black community, challenges of dealing with your own people that are decidedly different from just dealing with the dominant culture." Priscilla reported having strong supports within her family that helped her navigate the two cultures and she described her academic journey as being mainly positive. In sharing her story, she recalled multiple experiences where her family and community of origin empowered her.

Brenda

Brenda is a 42 year old faculty member at Iowa State University. Although she was born in Iowa, her father was in the military and so they moved around a lot. She shared that she grew up in a "lower middle class, maybe upper lower class" family where she was "privileged in terms of diverse experiences." She shared her experiences of being the only Black family on her street, but said she belonged to a predominantly Black church which is where she met most of her friends.

In Brenda's family education was very important. Both of her parents had at one point in their lives attended college, but neither graduated, making her and her siblings first generation college graduates. She explained how although it was expected that she and her siblings would earn college degrees, no one expected them to earn post-secondary degrees.

In her extended family system, Brenda's family is seen as an anomaly. She explained that many of her relatives are still living in Iowa and although they don't blatantly act disrespectful toward her immediate family members, "there is always a little bit of attitude when I see them or when we see them." During her interview she admitted, "It's funny because they have resented things and they have resented us in some regard, but then they want us to pay for everything, you know. And so it's like whatever."

Francesca

Francesca is a 37 year old administrator. Since earning her PhD, she has worked as an instructor, researcher, and currently focuses more on the administrative aspects of her work. She reported coming from a working class family where her father attained a GED and her mother completed high school. Throughout her childhood, Francesca was taught "If you want

to do anything, you have to go to college." They had no idea she would excel far beyond that to become the first doctor in their family.

Francesca grew up in a poor neighborhood of a large metropolitan city. She reports being raised in close proximity to her extended relatives and shared the benefits of growing up in such an environment. She admits to missing that sense of community and explains how at times she is disappointed that her children will not get to experience that kind of community-oriented upbringing. What Francesca does not miss is the poverty she grew up knowing: the crime, joblessness, and limited access to resources. She explained how her academic achievements have allowed her to raise her children in an environment where she is not constantly worried for their safety and well-being. She can comfortably provide for immediate family. Additionally, her family of origin can reap the benefits of her hard work.

Tasha

Tasha, 34 years old, recently earned her PhD from Iowa State University. She reports coming from a predominately Black community where the majority of the families were working class families. She explained that she chose to attend college close to home because as a first generation college student, she did not want to be too far away from her family, all of whom lived in close proximity to each other. Because of the culture shock she experienced adjusting to a predominately White environment, she admitted there were times she thought it might be easier to just go back home. During her interview, Tasha recited a startling statistic about African Americans – "For African Americans over the age of 25, like 1.2 % have professional or doctorate degrees." For her, the realization that not many African Americans have succeeded in the way that she was working towards served as motivation to stick things out.

Like Beatrice, Tasha recalled being asked by her family why she was choosing to remain in school for so long rather than come back home to work. She explained how in an effort to support her, her family often shared, "If it's too hard, just come home." Little did they know, their statements did not empower her, "they hurt." For Tasha, hearing such remarks from her family implied that they did not believe in her. Although she admitted to feeling painfully unsupported on her academic journey, she explained, "When they saw me walk across the stage, I think it finally hit them that what I just did is a pretty big deal."

<div align="center">Lauren</div>

Lauren, 31 years old, grew up in the midwest. She was raised by a single mother and has two brothers, six and eight years older than her. Lauren's father had limited involvement with her family since he lived in another state. She also has two sisters and 3 brothers on her father's side of the family, but has limited contact with them as well.

Neither parent nor the two older brothers graduated from high school. Growing up, there was not much money and it was not an issue to use food stamps or receive public aid for her or any of her friends in the community. After high school, she attended college with the hopes of becoming an elementary school teacher and returning to work in the Chicago Public Schools. It did not take long for her to realize that Chicago felt less and less like home and visits back "home" slowed down.

For all but a year and a half, she has remained in her college town continuing her education and working at the university. Currently a wife and mother of 2, Lauren is currently working full time in student affairs and pursuing a doctoral degree. Relationships with her family of origin, although valuable to her, have taken a backseat to caring for her children and her academic pursuits. Lauren, as uncomfortable as it was to admit, reported it

has been important for her prioritize her life as to ensure the best possible outcomes for her family – her husband and children.

<div align="center">Dorian</div>

Dorian is a 53 year old mother from Des Moines, IA. She recently earned her doctoral degree from Iowa State University. She is a first generation college graduate from a working class family. She reported living in a predominately White neighborhood, which is true for most parts of Iowa. She described her community as diverse in terms of families' economic backgrounds.

In Dorian's family, education was important. She explained how although society viewed her family as being "statistics - poor, Black, lower income, single parent after the divorce, impoverished," she felt empowered by many of her family members to work for her academic goals. Unfortunately, she was challenged by some of her older relatives who believed that she needed to stay in her place and because of their experiences with racism and discrimination feared that was setting herself up for failure. She recalled being told "This is not for you. Those are not the kinds of things that we do." In spite of the negative messages from some relatives, members of the dominant culture and members of the African American community, she worked hard and now has earned the degree she has desired since she was a child.

When exploring her family relationships currently and the changes she experienced throughout the years, Dorian feels "truly blessed to know that so many people are sharing this with [her]." She reported that people are "genuinely happy" for her and this has allowed her really relish her accomplishment.

Beatrice

Beatrice is a 25 year old first-generation college graduate currently working at ISU. Although she was born and raised in a working class family, she currently identifies as lower middle class.

Beatrice comes from a close-knit family system from the midwest. She was raised in close proximity to most of her extended relatives, and regularly got together with the whole family for meals and celebrations. Although she can now appreciate her family relationships, as a child she saw her family as being smothering and overly involved in each others' lives.

As a talented and gifted child, she was encouraged from a very young age to excel in school. Her family members, particularly her parents, stressed the importance of getting an education and her family was consistently supportive of her academic pursuits. She recalled the experience of her family all rallying together to throw her a "trunk party" after she graduated from high school. Everyone pitched in to buy her school supplies and make sure that her transition to college was smooth and that she had what she would need when she left home. Beatrice reported during one of her interviews, "I still have supplies from that party…they went all out." This was just one example of the support Beatrice received from her family of origin.

As she progressed through school, she described her family relationships as changing for the better. As a result of going away to college, she was able get distance from her relatives, which helped her mature. She explained that "college allowed me to see my family for what they really were, and I learned to love them for that." Looking back on her upbringing, she is able to see how her family's love and support motivated her and how their questions of "when are you coming home?" frustrated her. She expressed feeling pressured to

hurry up and finish and then move back home. She admits during her interview, "I never had any intention of going back."

Data Collection

In November 2007, an email message was sent to 10 African American women employed by Iowa State University describing the study and asking if they would be willing to be interviewed, along with an Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved informed consent form (see Appendix D). Three respondents replied with interest in the study and served as participants in my pilot study (For a detailed description of the pilot study, see Appendix E). In addition to the three women from the pilot study, I later sent revised recruitment emails (see Appendix C) to17 potential respondents, including three women who learned about the study through word of mouth. In the revised email women were informed that this study intended to focus on the experiences of African American women whose culture and environment are significantly different than their family of origin because of their family's working-class status. Women who identified as coming from working-class backgrounds self-selected to be part of the study. One potential respondent replied to the recruitment email indicating that she did not fit the criteria for the study because she did not come from a working-class background. Respondents were 13 upwardly mobile African American women who were first-generation college graduates from lower- and working-class families. I stopped recruiting respondents after meeting with the 13 women because the data became saturated, meaning that no news themes emerged from the data.

For this study, I conducted multiple interviews with respondents to gain information relevant to the three foci presented by Seidman (1991) who suggested that interviews focus on: (a) the participants' life history, (b) the concrete details of the participants' present

experiences in the topic area of the study, and (c) reflection on the meaning of participants' experiences. To ensure that respondents had ample time to share their stories, I met with some women more than once. By conducting multiple interviews, I was able to gain a wealth of information about respondents' experiences.  Although interviews were scheduled for an hour, most interviews lasted about 90 minutes.

At the start of the meetings, we established rapport by briefly sharing our reactions to the topic of interest. We also reviewed the informed consent document and discussed the specifics of the study. During the interview, participants were given further information about the study and given an opportunity to ask questions about my interest in this research topic. Respondents were told that I, too, come from a lower class background and am now in the process of working to change my social class status. I briefly shared some of the changes I've noticed in my family interactions since earning my Bachelor's degree and told respondents that such changes are what prompted my interest in this topic.

I used a semi-structured interview protocol to provide a base from which the interview could be expanded (see Appendix A). The use of a semi-structured interview approach provided direction to my conversations with the respondents, while allowing them space to express their own opinions and ideas in their own words (Esterberg, 2002). Additional questions emerged during each interview, which prompted women to clarify and explore their experiences in greater depth.

The interviews took place in convenient yet private locations. Interview locations included women's offices, work conference rooms, and private residences. One interview was conducted in my private residence. The respondent indicated that she wanted to meet for her second interview after work hours and expressed a desire to get away from her house.

She was invited to my home and accepted the invitation. The interview took place at my dining room table. Following the interview, the respondent indicated that she felt very comfortable during the interview and visited for an additional two hours, discussing not only upward mobility and family-related experiences, but also experiences of being married graduate students.

I audio-recorded the interviews with the respondents' consent and also jotted down notes on the interview guide as they spoke. I started the interviews by gathering demographic information pertinent to the topic, level of education, age, and self-described social class status. Next, I asked specific questions related to their interactions with their family of origin and changes that they may have noticed in their interactions since attending college. Respondents were asked to expound on their emotional reactions to their family interactions as well as their means of coping with resultant emotional distress.

Data Analysis

To ensure that I did not impose themes on the data, but that all themes were actually derived from the data, I used a constant comparative method of data analysis where I repeatedly explored new and different ways to interpret the data, always remaining aware of how my prior experiences and biases influenced my thinking. The process of analyzing the data started as I transcribed the first interview and continued until the emergent theme document listed all issues and themes that emerged in conversations with the respondents.

Information gained from the interviews, supplemental materials, memos and field notes were used in analyzing data. I transcribed all of the audio-taped interviews verbatim and coded them along with the supplemental materials. I analyzed the data using three basic

coding procedures: open, axial, and selective, or focused, coding methods. Each of these procedures will be described below.

Open coding is when the researcher works intensively with the data to become familiar with emerging themes (Esterberg, 2002). The goal of open coding is to let themes in the data emerge naturally as the researcher reads over the data, line by line, identifying themes and categories (Charmaz, 2006). I reviewed both the transcripts and the supplemental materials line by line without preconceived themes, which is the essence of open coding (Esterberg). Esterberg states that, depending on the researcher's learning style, he or she may use a number of different strategies to identify themes. Because I am a visual learner, I like to physically manipulate the data. Some people work better with computer programs, but I preferred to sit on the floor surrounded by my materials. I wrote codes in the margins of the transcripts to note key phrases as they came up.

During the next phase of data analysis, the axial coding phase, I categorized the data and put it "back together in new ways" by exploring how themes related to each other (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 97). While the open coding process broke the data down into little pieces, the axial coding process reassembled the data into meaningful parts. From the process of comparing codes and identifying relationships among them, codes were clustered into categories and assigned category labels. The term "axial" comes from the process of "coding around the axis of a category," linking categories in the development of a theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Some of the categories included: coping strategies, family support, personal accomplishments, family traditions and relationship outcomes. The initial codes are presented in Appendix F.

During the axial coding phase, I also identified the core category. The core category is the central phenomenon to which all other categories relate (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Criteria for core category status include centrality in relation to other categories, frequency of occurrence, and inclusiveness and ease with which it related to other categories (Strauss & Corbin). After spending time coding data, one category emerged with high frequency, and connected to many of the other categories. In this study, conflicting cultural experiences that led to the emergence of a bicultural identity was identified as the core category. When it was clear that the women's conflicting cultural experiences was the core category, I created categories around this core in the development of the theory.

After a central theme had been identified and validated by respondents, the remaining categories were explored. I compared the initial themes across the respondents and looked for similarities and differences in their experiences. I worked to answer questions such as "Why are women experiencing a change in family relationships?", "Why are they struggling to stay connected to family members?", "Where are they now?", "When did things change?", "What are the outcomes?" Additionally, as I reviewed the data, I looked for answers to questions such as "How do life experiences differ before and after going to college?", "How do changes in relationships occur?", "How do dual identities emerge?" and "How does a bicultural identity influence family relationships?" These questions helped to uncover relationships among categories.

It was during the final coding phase, selective coding, that I began to place constructs in a model in the development of a theory and relate them to one another to tell a story (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I coded the data with the main goal of understanding what leads to the development of a dual bicultural identity. During the

selective coding phase of data analysis, I identified examples of the categories that emerged during the open and axial coding phases by purposely scanning all other areas of the data to identify where those themes emerged. Because each of the interviews was transcribed and saved as Microsoft Word documents, I was able to use the "Edit - Find" option to quickly search an interview for the mention of certain key words. For example, I searched for key words or phrases like "identity," "conflict," "two worlds," and "changes" when I investigated data to find evidence of the bicultural identity category. I then gathered quotations from the data that supported the themes. By using direct quotes, I provided evidence that the conclusions I drew were consistent with the data collected.

During the axial and selective coding phases of data analysis, coding was done according to a paradigm, a visual model. A paradigm is a perspective used in conjunction with grounded theory methodology that helps to systematically gather and order data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Developed by Strauss (1987) and refined by Strauss and Corbin (1998), the coding paradigm recognizes that one must understand the nature of the relationship between structure and process in order to understand why and how events occur.

The basic components of the paradigm include the following as suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1998):

*Central Phenomenon* – Within grounded theory the central phenomenon or central theme is chosen from one category as a starting point from which to link the other categories. In this study, the central phenomenon was conflicting worldviews which led to the development of a bicultural identity.

*Causal Conditions* – Causal conditions influence the central phenomenon. They represent the events or variables that lead to the central phenomenon. Three conditions were identified as

preceding conflicting cultural experiences: Experiencing a change in status, experiencing

changing in family relationships, challenging reactions from family.

*Action Strategies* – Strategies refer to the tactics or responses respondents use to manage or

understand the central phenomenon. They are tactics that people use in response to issues

they encounter; purposeful acts done to solve a problem. Some of the strategies identified

include code-switching, relying on social support, and use of spirituality.

*Consequences/ Outcomes* – Outcomes are the result that follow an action. They are the

consequence of using various action strategies. In this study, the use of various strategies

helped women manage their emerging bicultural identity.

Figure 1 illustrates the components of the model and how they relate to one another.

*Figure 1.* Components of the model

| **Causal Conditions** | → | **Central Theme** | → | **Strategies (Actions/Interactions)** | → | **Consequences /Outcomes** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
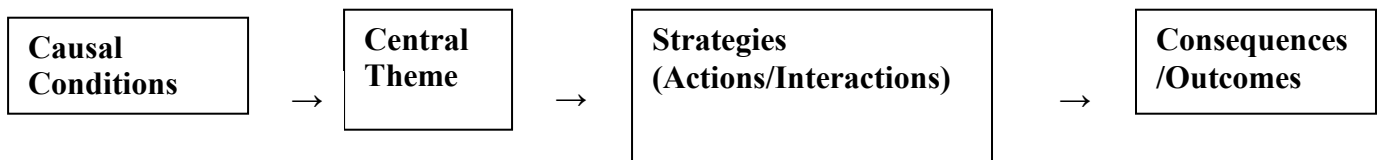
I integrated and refined the model as I explored respondents' experiences. When no

new categories emerged from the data, I knew my categories were saturated (Strauss &

Corbin, 1990).

## Coding Example

To illustrate the coding process, I will describe the emergence of a category labeled

code-switching, which will be covered at length in the next chapter. Code-switching was

ultimately categorized as a strategy for dealing with culture clashes with family members.

As I openly coded one of the interviews, I highlighted a respondent's statement: "When I do go and see my cousins that are around my age group, my first cousins, I can actually go and start speaking like them. I can understand their talk and not speak differently. I can go right back into that environment… I never wanted any of my cousins to believe that I felt that I was better than they are because I went away to college." I coded this segment as "changes in dialect" and whenever I read about a respondent presenting herself differently to either her family of origin or others in her life, I labeled those behaviors as either "altering self-presentation", "downplaying experiences" or "changes in dialect." I saw all of these as behaviors that respondents used to manage relationships by presenting an acceptable "self" to others. All of the events with these labels were merged together under the same category called code-switching. According to Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) code-switching is the process of shifting between dialects, languages and styles of communication in order to meet the conflicting demands and expectations of different groups.

Although the concepts under this "code-switching" category were similar in that they all have to do with changes in self-presentation during interactions with others, there were some differences among them. These differences became clearer during the axial coding phases, where I compared the "code-switching" codes to each other. I explored similarities and differences between instances of the behavior. I compared various women's experiences with "changing dialects," and "downplaying experiences." I wanted to know what attributes distinguished the behaviors.

I started to explore how "code-switching" related to the larger phenomenon of conflicting cultural experiences. Although the majority of the code-switching behaviors were presented after the change in relationships had occurred, some talked about choosing to code-

switch to avoid having relationships change. I initially considered code-switching as resulting from the attainment of an advanced degree, leading to the relationship change. I compared it to the other *causal conditions* and realized that it did not fit because the women talked about using these code-switching behaviors when they described other relationship management strategies, such a "spirituality" and "reliance on social support." I came to understand code-switching not as the activity that leads to changes in relationships, but as a behavior used when a change in relationship is identified.

Through exploring the unique experiences around each woman's use of code-switching, I identified patterns in the respondents' behavior. To develop my grounded theory, I analyzed each theme with the same rigor that I explored the "code-switching" category. The resulting theory delineates what situations led to the development of a bicultural identity among college-educated African American women from working-class backgrounds and also describes strategies for how these women manage their emerging bicultural identity. By forming groups of themes, and placing them into the visual model, I was able to generate a theory.

Establishing Trustworthiness

Qualitative research must be rigorous and credible.  To validate the theory, I performed four tasks: (1) compared the visual model with the raw data to see if the model could explain most of the cases; (2) received input on model development in my qualitative research class (HDFS 604) on how well the model depicted the experiences of the women; (3) received feedback on the model from a respondent about how well it fit her case; and (4) based on the feedback received, I altered the model to illustrate the family-related experiences of college educated African American women.

Additional strategies were utilized throughout this study to verify the rigor of the study, including triangulation of data, peer debriefings, and member checks to ensure credibility. Triangulation involves the use of multiple data sources to confirm the findings of the study (Merriam, 2002). I used in-depth semi-structured interviews along with supplemental materials from respondents as my primary source of data collection. Data from memos and field notes were also used for additional support for the findings. Because the interviews were conducted in person, information such as body language, tone, word choice and facial expressions were observed to give increased meaning to the stories told by respondents.

Peer debriefing refers to the use of a colleague or peer to comment on the specifics of the research project, such as data collection methods and findings as well as the overall research process (Creswell, 2002; Merriam, 2002). I used 2 fellow graduate students as peer debriefers who evaluated the interview questions for the research participants, offered suggestions on the design and implementation of the study, and checked the model as it emerged. I also elicited feedback from my qualitative research class members. The use of peer debriefers helped me to keep my personal biases and perceptions in check.

Member checks involve sharing with respondents the researcher's understandings and interpretations of their words to assure their accuracy (Merriam, 2002).  Throughout the interview process, I consistently asked for clarification from the participants to ensure that their thoughts, opinions, and experiences were clearly understood and recorded. Additionally, I selected two respondents from the pilot study to perform member checks. I gave them completed transcripts of the first interview and asked them to review them for

accuracy and provide corrections. Both the respondents briefly skimmed the transcripts, but neither offered feedback.

Another respondent was asked to provide feedback on the analysis and the emerging model. It was during our second interview that I went over the emerging model with her. She stated that she could identify with each of the components of the model and offered feedback related to the outcomes. This respondent was selected to check the model because in a previous interview she offered helpful information about the use of words such as demands, expectations, and obligations. She explained that those words had negative connotations and recommended the use of less accusatory language when questioning respondents about their family- related experiences.

<div align="center">Ethical Considerations</div>

The nature of qualitative research requires the researcher to intrude into the private thoughts and personal experiences of the research respondents. Thus, an important consideration becomes, "how does the researcher gather "thick" descriptive data necessary to accomplish the goals of the research without doing harm to the research participants?" (Merriam, 2002, p. 29). Because African American women from Iowa State University were respondents in this study and the information gathered was of a personal nature, questions about the confidentiality of the data and anonymity of the respondents must be addressed. In this study, I followed the procedures outlined below to ensure the ethical treatment of research participants.

(1) The research respondents were informed about the nature of the study, processes utilized, and how the data would be used and disseminated. Each research participant

was asked to sign a consent form prior to the interview and was advised that she could withdraw from the study at any time.

(2) I assured anonymity by storing all audio-taped interviews, field notes, consent forms, and any identifying information in a locked cabinet at my home. For individual interviews, respondents were assigned pseudonyms which were assigned to their interview transcripts so as not to reveal their real names. Research respondents were identified by a pseudonym in field notes and the final research report as well.

(3) Approval for the study was obtained from the Human Subjects Review Committee at Iowa State University (see Appendix D).

**Causal Conditions:
Factors That
Contribute to
Bicultural Identity
Emergence**

- Experiencing a change in social status

- Experiencing changes in family relationships

- Challenging Reactions from Family

**Conflicting Worldviews
(Life Experiences)**

- New Perspectives on Prior Experiences

- Conflicting Emotions

**Management
Strategies**

- Isolating worlds

- Code-switching

- Forgiveness

- Negotiating relationships

- Reliance on social support

- Self-nurturing

- Remembering motivations for academic pursuits

- Spirituality

- Avoidance

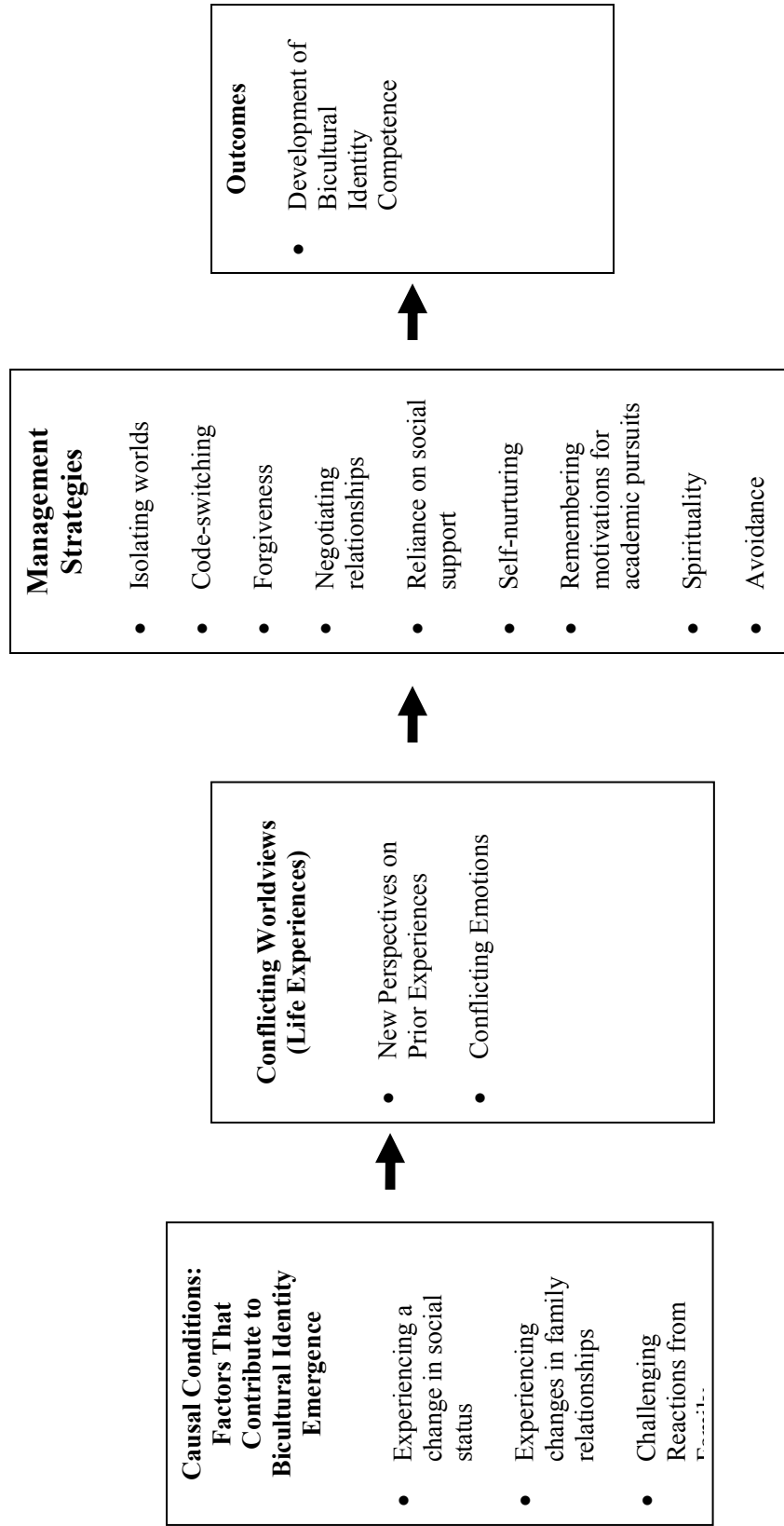**Outcomes**

- Development of Bicultural Identity Competence

*Figure 2.* Framework of Dual Identity Management.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A theory emerged from my interpretation of data gathered to answer the research question "What is the process by which African American women from working-class families manage relationships with members of their family of origin during and/or following the attainment of a college degree?" I analyzed the data following the procedures of open, axial, and selective coding (Charmaz, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This multiple coding facilitated the theoretical integration of the findings, which led to the construction of the theory of bicultural identity development among college-educated women from working-class backgrounds. The theory is divided into interconnected statements that address the phenomenon of bicultural identity development. As a part of the theoretical integration process, the major concepts of the constructed theory were linked within an organizational scheme (see Figure 2). Thus, the concepts of the constructed theory can be easily connected to one another, for this organizational scheme is basically a graphic design of the theory.

The following grounded theory was generated based on interviews with 13 college-educated African American women in Iowa about their family-related experiences: College-educated African American women from working-class backgrounds have experiences that cause a bicultural identity to emerge. These experiences include changes in social status and changes in family relationships. These changes cause the women to engage in a process of self and family exploration. To manage the conflicts they encounter between their various social spheres (personal and academic/professional), African American women use a host a strategies. These management strategies include code-switching, negotiating relationships with family members, and reliance on social support, and are aimed at managing both their

emerging identity and their relationships with members of their family of origin. As a result of using various management strategies, the women solidify their bicultural identity and develop bicultural identity competence.

Using the data from interview transcripts, supplemental materials provided by respondents, and researcher notes, the sections that follow will provide details about the model including: (a) factors that precede bicultural identity development, (b) conflicting life experiences, (c) management strategies, (d) and outcomes from using the strategies. In the discussion of the findings, I explain the interactional process by which I placed components into an overall framework.

*Causal Conditions*

*Experiencing a Change in Status.* Experiencing a change in status is the first factor that contributed to the emergence of a bicultural identity in African American women. All13 of the respondents acknowledged that they were in the process of, or had previously experienced, a change in social status. They felt that their status had changed because they were in a different social position. They reported making more money, living in nicer and safer neighborhoods than those in which they grew up, and being financially stable. They reported that their education had opened up new opportunities for them in the realm of employment. Especially for the respondents from lower class backgrounds, attainment of a post-secondary degree meant that they were making more money than ever before and have been able to move from being a member of the lower or working class, to being a member of the middle class.

When asked about changes in status, respondents focused on class from both a financial standpoint (e.g., low, working, middle class), as well as a social standpoint (e.g.,

being a part of an elite crowd). Respondents who were still in graduate school noted that they had moved to a higher class socially, but that they still had very limited financial resources, which meant that their social class was different but that their socioeconomic class may not have changed. Regina's response to a question about her current class status illustrated this point. She initially described herself as "broke", but went on to clarify,

> Let me see. I would probably, honestly, I would probably say that I live middle class, but I need a few more dollars in my salary for it to actually be middle class. Like if I could pay off my loans, you know. There are definitely some things out there, but as far as people characterize middle class, it's owning a home and you know having access to different resources, I guess I am middle class. But I am by far not rich. Um, maybe between working and middle class. I don't know. Well with being faculty, I guess I would say middle class even though all of the pieces are not there. (Regina)

Regina felt that having certain credentials automatically made one a member of a more elite class, regardless of finances. Like Regina, Priscilla felt that just being a member of the faculty changed her class status. She shared, "I think that regardless of any other holdings or wealth, the very fact that you might be a professor on this campus kind of puts you into a different class." Likewise, Brenda explained,

> Well, to me there is sort of different levels of being educated. One and the most, in some ways as an educator, one of the most crass senses, what education means is a better job. So, I mean like crass in terms in that it doesn't really value or appreciate education. What is does is allows you the lessons to commodify knowledge. And so, you get a degree in business, that means that you can make X amount of dollars doing these kinds of things. And so in one sense it makes you economically able to move

up. We say socio-economically because the restaurants you eat in or the nice neighborhood. So in one sense to me being educated affords you economic stability. (Brenda)

In her response, she acknowledged how education provides a means for financial upward mobility which is consistent with research. Studies show that college educated individuals make an average of 1.8 times the annual earnings of workers with a high school diploma (U.S. Census, 2006). All respondents acknowledged that because they have attained a formal education, they are currently or will eventually make more money than many members of their family of origin. Dorothy shared, "One day, I'll probably make more money than my mom and dad put together."

Although Dorothy anticipated making more money once she graduates, she still understood the distinction between reality and perception of her status. She shared, "I am on loan money and so this is kind of an illusion," which she explained to mean that although she can meet her financial needs, she only appears to be financially stable. Her "stability" is not really stability considering that she is going to have to pay back all of the money and although she appears to be well-off financially, she is really in debt. She offered the following,

Education just means that I, on a very plain level, I can apply for jobs that I couldn't apply for before. I have the potential to have a better salary. Maybe be more in debt in some ways. I mean, maybe be exposed to the broader things in life, which in the past we would naturally assume, culturally, that that's better, but we know that that's not always better. More is not always better. But it does, you know, when I think about being able to have an apartment that doesn't have bugs. Being able to drive a car.

Being able to go out and buy me a pair of shoes. Have a house full of groceries. Can give in the offering. You know. (Dorothy)

Resonating with the idea of appearing to be financially set while living off of loans, Jayne acknowledged how her assistantship and her loans combined were enough to "dress the part of middle class." She expressed feeling "fortunate" to have the means to maintain a middle class lifestyle, but went on to say, "…you cannot measure middle class on only a financial basis; you have to consider cultural and social capital to go with the financial capital to determine someone's middle class status."

Lidia understood that just by being on a college campus, a person is perceived as being a part of a different social class. Social class has to do with what activities one engages in and with whom these activities are shared. Examples of activities reserved for the upwardly mobile or the middle class might include taking vacations, dining out, and shopping for leisure in addition to necessity. Six of the thirteen respondents acknowledged having opportunities to engage in these activities, while members of their family of origin cannot. Francesca, a respondent who saw her change in status as having a significant impact on family relationships stated, "If you make 70 thousand and your family makes 15 thousand, how can you fill that gap? It's impossible."

*Changes in Family Relationships.* Changes in family relationships are the second factor that preceded the emergence of a bicultural identity in African American women. Changes in family relationships seemed to occur on multiple levels and it appears that some of the changes were initiated by the respondent while others were initiated by members of their family of origin.

Eight of the thirteen respondents explained that family members believed they had achieved financial security, and should thus begin helping family members financially. When exploring changes in family relationships, Francesca shared: "I think that there is – you know, every so often you do get an undercurrent of- there is the expectation that I have more financial resources." Sylvia shared a similar belief among her family members: "I think at times they think we have it like that and think that we have more than we really do."

What family members may not know is that their student is not actually making more money, but that she is living on loans that she will someday have to pay back. Dorothy shared,

There is a notion of, I got a little bit more in the loan package then I expected this year and I had a couple of good windfalls with a consulting that I did and I won this grant thing, so there were a couple of little easy kind of money coming my way. And there was this notion of not really wanting to publicize that per say, to the family for a number of reasons. And it was really weird and I am calling it on it. It was like, so will they think that I can pay money for them or do something for them. Or will it appear that I am bragging, you know. And you don't want to necessarily let people know… And it's converging at a time where I think I need to think about something pertaining to money and about myself as a person that has and who is not on the struggling tip. I have a new identity. It's like a line: "Do you have any money?" "No, I don't have any." Or "well, yea, I got a couple thousand in the bank. I can lend you 20 bucks." But then you say, "naw, I ain't got no money." Because that's been the tape. And so when you have that money you think "Well if I give you 20 today, will you ask me for 40 the next time? (Dorothy)

Even women who had completed their degrees expressed concern over family members' expectations for financial assistance. Dorothy discussed the challenge of having more money and feeling like her mom may be "taking advantage" of the situation:

What I am running into now is because I probably don't talk struggle no more and I am really not sensing a struggle. I pretty much paid the bills and I got some debt, but I ain't tripping. Before I was like, it was everything. I got to make it through. Now, with my mom, we share a phone and so she's like I am gonna pay $20 on it this month, knowing that $20 ain't gone cut it. And so I picked up the slack. With no issue, but then she was like, "Thanks." There is this sense that now I see you are flowing a bit better and so, there is this assumption that I will take care of it now, which is very different. I am like, I'll just take care of it. Where before I would have been like "Look, I can't do this. Don't even think about it. (Dorothy)

Communication becomes a problem because experiences and even vocabulary have become more dissimilar. Lauren added when she talks to her family about any topic, she is accused of using "college words." She recalled repeatedly having her family members say "I don't know what you are talking about. That must be one of those college words or something." She explained during her interview that she was not actually trying to use "college words" when talking to her family, but instead she was perceived that way anytime her family could not understand her. To Lauren, her language had not changed. From her family's perspective, she has definitely changed and college was to blame.

Regina acknowledged that there were strains in the family system resulting from her earning an advanced degree. She explained:

Relationships within the family haven't changed, but I think there are challenges, like I remember I was talking about my aunts and uncles, like their expectations for all of the kids, and this is definitely on my mother's side. Their expectations are for you to go to college and you know, become something great or whatever and I notice strains with some of my cousins who don't do that. Like they don't like to come around or they don't like to hear family members talking about "you need to do this, you need to do this like your cousins." …It's like getting a lecture at family gathers. You know and you just don't want to hear that, especially when you are an adult. They don't like those comparisons. My cousins, they can be very distant. (Regina)

Whether it is described as a change in relationship or a strained relationship, seven of the thirteen respondents could identify how their family members viewed them as different because they earned advanced degrees.

*Challenging Reactions from Family.* Family members' reactions to respondents' academic success varied from proud and accepting to challenging and invalidating. Although respondents primarily experienced positive reactions from their family about their academic pursuits, there were times when family members challenged respondents' choices. In these cases, respondents felt that their aspirations were not supported. Dorian shared the following vignette,

Even though I felt like I was insulated by my mom and dad and several of my aunts and uncles who really encouraged and valued and pushed education, you know, I had family members who just said, you know, you need to stay in your place. This is not for you. Those are not the kinds of things that we do. So, yea, intracultural messages, I think were just as strong and probably more damaging for me because they are from

people that you look to trust, people that you hope are going to nurture you. And I

had a great grandmother that, unfortunately, she grew up first generation out of

slavery and just really I think was hindered by that mindset. And would say all of the

time, um, you know, education is not for you. That is for the white man. It is not for

you and so you don't need to think about that. You need to think about going to work.

And you know that's the life that she grew up knowing, the environment that she

grew up in and so when she died I don't think that I had gone back to college, but I

don't know that she would have supported that or understood it, more than anything.

Yea, not necessarily, supported it. She just didn't understand why because that wasn't

the way that she grew up. (Dorian)

Four other respondents shared similar experiences where they were discouraged by

family members because of their academic choices. These women reported feeling that their

identity was challenged by their family members when they expressed an interest in attaining

a college degree or shared information about their college experience.

Bell (1990) reported, "As an oppressed group, upwardly mobile African Americans

are often forced to surrender their cultural identity of Blackness, thereby splitting off a

critical part of their personal identity" (p. 464). This presents a possible explanation for why

family members challenge the academic pursuits of relatives. Family members may become

fearful that by pursuing further education, their relative is losing a part of herself.

One sub-theme under Challenging Reactions from Family was being perceived as

"better than us." The word "bourgie," which is synonymous with arrogant, came up when

respondents' related family members' perceptions of those who have achieved academic

success. Another phrase, "better than," captures the same "you think you are better than us"

concept that many African Americans are faced with because they chose college. As a result of going to college, some African American women were accused of "acting white," which means that family members believed they had lost touch with what it means to be Black and instead were acting like members of the dominant culture. Tasha explained,

> Yea, it's just an interesting dynamic. I think, that whole thinking that I am better than them has also come up within my daughter's father family. That has come up with them as well. And it is just in little things that they do and act and say around me when I am visiting with them that gives me the feeling that they think that I think I am better than them. I don't know if it's the way I walk, and talk, and act. (Tasha)

Tasha recalled being called "Bourgie." She explained that her family members would say,

> "She thinks she is all of that and she is trying to do, trying to separate herself from all of this" and for me I have never acted, I have always acted differently I guess you could say. As far as, I hate to stereotype, but "acting White," the whole "acting white" thing is a big thing for them and I guess I am not ghetto enough, but I hate to use those types of terms, but I guess they expect that me being Black I would act a certain way based on what they have experienced in their environment. And for me to not act that way is different to them. And I think that I am better than them. (Tasha)

In response to being called "White," Lidia shared the following:

> I am not trying to be anything other than who I am and I have never tried to be anything other than Black. I have probably assimilated to the culture of commerce in the US which is the White culture, but that doesn't mean that I have forgotten or that I am unaware of the day to day struggles of my people. (Lidia)

Being perceived as "acting White," "thinking I am better than them," or "forgetting one's roots" seemed to be the families' perception of three of the respondents. For Brenda the use of those statements was oppressive. She shared,

> One of the dumbest statements that I have ever heard and I haven't really processed all of what it means to me, was "aww you so white, you are not being Black", or "whatever you are doing, you are not being Black." Ok. As if there is a really limited way of being Black… And it is almost like a you know, you could read all kinds of things on the psychology of oppression and the psychology behind slavery and all of that and it is that no longer, there is not even a boundary of, but you will keep yourself within the boundary that has been made. And a lot of times when people say that or when people have said that to me, it's a little bit troubling, but it is really in the long term not, in the long run it is not. (Brenda)

For some African Americans, a change in status is upsetting to other Blacks and represents a person losing touch with their African American identity. There is a song by well-known rapper Kanye West, where he accuses college-educated African Americans of having sacrificed a part of themselves by earning an advanced degree. He raps, "They stole your 'street-ness'. They give you a degree, but take away your street credibility". Dorothy resonated with this idea in the following excerpt.

> It is so funny that you say that because that has been the thing that my mom has said about me for the longest. She says, "You got book sense, no common sense." And not to make that sound bad, but I have had people look at me like that before. (Dorothy)

Family members may experience the women as engaging in activities and carrying themselves in a way that is traditionally associated with people of European decent. Three

specific activities that were criticized by relatives were reported by respondents: getting a piercing on body parts other than the ears, becoming a vegetarian, and "getting together with friends over coffee." In reaction to getting a bellybutton ring, Dorothy stated that she was confronted by a relative who said "Who do you think you are? You know you weren't raised like that. College has really changed you." Glenda reported receiving similar feedback, "you are just doing that because you moved up to Iowa and now you live with all of those White people" and I say no. That is not the case."

Dorothy described having her identity challenged by family and community members as a "Black issue" or something unique to African Americans. She said, "We have that whole Black issue of "whoa, you don't want to act like you are better than somebody." We got that whole stuff. White folks don't have to deal with that. You know, "don't be smelling yourself, now." Within the African American community it is important to remain humble and not let success "consume" you and Dorothy explained the roots of this perspective: That sort of pride is "sinful. We must never, not ever forget where we come from because we may make the mistake of thinking that we are great when in reality it is God who is great. He is the one who has blessed us and so we must always give Him the glory." Lidia gave an alternative reason for such an emphasis on humility. She explained that we are "standing on the shoulders of those who paved the way for us and so we are just one of many. Past leaders, our ancestors, they all worked to crack open the door, now it is our turn to knock it off the hinges."

Hill (2003) talks about African American history and the value placed on collectivism as being the main reason we have to remain grounded and humble as African Americans. There seems to be a fear that should individuals focus too much on self, they will neglect to

fulfill their duties to the larger African American community. This has led some African Americans to perceive a focus on self as negative.

For the women in the study, their focus on self was rooted in the community. Each shared strongly believing that it was because of their family centered upbringing and allegiance to the community that they were able to feel good about their current place in life. They each hoped to contribute to improving the well-being of those in the African American community through self-betterment.

Now that I have explored the causal conditions, I will next present that central phenomenon, the central theme of the study.

*Central Phenomenon: Conflicting Worldviews (Life Experiences)*

The central theme of this study is the awareness of conflicting life experiences and worldviews, which necessitates the development of a bicultural identity during and following the attainment of an advanced degree. This theme captures the essence of the family-related experiences of first-generation, college-educated African Americans from working-class families. Data gathered indicated that African American women became aware of conflicting expectations as they progressed through academia. All of the respondents identified challenges of managing competing personal and professional identities. This finding is consistent with research by Bell (1990) who writes,

> Beyond the pressures to conform to professional standards and dominant cultural values found in organizations, Black professional women must also manage expectations, values, and roles in relation to the Black community – a community with it's own norms regarding the status of women. (p. 460)

Under this category are two themes that further capture respondents' conflicting life experiences: (1) New Perspectives on Prior Experiences, and (2) Conflicting Emotions. Both of these will be covered next.

*New Perspectives on Prior Experiences.* The first theme that emerged under conflicting life experiences was respondents' new perspectives on prior experiences. As a result of going to college, people tend to experience changes in their perspectives, values and interests. Carolyn Cutrona was quoted in the Iowa State Daily (2008) as saying, "When people go off to college, you grow up in certain ways and maybe your values change in certain ways." When respondents were asked about the process of change, some identified experiences that challenged their values. These experiences forced the respondents to examine the origin of their values and for some led to altered perspectives. Glenda who works in a predominately White office shared the challenges of learning to trust White women. She explained,

> I had to deal with White females approaching me as friends. I had never had that kind
>
> of experience up to this point. Ever! I was resistant at first and I thought they are so
>
> different. I was not comfortable accepting that difference. But once I did, my
>
> friendship group here has become very dear to me. (Glenda)

Glenda acknowledged that although she was comfortable interacting with Whites on a superficial level, she was not comfortable developing more intimate relationships. Only after spending a considerable amount of time reflecting on her family and community friendship circles, which were not culturally diverse, was Glenda able broaden her social network and develop very meaningful relationships with a diverse group of women.

Dorothy also broadened her "horizon" and attributed her change to college. She explained that as a student, she came across a pile of free books in the hallway. While looking through the pile, which she always does, she came across a book about the subtle power of verbal abuse. She said she had initially picked up the book because she was experiencing some interpersonal issues at her church, but that as she read the book and learned about verbal abuse, she started reflecting on the way her mother communicated with her. Dorothy explained,

> I do remember times that I had to tell my mom, "You know, you can't talk to me like that" in so many words. You know she would like, it's almost like she would attack me with her words and you know we be like, it ain't happening no more. And so you could see how she was struggling trying to let go and we later talked about it and we were very, very close and we talked about it, but it was hard for her to let it go and I could have been very disrespectful and we could have had severed ties, but I just didn't want to do it that way. And for some reason it worked out that by and by then she was fine. If we didn't speak for a couple of days or something like that, it would be cool. But I was just like mom I am not going to let you assault my character because you know sometimes she would say, "you are always… and you are like this" and "no, this has nothing to do with who I am, this has something to do with this issue right here." And we would be in the car driving and it would be so uncomfortable but I was standing up for who I was becoming and I was not going to let anyone talk to me any kind of way. (Dorothy)

When asked to identify specific challenges faced within the family during or following the attainment of an advanced degree, Dorothy admitted that after she returned

home after graduating from college, she perceived her family as being less sophisticated. Although "embarrassing to say out loud," she shared,

> I think I was, you become snooty and you don't really realize it because you do think like – you never say it but you think like people back there don't have it as much. I didn't notice the change, but my mom would point it out and I would reject it over the years. She would say, "you were different" and I would say no I wasn't. (Dorothy)

She went on to say,

> I think I was like the banana in the tailpipe sort of thing. The banana in the tailpipe, where all of a sudden you got a little 'edumacation', as old folks would call it, so now you are kind of up on yourself and you think that you're learning something and so your diction changes and you don't relax anymore. You want to be very much, "this is how it is instead of "what's up" and you know we are very careful of our speech. I don't know, it's just we are like I got a little somethin' somethin' about me and I think that it might be subtle and I think it's the notion that knowledge that expands and somewhat puffs up and so you look back at the hood, even though I wasn't necessarily in the hood, but the neighborhood but you kind of maybe think that you know a little bit more. (Dorothy)

Respondents were respectful of their family members by emphasizing the value of their family members' street knowledge and wisdom developed as a result of their life experiences. Lauren spoke of having a different knowledge set as a result of going to college. She acknowledged that through formal education, people are taught things that they may not have been taught had they stayed at home. She reported, "The information learned, although different from what is taught at home, is not more valuable." She explained,

When I first came to school here from Chicago going back home became strange. Like, I started to feel out of place, so I really didn't go back home anymore for more than like a week at a time. Every summer, I stayed here and even now it's odd. I am now the cousin from Iowa. I am no longer the cousin from Chicago, so it's different. (Lauren)

Sylvia explained a similar experience as she had also done some reflecting on her relationship with her mother and declared,

I have been reflecting a lot on things about my relationship with my mom you know and certain things like how I grew up as a kid and just some things about why I am so independent and not very understanding of the fact that there are people who would and could help me… I can say somewhat when I went to college, I think that you learn different things about yourself and you learn about what you value and things are different in your world at college than they are at home. I always knew that some things that happened at home, weren't good. But going off to college, I think actually gave me the gumption to be able to say or at least to decide, you know, I want to do something different, I don't want this to be my life. And at times that would affect my relationship with my mom because I didn't know how to communicate that I don't want this for my life and when I come home to spend time it bothers me or concerns me that this is what is happening at home… It was more so like internally processing what was happening. (Sylvia)

Seven respondents identified aspects of their upbringing that could be described as deficient. Specifically when related to preparation for the world of work, five of the thirteen respondents did not feel prepared. Bell (1990) reported that because many African American

women are the first of their race and gender to pursue advanced degrees and academic positions, "they are left to their own resources for actualizing their visions of professional achievement." Again, Sylvia really resonated with this concept and shared,

> As I am thinking about upward mobility and coming from working class families, it might be that we are taught, sort of trained at how to be good workers in a job. But maybe we are not necessarily prepared for how to maintain a career and what that looks like and entails because not many people have had them. (Sylvia)

During an interview, Sylvia, who was raised in a working class home with a drug addicted step-father, was a respondent who really had a lot to share related to reflections about her upbringing and how her family failed to meet her needs. An example of an unmet need for Sylvia was a feeling of safety within her home. She shared,

> I didn't like feeling unsafe all of the time and I just felt like if I am gonna be safe, I am gonna have to make myself feel safe and so I used to sleep with a knife underneath my pillow all of the time because I thought, I don't know who is going to come into my house in the middle of the night or if in our neighborhood somebody was going to come up and try to hurt us. So I had all of these strategies in my head about if someone came in my room, what would I do? If they went into another room, what would I do? I felt like I had to have something to protect myself… It's weird because there are so many precautions in me because of how I grew up. You always take your purse to your room. And this is where that guilt comes in, it's that line between feeling safe [and paranoia]. (Sylvia)

Through the process of exploring past life experiences, Sylvia was able to identify the shortcomings of her upbringing. She was also able to see how those life experiences impact

her life currently. As a result of processing her life experiences, she identified differences that exist between the way she lives her life presently and the way she grew up. "Although those experiences shaped me, they don't determine who I am…The differences are night and day."

*Conflicting Emotions.* The second theme of conflicting life experiences was respondents' conflicting emotional experiences. Respondents experienced psychological distress as a result of dealing with the pressures of managing conflicts associated with upward mobility (Brown, 2008). The women in the study also experienced emotional reactions to the changes in their family relationships that occurred as a result of pursuing academic success. The emotional reactions varied across respondents, but one emotion that four of the thirteen women resonated with was discouragement. Tasha explained:

Well it's discouraging. Very discouraging to have them say [negative things about me]. And at the time you just kind of hold it in and you suck it in and you later think about it like, jeez wow, I didn't know they thought that way about me. And so it made me second guess what I was doing as far as getting another degree and what I was doing. So it's tough not having as much, all of that family support other than my immediate family that I have. Yea, it's just an interesting dynamic. (Tasha)

Oyserman, Grant, and Ager (1995) state that because many African Americans develop their identity through group membership, being ostracized by the group can really shatter feelings of worth, leaving one vulnerable to self-blame or depression. Dorothy explained how negative reactions from family members about her academic success had negative impacts on her development of a positive self-concept.

I think sometimes it can impact your success. You are not able to really, fully be there. There is something about family. If they don't have it right, they can really make you feel low. You know, like "I remember when, honey" "Don't even be tripping" and however and that is not very affirming to people and it does create, could create a sense of alienation with your family because if you are around the girls who got the degrees or the people or the white folks around the office where this is just normal to them, they are never going back home to "umhum, before there was slavery and now you think" and now they be thinking but there is more of this "I am among people of like experiences and so there is not a big trip about it." Whereas sometimes when you go back home sort to speak, there is this notion of, "Who do you think you are?" kind of stuff. (Dorothy)

She went on to say:

I think perhaps as I have talked to you maybe some of the other stuff was unspoken. You know, this notion of how do you feel about me? How do you see me? And is that a subtle kind of a metaphysical kind of, does it create kind of a metaphysical tension in the air that makes them not be completely who they are. And so I can't be talking about all of the wonderful things that are happening with me because that might in fact draw attention to myself and that puts me in an awkward position. And we are from the Midwest, so we don't want to do that anyway. You know, "you ain't better than nobody." That is the whole Midwestern thing, anyway. So does it allow you in some ways not to be fully who you are? Can you talk about your discoveries and the things that you have discovered through your learning in a way that somebody will celebrate and say "girl that's deep" or do you just have to be "I am just home". I want

to be understood. We want to be got, understood. We want to be real, and we want people to really get me. Can you see my heart and value my heart. You know, I am home, but then you go off to your world. (Dorothy)

For three of the women in the study, feelings of guilt emerged as they achieved academic success. I viewed this as "survivor's guilt" which seems to stem from women's conflicting emotions of being proud to have succeeded, while at the same time feeling sadness associated with leaving behind those who have not made it or who have not had the same success. Sylvia shared,

I think that is where the guilt comes in. I would never say I have escaped because I don't feel like that, but I feel so grateful for the life that I have and I am so grateful to not be fearful all of the time. And I would never tell my mom that because I feel that I don't want her to feel like she did something wrong. (Sylvia)

Through cognitive and emotional exploration, respondents became aware of deficits in their upbringing and various ways that their new value set differs from that of their family of origin. They also became aware of their emotional scars. As respondents became cognizant of the impacts their upbringing and family relationships had on them, they realized they needed to work to improve or at least maintain relationships with their family members.

I will next present that strategies used by respondents to manage their family relationships and their conflicting worldviews and experiences.

*Management Strategies*

Strategies serve the purpose of maintaining family relationships while adjusting to the demands of a new environment that has different rules of functioning (Anglin & Wade, 2007). As the women in the study progressed in academic settings and earned advanced

degrees, they were required to learn how to live in a predominantly White society as Black women. This process of identity management is a central step in the process of personal identity development for most African American women, especially those who are upwardly mobile (DeFrancisco & Chatham-Carpenter, 2000). Women in the study reported using various strategies to help them adjust to the changes in their identity. This finding is consistent with research by Allen (1995) who stated that African American women often use coping strategies to maintain a sense of pride, confidence and identity.

All of the women interviewed expressed a desire to stay grounded in their ethnic identity, and described working to fix, improve, change, negotiate, develop, cope with and create situations that were comfortable for both them and their family of origin. Their challenge was to manage the tensions between their two worlds. The use of management strategies enabled the women to achieve academic success and maintain their connection to their community (Petersen, 2000). Recognizing that there is a major disconnect between the academic and the family system, some women expressed a desire to bridge the gap between the two worlds. Lauren stated, "I have created a whole separate life for myself and now, reestablishing that connection is one of my priorities." There are many ways to go about connecting to the family and managing damaged relationships and regardless of the strategies used, the women all wanted to move past the pain and discomfort in their relationships so that they could keep the connections to their family system. Nine strategies emerged from the data: (1) Isolating Worlds, (2) Code-switching, (3) Forgiveness, (4) Negotiating Relationships, (5) Social Support, (6) Self-Nurturing, (7) Remembering Motivations for Academic Pursuits, (8) Spirituality, and (9) Avoidance. A description of each is provided below.

*Isolating Worlds.* For four of the women in the study, one way to manage the conflicting aspects of their lives was by keeping their two worlds separate. This meant being selective and intentional about what was shared with family members and others. For example, Glenda shared, "When I go home for family reunion in August and let's say I stayed four to five days, that's the only time that I do not take any work with me. I don't check email or anything like that. That way, I keep those two worlds very separate."

*Code-Switching.* Code-switching, which involves alternating behaviors between the two worlds, was a strategy all respondents identified. By code switching, the women could decide which parts of themselves to display in specific interactions. For example, when interacting with family, women would let down their professional persona, and connect and relate in a way that might not be acceptable in their professional settings. Likewise, when at work, the women would avoid disclosing certain aspects of themselves to maintain professional interactions in the work place. Dorothy gave the example of slapping hands (like a high five) when back home. She explained that she rarely uses this gesture at work because it does not seem appropriate. Her "give me some" high five is reserved for interactions with family and other members of the African American community.

Code-switching was something the women learned at an early age. Dorothy admitted "my mom would do it when she got on the phone with a bill collector or somebody White. She would change her voice and I'd be like, 'Why she talking like that?" Then I just learned, 'Aww, she must be on the phone with White people and trying to sound proper." She went on to say, "I get that correct English is necessary in white environments in order to fit in, but that's just not ok when talking to people at home. You sound phony."

Lidia explained having to say to her family, "Forgive me if I sound White. That's just how I talk now." Describing interactions with her family members she shared,

I just try to make sure that I watch not only my language, but I think, um, my body language. I try to make it more personal, that even if they have to hear me, sounding like me, that they get that I am interested in them. That this is really genuine. I really care about you as a person, forget this, I'm sorry. I have just been here so long that that is how I am going to sound. But I can make that personal connection, racially even if I can't make it through my language. So for me it is, I try to up my body language and increase my face time and I try to really engage them. I personally seek them out, so that even if my language doesn't sound right, they can get that I care. "OK, she is still one of us." Yea, and so that's a code switch. (Lidia)

By code-switching, African American women are able to "retain allegiance to their own culture" (Bell, 1990) and at the same time be genuine and present with the family. Dorothy shared,

There is a comfort in family relationships - that no matter how much we have to put on mask in the world to sort of wheel and deal, you know, I can just be me at home. Like even for people who like strive for authenticity in every area, there is still this notion of coming back home and saying "whee" [sigh of relief] when you are around your people. And if you have nurtured those relationships, then you allow - it's almost as if you carve out a space where you can always come back. (Dorothy)

When discussing code-switching and altering language, women acknowledged that they changed both their style of communication and the topics they discussed when interacting with their family of origin. Glenda clearly stated, "I cannot talk to them about my

work." This was the sentiment of many of the women interviewed. Because of the separation between family and work, family members back home knew very little about the day to day experiences of their college-educated relatives.

*Forgiveness.* Three of the thirteen respondents reported benefits of forgiving family members. For example, Sylvia admitted that physical distance from her family provided an "excuse" to be emotionally distant even though her true reason for being emotionally distant was unresolved resentment towards them and she made the conscious choice not to be there for them. As she reflected on her upbringing, she realized that she harbored resentments towards members of her family of origin because of the personal and professional modeling that was missing from her upbringing. While she was away at college, she built up the nerve to confront her mother about it. She explained how her mother felt that was "judging her" for the decisions she made while raising Sylvia and the consequences her lack of education had on Sylvia's upbringing. Tearfully, Sylvia shared that she was "kicked out" of her mother's house for being disrespectful and sent to live with her grandmother. It was at that point that she realized, "not everything I feel, can I share." She also acknowledged how focusing on the negative aspects of her upbringing and things missing from her childhood was not necessarily helpful for her maintaining a relationship with her mom. She explained how forgiveness is a strategy she has used to manage her relationship with her mother.

Dorothy explained intentionally choosing to focus only on the positive aspects of her family relationships because of the "rifts" that can occur as a result of focusing on the negative. She shared,

> Early on I begin to kind of think, what are the good things that I inherited from my
>
> mom? Because some of those other things can cause rifts too. I mean, it's like "dang

she already did this" and "she didn't do this" and I can go back and name some things that she didn't do right, but I chose to look at what are the gifts that I inherited from her and I think that if you keep those in the forefront then the relationship can thrive. So, the changes are not seen as "I don't like you, I think all of what you did is bad." It's more like "well here is another way to do it." (Dorothy)

By forgiving family for shortcomings while highlighting positive aspects of the relationships, these women were able to maintain relationships with their family members, even when their family-related experiences where less than ideal.

*Negotiating Relationships.* Negotiating relationships involved defining and outlining boundaries within a relationship. To avoid being taken advantage of or guilt tripped into doing more than they were comfortable with by members of the family of origin, six of the respondents report placing boundaries on their family relationships. This way, family members knew what to expect from their student and was not surprised when, for instance, she did not go home during breaks from school. In this example, her decision was respected by her family because she was straightforward with them about her plans.

Lauren acknowledged that the various demands and expectations placed on her as a student have been her priority for years. Although her family relationships had not lost their value to her, she was focused on meeting the demands of an academic environment. As Lauren worked to find balance between her conflicting identities, she acknowledged that her academic and professional demands had taken precedence over familial obligations only because family was far away and less convenient to access.

For these six women, managing conflicting identities meant working to renegotiate the terms of their relationship with members of their family of origin. Dorothy said, "I

literally had to reshape our relationship." She provided a specific example of how she managed changes in her family relationships and addressed the issue of her being perceived as being in a better place to contribute to the family:

> How do I manage this new identity, and I actually have thoughts about that now. I know my heart is to give so maybe I should have a certain amount set aside because I am gonna have to manage that so if someone comes to me and ask do you have 50 bucks, I can say well yea and not feel like I am being deprived or pulled at because here is what I have set up to help, "here is my little purse" and then - but yet I can take care of the things that I need to take care of and so it's not that crab mentality of you asking me and now I am trying to make something and so none of us have anything. But to even think about having that conversation is something new. (Dorothy)

When renegotiating relationships with family members, it was important for respondents to be able to set boundaries. Sylvia shared:

> I think that I would take on more of the responsibility or more of the emotional angst of my parents relationship and feel that need to fill in more gaps than I should. Which would in turn hurt my family so I am grateful for the distance because I think that that really helps to keeps me emotionally detached. But I still feel attached, but I get to choose when. So if my mom calls and she has some drama and I feel like I can't deal with this right now, I won't call back until I feel like I can. So, and it's hard for me because I have never been the type of person that hasn't been there for my family or even for my friends. But now I think just having a son and having a husband, I think that if I do that I am going to not be everything that I can be over here. It's hard

because I feel like "am I abandoning them in some way" because I try to stay out of a lot of the drama. (Sylvia)

Lauren, who was working to manage family relationships and recognized the complexity of the situation shared:

Like my cousin that I am very close to, she has a daughter who is a few months younger than my oldest and so we connect on our kids or we make time for each other like little time where I might not go out with her and her friends and she might not go out with me and my friends because those circles are very different and so it might be a short amount of time that we will spend together, but it will just be the us time. (Lauren)

*Social Support.* Sometimes maintenance of family relationships takes more than negotiating. During the times that family and community members struggled to affirm the new identity of their college-educated family members, the women had to find and create relationships that would validate and affirm their multiple identities. They wanted to make sure that each part of themselves was recognized in these relationships because of the value associated with belonging to multiple groups. To gain acceptance, women relied on other sources of social support. Tasha shared, "you strengthen the relationships you can, and the rest, you just have to let go."

In this social support section, I first describe women whose families delight in their success. Then I move to women who have had to find support elsewhere. Lastly, I illustrate experiences of women who would prefer to be in a network of other African American women who understand their experiences and perspectives.

For the most part, respondents were encouraged and supported by their family members. Their experiences were consistent with research findings that depict the African American family systems as being the most supportive force in an African American's life (Hill, 2003; Petersen, 2000). Ten of the women also shared stories about their family members being proud of them. Francesca shared how "cool" it is that she went to college and shared the positive family-related experiences she had along her journey. She stated,

> By in large they really think it's cool and the neat thing about it is that they all had a hand in it. You know, my brothers used to go and pick me up from undergrad and when I didn't have money, because I wouldn't ask my mom, like ok "big brother, I need gas money or I need money to do laundry or I don't have any money to go and hang out at the grill or whatever it is." And so it was really a group effort getting me through college. So, I think that they think that it is pretty cool as a result because it's everyone's success. Not just mine. Not just my parents. And so, it's been a pretty cool experience. (Francesca)

Glenda with a huge smile on her face, affectionately shared her feelings,

> You know how it is, with a lot of Black families, they are so, you know with these first generation because this was a first. And they would say "Yea, she's in college and they'll be home for the holiday." I can remember my aunt and other relatives, and my dad would say "How is college" and that was basically all that they could ask you because they didn't know about the environment. They'd say "How are you doing in school" and it'd be "Good. I am glad to see you." (Glenda)

Similarly, Lauren explained how encouraging it was to hear her mother take pride in her academic success. She shared,

She would just kind of talk about – she would always tell me, not necessarily directly, I am proud of you. But she would tell me, I was talking to so and so about you and these are the things that I was saying and those sort of things. But that was always nice and encouraging. (Lauren)

Priscilla, understanding that not all family members are going to validate and affirm the journey she has chosen shared:

But there were times where it was very important to me that people understood and I always had to justify myself to others. I think that those are just stages of development adolescents, teenagers, young adulthood, you know. I think it's complex, but amazingly simple. I think that self acceptance and being comfortable with who you are and knowing that, it sounds trite, but when you look in the mirror, you can accept that and be proud of that. And once you do that, it doesn't matter if, and I'll share this poem that a friend gave me and it doesn't matter if everyone thinks you are great and inside you are the most vindictive person in the world and you look in the mirror and you know that and you know that you can't respect yourself and so the reverse is also true. If you have done everything that you know how to do to be good, fair to people and you are comfortable with the way that you live your life, then it doesn't matter if everybody agrees with you or not. (Priscilla)

When family members were not supportive, the women went outside of their family of origin and developed meaningful relationships that could not take the place of family, but provided a reparative experience. Dorian shared from her dissertation, which explored the educational experiences of African American women,

The other thing that I found in my study with the younger generation is for that reason, many of them had to reinvent their family and surround themselves with people who could be supportive. I just never fathomed that as a group, as a culture, that we would get to a place where we couldn't support one another and move forward. (Dorian)

Sylvia explained how her husband supports her in ways that family of origin was not able to. "My husband is a great friend and I have really close friends that know me. They know me when I am not the strong person and they know me when I have a bad day and know me when I get frustrated or I feel like I need some encouragement."

Because the women in the study were resilient, they were able to develop social networks that buffered against the negative aspects of their family relationships and relationships with people from their culture of origin. They learned to use family and their community for certain forms of support and use colleagues and other friends for other sources of support. Dorothy explained, "A lot of times I am going to vent [about work], but I also need some perspective, but the best people to get perspective from are those who work here, the colleagues in the environment." Lauren reported:

I guess one thing that comes to mind is that they made me want to replace them or find surrogates, so finding a network and so that being a coping strategy. Recognizing that although I was not close to my family when I was younger as I have grown older, I have gotten closer to them so now I try to find a family group around me that can serve those same purposes, like going through the same things that I am going through. (Lauren)

Glenda shared, "I don't have a family here. I am not married and I don't have children, so when I say my family here I am talking about my friends here... They allowed me to be who I was and they were comfortable with themselves." In the same vein, Jayne explained:

I have been extremely blessed in that I have some people in my life who I have been friends with for probably 20 years. And then I have some newer friends. And I have some spiritual friends and some not spiritual friends and I have a mixture... I don't think I have composed this whole group in one setting, but depending on the type of support I need at the time, then I am going to have someone to call on. Sometimes I may need some spiritual support and them some will come and pray for me. Some times I may need some sister girl support and I need someone who is very matter of fact and who is going to give you that sister girl wisdom. And some times you may need someone who is going to listen and not say anything. (Jayne)

For many of these respondents, they felt more comfortable being themselves when they were around people from a similar background. One of the reasons for this higher comfort level with other African American women was that they felt they shared the same viewpoint or reference point about issues. Priscilla explained:

A common standpoint that Blacks, particularly Black females come from - that even if we come from a different social economic class, we still experience some of the same discriminatory practices and assumptions and stereotypes. So, when you are among those with whom you share the same standpoint, you talk about things in a different way. And you wouldn't talk about that with someone from the dominant culture because you would have to explain too much. (Priscilla)

Use of social support is a primary management strategy used by respondents. This finding is consistent with research that indicates that African Americans often rely on informal social support networks to help deal with difficult situations (Hill, 2003). Through developing social networks within and outside of their culture of origin, respondents were able to have the various parts of their identities validated and affirmed, which in turn helped them maintain a positive sense of self.

*Self-Nurturing.* Although social support is important, there is also great value in being able to nurture and support oneself. Dorothy shared the importance of self-acceptance. She shared, "Yea, you have to be strong to be different. You have to have an internal strength and confidence in yourself."

To help her manage her complex identity, Jayne, who said she posts positive affirmations around her house shared, "I am really not into metaphysical things. I am very into traditional religion but sometimes you have to encourage yourself. You have to encourage yourself because you might wake up one day and you are like nobody is encouraging you." Lidia shared a similar belief where she believes it is her place to build herself up and "internal dialogue and being able to self-sooth" are very important to her.

*Remembering Motivation for Academic Pursuits.* Eight of the women in the study reported deliberately staying aware of their motivations for attaining an advanced degree. An important motive was being able to use academic success for the betterment of African Americans. Many of the women saw attaining a degree as giving them the power to influence policy and affect change as it relates to African Americans. Lauren stated,

In my eyes, my college degree is a ticket to the table. The degree or even the things

that I have learned in class in pursuit of it have not necessarily made me more able to

achieve my goals. What it has done is given me admission to the places I need to be

in order to have an influence. (Lauren)

Priscilla saw her degree as giving her the same privilege: "It will give me the

opportunity to maybe stand on a platform that I normally would not be able to stand on,

improving the way that African Americans are viewed by the larger society." Lauren saw

attaining an education and holding a degree in a similar light and shared, "I want to be able to

increase my sphere of influence so that I can make bigger decisions that might help more

people." In the same way, Dorothy explained,

I really do want to give back. There are some things specifically with respect to

perhaps maybe influencing mindsets or some things like that or being able to support

to give, fund things. I really would love to do that kind of philanthropic kind of stuff

where you would support initiatives that I value and things like that. (Dorothy)

The women in the study were also motivated to attend college to increase hope

among African Americans, many of whom doubt the possibility of academic success. For the

women in the study, it was their responsibility to be a role model for the younger generations

and this was a duty the women were happy to fulfill. Sylvia explained, "I feel like I need to

be an example and an encouragement and motivator to others. If I can do this, you can do

this." Likewise, Tasha wanted to inspire others, particularly younger generations and shared,

…Now they have gotten to the point where they don't even finish high school. So, it

just made it even more important for me to stick this out and get through it. And I was

completely shocked because I have several cousins who stopped at high school. That

was it. And I was like are you kidding me? What are you- you have no idea of how

you are limiting your opportunities for later on in life by not continuing, but hopefully

in the next couple of years they will realize that, huh I think I need to do something

with myself.  (Tasha)

When asked if she shared her concerns with her relatives, she replied, "I have and I

try to all of the time and I try to lead by example, so hopefully they see what it is that I am

doing and are able to know that that is an option for them." For the women in the study,

especially those who had children, being a role model and being an example of success was

an important motivation for completing college and going on to earn advanced degrees.

Lauren, who has two daughters and many younger cousins, stated, "All of the other little kids

in my life, I want them to see that there is nothing special about me, so if I can do this, you

can do this too."

The women interviewed could all acknowledge the significance of their family of

origin in the journey towards academic success. When asked about their feelings of

responsibility to take what they have gained and attained back to their family and community

of origin, they all shared the same sentiment: I have to give back. Dorian said it best when

she shared:

I just believe that my responsibility is to constantly reach back and give and set the

tone and be the role model and provide the support…And it's not a choice. It's a

charge and I take it very seriously. And not just my family. For young women like

you. You know, it's not a choice. For the larger African American community, it's

being supportive, it's offering guidance. Being a listening ear, a shoulder. You know,

reaching out and not turning my back. Now I will be the first one to say that I struggle

with young angry people, but I try my best to figure out what I need to do and lots of

times it's reaching out to the generation between us and supporting that generation so they can support the younger generation. (Dorian)

By identifying as women who want to effect change, the respondents were choosing to play a role in their family that not many others play. African American women have traditionally held a unique role within the family system as the keepers of culture in their communities and often as the primary or sole caretakers of families (Hill, 2003). The respondents identified goals and expectations for themselves that differ from the goals and expectations of other members of their family. By choosing to use education as the avenue for achieving change, many of the women distinguished themselves from other members of their family of origin. Jayne described earning an advanced degree as her "bright idea." She shared, "I knew what I was getting myself into from the start. I just have to keep reminding myself that anything worth having is going to take work to maintain."

*Spirituality.* Five of the women in the study were able to identify use of religion or spirituality as being what helped them manage family relationships. Sylvia, who has been setting boundaries with her family of origin explained, "I pray a lot about situations back home especially because sometimes I feel guilty about not intervening more." Lidia explained what she gets out of conversations with God:

And definitely my faith. That is probably the place where I did most of my processing. At least within the context of my daily system and so understanding that those preconceived notions were nothing but that and that that had nothing to do with who God created me to be. Those are their issues, and I can show you how those really are your issues and not mine. (Lidia)

Dorothy explained that spirituality has helped her to manage her family relationships by softening her heart and making her more understanding of the experiences from her family's perspective. She shared:

And I had to come back and again it's in my faith and it's tenderized me to keep the relationships. I really do think that and I thank God, not because I am so great, but because God knew this chick certainly needs some tenderness because if she don't get it she would be a trip. And so that tenderness gained through my spiritual pursuit has allowed me to still keep my family because you can – you know, typically people won't understand your journey and they may say things out of ignorance and what do we typically do, bam, I can be down all by myself and I don't need this. I am done with you. I always feel that a life lived with that motivation is not full life. Because I have seen people live like, well I'll show you. And their life is all about well I'll show you and at some point they burn out because they are not doing it for themselves. So, I think I really, as I am talking to you now that I definitely remember points of separation and things, but I think that it has been soften by my commitment to the relationship. And that's through my faith which gives me framework out of which to be tender and why I need to be tender and sort of the perceived benefits of that. (Dorothy)

Research indicates that African Americans, particularly women, use religion and spirituality to cope with life's issues and to provide a sense of belonging (Hill, 2003). For the five women in the study who used spirituality to help manage their family relationships and their identity, the overarching sentiment was that they had primarily been granted their educational opportunities "through the grace of God." Even when family relationships were

challenging, the women were very grateful to God for their families as well as their educational opportunities, which seemed to further their appreciation of both.

*Avoidance.* Lastly, avoidance is a relationship and identity management strategy used by women in the study. There were two respondents who admitted that dealing with family-related experiences was too challenging given the demands that they have as students and professionals. Lauren explained how painful it was to admit, but that she was not actively working to manage the change in relationships she experienced within her family system. She shared:

> One way that I cope is that I block it. Well not so much block it, but I just keep on moving with the day to day stuff and not really sitting down and reflecting on it a whole lot. Um, and when I do sit down and think about what is going on and how I am feeling about it, then I will do my band-aide attempts. Like, ok, for a good week or so, I will call everybody everyday and we will talk about a whole lot of stuff and then that wears off before long. And so I don't think that I have found anything that is long term aside from my continued isolation. I have coped with it by not dealing with it. Like they are still over there and I have just made my own other world over here. (Lauren)

*Summary of Strategies*

Respondent in this study used strategies to help them go beyond coping with difficult situations to actually managing them. The strategies served the purpose of helping women manage their emerging bicultural identity and their family relationships. Respondents reported developing these management strategies out of necessity and over extended periods

of time. Not all women used all strategies; they worked to find specific strategies that worked best for them given their needs and their unique family situation.

I will next present the outcomes of using management strategies.

*Outcome: Development of Bicultural Identity Competence*

As a result of using management strategies, respondents developed a bicultural identity. For many of the women in the study, it was very important to maintain connections to the African American community while fostering an emerging professional identity. Going to college and earning advanced degrees allowed them to submerge in a culture quite different than the one they grew up with, which led to the emergence of a dual or bicultural identity. Rather than choosing one culture over the other, the women worked to manage and maintain allegiance to both cultures. Dorothy shared,

> I think the identity integration has to do with the person accepting themselves. That person coming to terms with and being comfortable with themselves and part of that 'me being comfortable' with myself is also a social system that supports the various parts of me. (Dorothy)

The various strategies used by respondents helped them move from simply being bicultural to actually developing bicultural competence where they were able to effectively navigate both aspects of their identity. In each case, multiple strategies, even avoidance strategies, were used to manage a bicultural identity that emerged as a result of going away to college and attaining a post- secondary education. The strategies used by the women worked for the most part to integrate their emergent bicultural identity with emphasis on maintaining and improving relationships with members of the family of origin. Additionally, strategies

for managing a dual identity were successful at helping the women minimize negative psychological consequences of being bicultural beings.

Many of the respondents reported belonging to two separate groups, the Black community and the dominant culture. Although the women all identified as African American, they work or study in predominantly white environments, where they see few Black faces over the course of a day. Glenda shared the following illustration:

When I first came to the university, this was a totally, totally different and new working environment for me. Not that I had never worked with people from the majority culture, because that was not the case. I have never worked in an environment where I was the only woman in the office who looked like myself. This environment was very new to me and it was to some extent, but not overly so that it became a burden to me, but it was difficult early on for me to gather myself and to be able to function in a relaxed kind of way in an environment where I felt I was trapped in. And with that came that professional persona and then the other one where I am home and I can take this off and I can talk to my other friends from other institutions who are in environments where I would have normally been comfortable. So I could relax. That was an adjustment. Yes an adjustment because these people that I worked around, who I socialized with, and people who specifically knew only in a working environment. And so, I had that this person and then there was this other person. But since then I have come into myself. And I think that it got better. (Glenda)

Glenda struggled to discover and define herself in this unfamiliar environment. Six other respondents in the study echoed Glenda's experience as they shared struggles managing the dual identity that developed as they progressed through their academic journeys, which is

consistent with research that indicates that there are complexities of managing dual roles for African American women (Bell, 1990; Zimani, 2003). The problem is that neither of these studies focuses on the adjustments that take place within the family system. For this reason, this study focused on the family-related experiences of upwardly mobile African American women.

Because the professional identity was a gratifying part of the African American women's core identity, I wanted to understand how the women saw their two opposing identities co-existing. For the most part, the women were able to create a dynamic, fluid life structure that allowed them to shape patterns of their social interactions, relationships, and mobility, both within and between the two cultural contexts. This bicultural life structure was their way of organizing life and helped them avoid becoming overwhelmed by their various cultural demands.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In this study, the voices of 13 African American women emerged through interviews, journal entries and other documents provided by respondents including resumes, class assignments and e-mail exchanges. Their stories led to the development of a grounded theory of relationship management with members of their family of origin among college-educated African American women. This chapter provides a summary of key findings along with limitations of the study, a brief discussion of the ways this study contributes to the literature on upward mobility, implications of this research for academic programs, and recommendations for future research. The chapter ends with a self-reflection from the researcher.

## Summary of Key Findings

Evidence from this exploratory study suggests that the respondents developed a bicultural identity out of necessity after being confronted with conflicting experiences and worldviews. This finding is consistent with research by Bell (1990) who indicted that upwardly mobile African American women develop a bicultural identity because often the expectations of two environments are conflicting. For example, in the professional environment, women are expected to highlight their strengths in interactions with others as a means for self-promotion. To some African Americans, this same highlighting of strengths is perceived as bragging or showing off. Because rules and expectations are different across their two worlds, these women have developed a bicultural identity which allows them to be deliberate in their actions and decide which behaviors to present in specific interactions to avoid being misunderstood or misperceived.

This study focused on the family-related experiences of African American women who have set academic goals for themselves and succeeded at achieving these goals in the face of adversities and barriers. The hurdles the women have overcome existed both in their families and home communities, and also in the education system and the larger society. Through exploring the women's experiences, a grounded theory was generated that describes the process of bicultural identity development among college-educated African American women from working-class backgrounds. The emergent theory highlights the changes that occur and some of the conflicting life experiences of African American women progressing through academia. To help this researcher understand the process of managing relationships and their identity, respondents talked at length about their lived experiences as college-educated African American women interacting with their family of origin, the larger African American community, and the society of which they live.

Findings from this study indicated that among some African Americans there was a misperception that by attaining an education, African American women lose their connection to the African American community. This misperception is based on the premise that people cannot belong to two cultures; they have to choose one over the other. Berry's (1980) research on second-culture acquisition supported this notion and termed it assimilation. Assimilation involves relinquishing one's culture of origin and adopting the new culture. According to Berry, in addition to assimilation there are three possible outcomes of being confronted by a culture different from the culture of origin: separation, marginalization, and integration. Separation involves maintaining only the culture of origin. Marginalization involves distancing oneself from both the old and new cultures. Finally, integration, or

biculturalism, involves simultaneously maintaining one's cultural heritage and adopting a new cultural identity.

It is clear that in my study each respondent had achieved a bicultural identity; each had succeeded academically without losing her identification with the African American community (LaFromboise et al., 1993). As a result of using management strategies, respondents developed a bicultural identity, although they differed in their level of bicultural identity integration. Benet-Martinez, Lee, and Leu (2006) indicated that biculturalism falls on a continuum, which fit well with the findings in this study. Some respondents were at a place of increasing bicultural awareness whereas others seemed to have succeeded more fully at integrating their bicultural identity. As with general cultural awareness and acceptance, the process of developing bicultural competence for the bicultural individual occurs over his or her lifetime (LaFromboise et al.). Research has found that competence develops through repeated task related experiences and changes over time as new information and experience are acquired (Benet-Martinez, Lee, & Leu). Therefore the more individuals are faced with conflicting life experiences, the more opportunities they will have to further their bicultural identity competence.

Unfortunately, for the women in the study, managing their bicultural identity has not been without stress. Women reported that they were at times confronted with feedback and experiences that were incongruent with the messages they grew up receiving from their family and community of origin. As the women shared their stories, it was evident that their families valued education and could see the advantages of educational opportunities, yet their relatives seemed to worry about what such opportunities might do to their student.

Dissimilar experiences, values, and lifestyle preferences between students and their family and community of origin may provide an explanation for conflictual relationships (Smokowski, Rose, & Bacallao, 2008). Research indicates that as a result of going to college, people often experience a change in their values and interests (Hochschild, 1993), and this idea was supported by respondents. I speculate that students and their family may feel they have less in common than they did before the respondent went to college.

African Americans may put pressure on those within their own ethnic group to maintain their culture of origin (LaFromboise et al., 1993). Family and community members may become concerned that adoption of the dominant culture's norms and values threatens African American cultural preservation, leading them to become rigid and defensive. Respondents were consistently cautioned against becoming conceited because of their academic success. Some respondents were confronted with derogatory statements from their family and community of origin, which implied that because the women chose to be educated, they were "acting White." To some members of the African American community, attaining an education is seen as "acting White" or "selling out." Historically, there was some legitimacy to this notion; Blacks were forbidden to learn to read or write during slavery (DuBois, 1909). African Americans who grew up during slavery and in generations after slavery learned that education was something reserved for White people. Currently, we know that this notion is ludicrous and that education is an asset to all who seek it, regardless of ethnicity. Unfortunately, for some, the definition of what it means to be Black has not expanded to include education, even though respondents in the study viewed academic success as an important component of their identity as African Americans.

Research indicates that bicultural individuals may benefit from developing both personal (individual) and group (collective) identities (Gushue & Constantine, 2003). Research by Sameroff (1982) suggests that in order for an individual to effectively navigate his or her bicultural identity, he or she must develop a well-formed sense of his or her own identity that is distinct from his or her family of origin and social organizations. Through the development of dual identities, individuals can maintain a sense of individual self while simultaneously remaining connected with their family and community of origin. There are significant differences between individuals with a strong sense of self and those with a poorly defined sense of self (Bowen; 1979; Gushue & Constantine, 2003; Kerr, 1988; Kerr & Bowen, 1988). People with a poorly defined sense will have very little emotional separation from their family and community of origin, and their behaviors will focus on responding to the expectations and feedback of others (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Less differentiated people also show less adaptiveness and exhibit psychological symptoms more readily when under stress (Kerr). Additionally, such people are more likely to cut off contact if they become overly stressed by family relationships, rather than actually working to resolve the emotions (Gushue & Constantine, 2003).

On the other hand, a well differentiated person is less influenced by external pressure from his or her family of origin (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). He or she is able display greater flexibility when confronted by stressful situations and is slower to develop psychological symptoms (Gushue & Constantine, 2003). Even when personal desires are at odds with those of the family of origin, differentiated people can stand up for their own beliefs while remaining connected (Schnarch, 1997; Skowron, 2000). Thus, people from collectivist cultures with a well-differentiated sense of self can successfully develop a bicultural identity.

Although African American family systems are collectivist in orientation (Denby, 1996), in my sample, there was variation in levels of family-centeredness. Some of the women reported coming from individualistic family systems where autonomy was valued and emphasized. These women were raised to be independent thinkers who made decisions based on their own individual interests. Other women came from families where relationships were highly enmeshed. Within these enmeshed family systems, it was often the needs and wants of the family, rather the individual, that were most important. In such families, group identification took precedence over self-identification. Development of a bicultural identity was more difficult for these women.

Respondents' cognitive and emotional exploration of their group and self identification sparked the use of strategies which helped them manage their bicultural identities. The management strategies identified by women in the study were consistent with the skills described by LaFromboise et al. (1993) in the discussion of bicultural identity development. The 6 skills are knowledge of cultural beliefs and values, positive attitudes toward both majority and minority groups, bicultural efficacy, communication ability, role repertoire, and sense of being grounded (LaFromboise et al., 1993). Each was aimed at helping people manage the process of living in two cultures.

Through the use of strategies women engaged in their professional fields without losing competence in their culture of origin. For example, respondents discussed the capacity to alternate between environments by using different words or dialects to communicate with family of origin. They chose to tailor their interactions with members of their family of origin to accommodate family members' lack of exposure to and understanding of college-related experiences. Respondents maintained that by code-switching they were able to effectively

communicate with their family or origin. This communication ability is an essential component of the LaFromboise et al. (1993) bicultural identity competence model. Respondents also discussed the importance of maintaining connections to both cultures and of awareness of one's cultural identification, which reflects the maintenance of groundedness in both cultures component of the LaFromboise et al. bicultural identity competence model.

Another strategy aimed at managing their emerging bicultural identity was reliance on social support. In the LaFromboise et al. (1993) bicultural identity model, the establishment of stable networks in both cultures provides a sense of identity and belonging. The women in my study developed separate social networks that validated and affirmed various parts of their identities, thus allowing them to maintain a sense of self pride and confidence. Through the development of networks within the African American community, including supportive family members, respondents were able to maintain a sense of pride in their community and stay connected to their culture of origin. Through the development of networks with people within their work environments, respondents fostered their emerging professional identities while receiving work related support.

In conclusion, the women in this study possessed a wealth of knowledge instilled by their culture and family of origin and their identities were further developed through experiences and contact with a second culture. Thus, they had access to resources from the two cultures and developed skills that help them successfully navigate two cultures. In essence, a bicultural identity means African American women in the study have an expanded skill set that allows them to function in both their academic environment and in interactions with members of their family and community of origin.

Limitations

Grounded theory, the research methodology used for this study, looks at the process and the structure of respondents' experiences. In this case, this study explored the process of bicultural identity development among college-educated African American women. A few limitations are inherent in the use of this qualitative research approach. Using in-person interviews and the intentional sampling method imposed limitations on the study. Because the women were talking to another African American woman about their personal experiences, they may have had an unconscious desire for positive self-disclosure. Additionally, within the African American community sharing personal or family "business" with others is often frowned upon, so women may have been reluctant to share detailed information on such a sensitive topic.

Another limitation of this study that is common to all qualitative research is the fact that grounded theory research cannot be generalized to the larger population. Glaser (1992) indicates that generalizing to the larger population is not appropriate when using grounded theory. Although this study cannot be directly generalized, it can be used as a basis for other research because other college-educated African American women are likely to have similar experiences so they may relate to the emergence of a bicultural identity.

As I have stated, I am a college-educated African American woman and my personal experiences of managing both my bicultural identity and family relationships was a motivating factor in my desire to conduct this study. As the researcher who selected respondents, conducted interviews, transcribed and analyzed data, and wrote up the final report, it is possible that my own personal experiences may have biased my understanding and/or interpretation of respondents' experiences along this research process. Therefore, it is

important to recognize that should another researcher examine the data, their findings and emergent grounded theory may not be same as those identified in this study.

Another limitation is the scope of the study. When thinking about the experiences of college-educated African American women, there are many areas to explore; too many cover in one study. For this reason, this study was limited to the family-related experiences of upwardly mobile African American women. I intentionally avoided interview questions and research findings related to the experiences of the women in their professional environments. For research on the professional experiences of upwardly mobile African American women, review Alfred (2001), Bell (1990), and Terhune (2008).

Although the respondents in this study were able to achieve academic success while managing relationships with members of their family of origin, there may be African American women confronted with similar challenges who did not succeed academically. There may also be women who were not successful at maintaining relationships with their family of origin after gaining an advanced education. Unfortunately, this study does not capture the experiences of women who dropped out of college or who have family relationships that are too damaged to repair. This study also does not capture the experiences of African American women who are educated yet unemployed because the selected sample was limited to women who have earned at least a bachelors degree (ranging to completion of a doctorate) and working as either graduate students with assistantships, full-time staff members, or professors at a university. The experiences of these African American women would be an important topic in future research.

Contributions to the Literature

This study makes several contributions to the literature on upwardly mobile ethnic minority group members. This study highlights the complex issues that African American women live with on a daily basis and how they persevere in academic settings with or without the support of their family or home community. Although some women reported psychological distress resulting from their experiences of upward mobility, the women in this study were resilient and demonstrated the strength of African American women. Regardless of their current position, be it student, professional, or educator, the women shared a wide variety of experiences within the education and family systems, all of which impacted the women's beliefs about themselves, others, and the world in which they live in.

It is important to note the passion for learning expressed by each of the respondents. This passion to better themselves and their communities was the motivation that drove them to continue their path to success in the formal education environment even in the midst of adversities. Keeping salient the reasons that African American women decide to pursue their education may help educators and counselors encourage these women to work through their troubles and stay on course towards their educational endeavors.

Study Implications

From the findings of the current study, it is evident that African American women face multiple challenges when working to attain advanced academic degrees, including the challenges of maintaining family relationships. Academic programs can help ease the transition by developing programs and policies that attend to the special concerns and needs of African American women on campus. Also, because African American women are striving to attain positions previously occupied by members of the dominant group, there

needs to be support in place to help these women navigate the process. Such programs might include orientations for family members so that they can be informed of the experiences of their student and have an understanding of the transition their family member is going through. In the case of many first generation college students, lack of understanding can interfere with support offered for educational tasks (Rosales & Person, 2003).

Counseling and support groups for African American women might also be helpful. These can provide a safe space for African American women to vent about their experiences, to get advice on coping with challenges, to develop relationships with individuals having similar experiences, and to openly discuss the process of integrating multiple identities. It may also be helpful for institutions, especially predominantly White institutions, to create a substantive African American presence on campus through attracting African American faculty, staff and students in order to reduce feelings of marginalization among African American women. Although mentoring relationships among African American women are important, I understand it is challenging to recruit ethnic minorities to predominantly White environments. While the numbers of African American faculty and administrators may be low, the role that these women play in assisting future generations of African American women in academia is essential. Both professors and students must be willing to reach out to African American women within and outside their program of study. These relationships with individuals from a similar background may be vital in the retention and success of African American students, staff, and professors.

In order to increase mentorship and prevent burnout among faculty involved in mentoring graduate students and junior faculty members, university leaders and decision makers should revisit and revise the faculty reward and recognition system (Bloomberg &

Volpe, 2008). This is not to say that universities should simply expand obligations to include mentorship, but rather they should provide incentives for mentoring minority undergraduates, graduate students, and junior faculty members. Such incentives might include course reduction or official recognition of their roles as mentors. Administrators might also consider developing and implementing formal training programs in mentoring culturally diverse populations for faculty members.

<div align="center">Recommendations for Future Research</div>

Like much research, as this study ends, more questions emerged, questions such as *What are the family related experiences of women from different social backgrounds? Ethnic groups? What are the specific needs of college-educated African American women as they navigate the educational system? What can family members do to help promote adjustment for their students?* These questions can be explored by future researchers interested in understanding the family-related experiences of college-educated African American women. Future researchers should use both qualitative and quantitative research methods to understand the experiences of this unique population. A larger sample should be studied to determine if most African American women have the same experiences with managing relationships with members of their family of origin identified in my study and what factors contribute to the women experiencing different outcomes. Conducting focus groups might also provide information about African American women's experiences. Future researchers may also benefit from collecting data from African American men to explore how their family-related experiences may be similar or different from the experiences of African American women.

Regarding other racial groups, interviews should be conducted for the purpose of conducting a cross-cultural study against which to compare the findings of this study. For upwardly mobile African Americans, it is important to maintain strong connections to their family and community of origin. It would be interesting to see the role family members play in the upward mobility of individuals from other cultural groups.

Other areas needing future research include studying the experiences of family members of college-educated African American women because this study only assessed the experiences of the African American student or professional. Thus a study that gains the perspective of both the college-educated women and members of the family of origin would provide a more comprehensive picture.

## Concluding Self-Reflection

The respondents' open and honest sharing helped me tremendously, not only as a graduate student working to complete a dissertation, but also with my personal growth and development. The women spoke of family experiences that sounded like we could have grown up in the same home. Through my encounters with respondents I learned a great deal about my allegiance to my family of origin as well as my ties to the African American community. I was able to reflect on my assumptions and expectations for myself and my family. I had my thinking challenged numerous times by respondents as they told of their life experiences.

The most substantive realization I had was related to the resiliency of African American women. Kitano and Lewis (2005) explain resilience as the phenomenon of surviving and thriving in the face of adversity. This study revealed that no matter how challenging the family situation became or how uncertain the outlook, respondents found

ways to continue moving forward in educational endeavors, even without consistent help to smooth the hurdles or confront the barriers. The strength and resourcefulness of these African American women is what I hope to convey with this study. While some respondents sought support to help themselves overcome difficulties, others isolated themselves. Nonetheless, each woman made what she believed to be the best decision for herself and her family based on the situation.

Now that the data have been collected and analyzed, I can see how much my past life experiences influence the woman I am today. One respondent stated "I am a product of my past" and I so can identify with this sentiment. It is because of my experiences overcoming challenging family encounters that I became interested in this topic, and now I have the stories of the women as additional motivation to continue on this challenging bicultural pathway. Through conducting this study, I've learned that although I have had different life experiences than most members of my family of origin, we are still family and family is invaluable. I need to work for these relationships because they mean so much to me. Maintaining family relationships requires thoughtfulness and deliberate efforts in interactions and openness on both sides. I want to understand the experiences of my family of origin now, which is a different mindset than before, when I could only think about things from my perspective. Today, I want to understand them and assist them in any way possible to help them to understand me. I believe this new outlook will help me maintain existing connections and mend severed ties within my family.

I was so inspired by these 13 women that I wrote a performance ethnography to capture their experiences. Performance ethnography is a creative way to disseminate research that blends together the worlds of social sciences and performance arts (Madison 2005).

Because performance has always been an important part of my identity, I thought it was only fitting to create a piece based on their stories. "The performance strives to communicate a sense of subjects' worlds in their own words; it hopes to amplify their meanings and intentions to a larger group of listeners and observers" (p. 174). My performance ethnography, which I will perform during my final defense of this project, allows me to perform the results of study and share what I believe to be the essence of the college-educated African American woman's experiences with members of their family of origin. For a transcript of the performance ethnography, see Appendix G.

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APPENDIX A

DISSERTATATION INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

**Demographic variables including age, highest degree attained, and salary**

**When did you graduate?**

**From what school?**

**How far is that from your hometown?**

**Who lives back home?**

**How far is closest relative?**

**What are your interactions like with your family of origin?**

**Tell me about the economic state of your family of origin.**

**Have interactions with your family of origin changed since you attended college? If so, how have your interactions with your family of origin changed since attending college?**

**Does your family place demands on you? What kinds?**

**Do you offer support to your family of origin? What kinds?**

**Does your family of origin offer you support? What kinds?**

**Do you have problems as a result of upward mobility? What kinds?**

**Do you feel you have to shift between two identities (collectvitist and individualist, and/or family and profession)?**

**How do you manage these multiple identities?**

**What are your feelings associated with shifting between identities?**

**How do you cope with shifting between identities?**

**What have you done to manage feelings associated with upward mobility?**

**What have you done to manage relationships with your family of origin?**

APPENDIX B

SAMPLE MEMO 1

Memo: Embracing a change in status                                    6/10/08

It seems that the women interviewed could all on some level acknowledge that they were in process of or had at some point in their lives experienced a change in status. It was acknowledged that the women made more salary wise, that they lived in nicer and safer neighborhoods than the ones they grew in, that they were more financially stable and that live after receiving an education offered new opportunities.  When asked what it means to be educated the women all shared of new opportunities that would be made available to them. They talked about being able to help on a larger level. Being able to now give back to others who have helped them along the way.

Going to college means working hard for a greater good; to better the situation of the family and community of origin. Working and believing that at the end of all of this, the sacrifice will all have been worth it. It is because you decided to go to school and earn a degree that not many people like you have, you are now the exception? You are proving something even if you don't feel like you have anything to prove. You are a member of an oppressed group who is achieving something that used to be off guards to you. There was a time when reading was illegal for Blacks. Those who broke the rules imposed by Whites had consequences and learned that education was not for them. Education means power. Black people are resourceful and you add on top of that formal education which teaches you more than you learn in books. (Within the African American community learning happens through stories. Sharing information and passing it down from generation to generation by members of the family.) By going away to college women learn about systems and how life really works. They develop life skills that will help them in many different situations. They learn to cope and be strong and filter out what is true about them. They have to be the judges of what success is and with an education they can be judgmental or should I say critical. They don't have to take things at face value. They can look at a situation a little bit differently and come to a different conclusion. Is this what happens as they reflect on their family related experiences?

The message that education is not for Blacks has been internalized by some Blacks. They believe that are trapped like the fly in the jar. They feel helpless and trapped. They may even feel that there is no way for them to improve their situation. What does it mean the when a Black person makes it?

Not all Blacks believe that education is not for them. Some set their dreams high and set goals that will require them to step outside of the box of what it means to be Black. Being Black is more "the hood." It is more than poverty and any other negative beliefs people may have about members of this group. We are strong people. We have survived a lot of barriers and keep succeeding.

What seemed to be missing from some of the women's story was an embracing of their new identities or a clear understanding of what the change in status meant about their self-

concept. Glenda described herself as "being a poor Black girl." Many others echoed this woman's remarks. They explained how a change in status represented something (not the word: unfamiliar) and even a bit (negative: not the word). There seems to be a lot of fear that change of will represent a disconnection from their family of origin. One woman shared "if you make 70 thousand and your family make 15 thousand, how can you fill you that gap. It's impossible."

So some women are able to transcend the barriers of class and gradually enter into a different class. This new class maybe very different from the class that they were raised in. The change in status may be something that the person was shooting for their whole life and so there are strong feelings of accomplishment once this goal is attained, right? Some are eager to embrace a new identity. They were tired of struggling and felt that there was something more out there for them. They believed and trusted in the process and failed to give up. It's a long road. For some, much more than 10 years: 4 years for a bachelors and 6 years of graduate training. Other times women feel a bit embarrassed by their success. Fearful about what their new identity means. What does it mean about where they come from if they change statues?

Maybe some of the difficulty with embracing a new identity is realizing that although a change in status is taking place on a person level, in society the change may not mean much in terms of the way that the women are treated. Dorothy described herself as "Middle class but still Black."
For the women in the study, they could acknowledge that they were in fact in a different social class that they were educated. All of them worked around the university and so hanging around faculty members all of the time, doctors, and being a part of this environment day in and day out automatically made them look like they were in different social class even if their many did not. There are certain benefits to being in this sort of environment. There are many opportunities and resources that people back home may not have access to. Many women spoke of living off of loan money and how the change in status was a facade. That they really were still poor, but could now dress the part of middle class. For the women though, being in a PWI means that although you may have the same status as those around here and have the same degree or are working toward the same degree as your counterparts, you are not like us. You are Black and what that means is that you are different. You are deficient in some way. Ghetto? Ignorant? Loud? Aggressive? Bitchy? And many other negative stereotypes that exists about Black women get attached to these women. Even before they speak others have already prejudged them as being a certain way and for this reason treat them differently. Maybe they don't get the same respect that another faculty member may get. The women shared that it is important for them to not feed into the stereotypes. Be a positive representation for their race. Make sure that if a racial issue arises they handle it in a way so that negative outcomes are minimized. Choosing battles? Do I confront or let it pass? Is it worth the political backlash?

SAMPLE MEMO 2

Memo: Changes in relationships with family of origin                    7/17/08

When exploring the experiences of the women, it seemed that many of them could identify changes or perceived that there were some changes in the relationships with members of their family of origin. It is being speculated in this study that the reason for the change, cause for the change in relationships is a change in social status on the part of the college educated African American women in the study. It is not believed that a change in social status is the sole purpose or the only reason that an African American woman or anyone for that reason experiences changes in relationships with members of their family of origin. What are other reasons?

When exploring possible reasons for the change in relationship, research says that people experience changes in relationships due to aging (Eriksons's developmental model may be relevant), becoming more independent from the family system and more autonomous (differentiation from the family origin). Normal developmental changes occur that cause people to change the dynamics of their interactions to better fit them. Dorothy shared how her needs for her mother changed: she no longer needed a parental figure, but more of a friend who can support her and affirm her professional identity. When she has directly asked her mother to meet her needs, she is able to do it. She shared being fearful that she will hurt or make her mother feel abandoned. Why? She worries that her mother will perceive her actions as indicating that she thinks she is better than her family because they have a degree. When she went away to school she was distant. She didn't call or visit much; she was always too busy for them.

It is important to note that the changes identified are from one side of the relationship. The women are working under the assumption that they are perceived a certain way by their family members. When asked why they think relationships have changed, many of the women reported "I don't know." It seems that they do not see themselves very different just because they have degrees now. Some identified that the changes came as a result of them not being the same. Not enjoying doing the same things that they used to do as a family. Having experienced more since living at home, some of the women's perspectives have changed. It seems that college is a time to explore yourself, your interests, your values, and beliefs. After going away to school, some women could see differences in the way they viewed things. Changes in the way their worldview. Some of the changes were in terms of the frequency to which they saw each other. There were changes in the way that they interacted when they did see each other. Women spoke of awkward interactions where they left the interaction feeling like things have not been reciprocal, meaning that they gave more than they received in that interaction. Women spoke about eagerly returning home to the comfort and familiarity of being with people like them. Ironically, sometimes people wanted to leave PWI to get to comfort and other times they wanted to leave home to get back to their PWI. People who understood and respected them. People who validated their identities. The changes that the women experienced in their relationships varied from positive changes that strengthened the relationships to negative changes that left the relationships strained. Some of the changes that were seen as positive involved family members being more understanding

the needs of the educated family member and vise versa. When there was a mutual understanding among family members, it seemed that relationships were viewed as positive. Women shared that when they went home to their family of origin, some were now seen as smart by family members. Being capable of doing something that almost makes them special now. Being praised for their academic achievement. Family members seeking them out for support or encouragement when before they would not get such attention. When there was a lack of understanding of roles or feelings of being overtaxed by the new expectations of family members, relationships were strained or had more of a possibility of becoming strained. It seemed that many of the women in the study worked hard to adjust to the changes in relationships. They expressed feeling that it was them who had changed, not their family members and for this reason, they needed to be the ones being accommodating. Just because the women could identify changes in their relationships, few reported viewing their family any different. Some shared that after going away to college a returning home, there were unhealthy things about their family that they did not want to put up with. They spoke about confronting these various issues which include various forms of abuse, substance use and abuse, interaction styles etc. Outcomes of confronting these issues varied from positive, family members being open and receptive to feedback, integrating changes to negative where family members were defensive and offended by the actions of the college educated person. The women who shared that they did not see their families any different shared that they appreciated going home to there safe place. They shared that they often worried their family members would perceive them as different after getting a degree. Different in terms of them needing, respecting and valuing their family members. There were fears expressed that the women would be perceived as an outsider by their family members should they do a certain action or speak a certain way. This led to the women being very intentional and deliberate in their interactions with their family. Being very mindful of the fact that they now have accomplished something that others have not, and for this reason, they need to be sure not to rub it in their faces or brag or boast as to make the others feel bad about not having accomplished the same thing.

Dorothy shared, "I changed when I was in school." So did Tasha. They report being more confident now. More assertive now. More open to new experiences now. Not afraid of change or of differences from when they grew up. More hopeful and accepting now. What does it mean if the women are different now? Are they going to still value family interactions? Since so many women experience a change in relationships with their family, may be family should anticipate it. That way that could prepare and not be shocked. Like white people shouldn't be shocked to find an educated Black, Blacks should not be shocked by the change in relationships that occur after one person receives a degree.

Dorothy asked, is it the family's goal to knock her off of that "high horse" (may feel like insults will not be verbal. Not words, just a facial expression, exasperated sigh, "yeah, yeah, what ever", "must be college thing", failure to affirm). "We were not raised to think that we are better than others. We are all the same." "Don't ever forget where you came from and who helped you get here." "Without saying you owe me, they say it." Or before they left did they receive the message, "when you are done you owe us?" What makes women think that it is their responsibility? Is it being a woman? A Black woman? Is it something deeper? Who

else is going to do it? Survivors guilt?  Fears of further alienation? Or pure desire. "I have it, why not share?" This was my whole reason for going to school? We are a group. A rule to being apart of this community is sharing and giving back. "What is mine is yours."

APPENDIX C

Hello

My name is Danielle J. Simmons and I am doctoral candidate in Counseling Psychology. I am working on my doctoral dissertation on interactions among African American women with the family of origin. I am interested in exploring your interactions with your family of origin and any changes in interaction that may have occurred as a result of you attending college. I am primarily interested in understanding the demands and expectations that may be placed on you by your family of origin.

I am interested in meeting with you to discuss the topic. If you are interested in participating, please respond to this email or give me a call at 294-9668.

If you are any questions, please feel free to contact me. I am attaching a copy of my informed consent document for your review.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to hearing back from you.

APPENDIX D

## INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

**Title of Study:**     **Demands, Social Support, and Coping Among College Educated
                        African American Women**

**Investigators:**      **Danielle Jacqueline Hill, M.S.**

This is a research study.  Please take your time in deciding if you would like to participate.
Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to learn more about African American women's experiences
with their family of origin after attaining a college education. You are being invited to
participate in this study because you identify as African American/ Black and have attended
college.

### DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in this study, your participation will last for one hour. You will be
interviewed once at a time that is convenient for you this academic year. During the study
you may expect the following study procedures to be followed:  I will be interviewing you at
a location that is private and conveniently located for you. I will audio record the interview
for later analysis. The recording will be erased after the interviews have been transcribed and
the transcriptions will be keep in a safe, secure location.

### RISKS AND BENEFITS

While participating in this study, risk is minimal. However, you may experience mild
discomfort in answering the questions that are personal in nature about your relationships
with your family. There are no additional risks for participating in this study. You do not
have to answer any questions you do not want to. If you decide to participate in this study
there will be no direct benefit to you. It is hoped that the information gained in this study will
benefit society by providing new information regarding the experiences of African American
women who have attended college.

### COSTS AND COMPENSATION

You will not have any costs from participating in this study.  You will not be compensated
for participating in this study.

### PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. If you decide not to participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

## CONFIDENTIALITY

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken: you will be given the opportunity to use pseudonyms if names are used at any point in the interviews. Your information will never have your name attached. An arbitrary code number will be used instead. All research records will be kept on a secure server at the Institue for Social and Beahvioral Research. Only the researcher and supervising faculty member will have access to records. The computer files will be kept in secure, password protected file. Files will be kept until the my doctoral dissertation is completedIf the results are puclished, the participants identity will remain confidential.

## QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study.

- For further information about the study contact Danielle J. Hill (515-294-9668; dhill@iastate.edu) or Dr. Carolyn Cutrona (515-294-6784; ccutrona@iastate.edu).

- If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, IRB@iastate.edu, or Director, (515) 294-3115, Office of Research Assurances, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011.

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## PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Participant's Name (printed) _____

_____          _____
(Participant's Signature)                                    (Date)


**INVESTIGATOR STATEMENT**

I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to read and learn about the study and all of their questions have been answered.  It is my opinion that the participant understands the purpose, risks, benefits and the procedures that will be followed in this study and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

_____          _____
(Signature of Person Obtaining                     (Date)
Informed Consent)

APPENDIX E

## PILOT STUDY

To assess the value of using interviews to explore the experiences of upwardly mobile African American women, I decided to conduct pilot study interviews before beginning the larger dissertation project. Therefore, in November 2007, an email message was sent to 10 African American women employed by Iowa State University describing the study and asking if they would be willing to be interviewed along with an Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved informed consent form. Three respondents replied with interest in the study. The respondents were three African American women who were all familiar with the impacts of upward mobility. One of the women interviewed was working in a profession, having earned her Bachelor's degree, one was working having earned her Master's degree, and the third respondent was a full-time graduate student working on her doctorate.

Individual semi-structured interviews were used to explore respondents' experiences with their family of origin since earning their degree. Interviews provide a detailed description of individuals' experiences relating to the phenomenon of interest and allow respondents to thoroughly share their story (Esterberg). The interviews were scheduled for an hour and were conducted in a private location selected by the respondent to ensure their comfort. Two of the interviews were conducted in the private offices of the respondents. The other was held in an unoccupied conference room at her workplace.

### Pilot Study Analysis

According to Esterberg (2002), qualitative data analysis involves recognizing patterns in the data, generating ideas about what these patterns might mean, and exploring potential meanings in the data. Additionally, Coffey and Atkins (1996) explain that qualitative coding entails three basic procedures: (1) noticing a phenomenon, (2) collecting examples of such

phenomenon, and (3) analyzing the examples of the phenomenon in order to identify

"commonalities, differences, patterns, and structures" (p. 29). They describe two coding

strategies used in qualitative research projects: open and focused coding. Open coding

involves drawing salient categories of data from transcribed interviews, observations, and

field notes.

The data from the interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using an open

coding method of data analysis. After reading the transcripts numerous times, I realized

themes were emerging that were both unique to individual participants and also consistent

across the participants. I highlighted information that seemed to be related to the emerging

themes. While open coding, I highlighted themes as they emerged and documented the theme

in the margins of the transcripts and supplemental materials to assist in the process of

recording and later organizing the specific topics that emerge.

I then engaged in a more focused coding approach where I focused on the themes that

emerged from the open coding method. Esterberg (2002) stated that once a researcher

identifies several reoccurring themes, he or she may begin to do more focused coding. This

focused coding allows the researcher to more narrowly identify themes and entails going

through the data again, line by line, while focusing on those key themes that emerged during

the open coding strategy. I was able to explore the themes more specifically and, to ensure

goodness and trustworthiness of the data, I began to take quotations from the interviews that

supported the themes. By using direct quotes, I was able to provide evidence that the findings

of the study are consistent with the data collected.

Through conducting a pilot study, I was able to practice the data collection process

for this dissertation. I learned effective ways to gain access to potential respondents, received

feedback on my interview protocol and developed strategies for coding the data. Through the process of conducting the pilot study, I learned that the topic is relevant to African American professional women at ISU and that a dissertation about African American family relationships is justifiable.

APPENDIX F

INITIAL CODES

Thirty- four initial categories derived from open coding

1. Family make-up (family structure, size of family, relationships with extended relatives)
2. Interactions with family of origin (feeling misunderstood, being seen as expert)
3. Motivation for attaining a college education (being socialized directly and/or indirectly, to get out of poverty, improve family situation, to increase opportunities, change perception of African Americans)
4. Self-efficacy (belief in ability, vision of future)
5. Accomplishment ( proud, "few have done it", first in family)
6. Family traditions (getting together on holidays, close proximity, sharing among family members, celebrating together)
7. Effects of being first generation (need to teach self, lack of role models)
8. Connections with educators promotes interest and belief in ability to succeed (role models, teachers, mentors)
9. Exploring multiple identities (ethnicity, gender, age, education, social class)
10. Managing multiple (compartmentalizing identities, wearing various "hats", not discussing work with family of origin)
11. Perception of dominant culture (knowing what it means to be White, not negative, just not desired; hold negative views of African American community)
12. Societal influences (experiences with racism and discrimination, values and beliefs of majority culture, being a double minority)
13. Experiences with African American community (attending predominantly Black schools, living in predominantly Black community)
14. Experiences with majority culture (limited interactions by attending predominantly Black schools, multicultural experiences from early age, assimilation)
15. Struggles associated with working in PWI (representing African Americans, needing to prove self, being misunderstood, intentional in interactions)
16. Changes in life resulting from change in status (increased finances, changes in values and relating to others)
17. Family support (family of origin, i.e., mother, father, siblings, grandparents and family of procreation, i.e., husband, boyfriend, children; emotional, tangible, educational support)
18. Friend support (friends living nearby, experiencing similar situations; emotional, tangible, educational support)
19. Colleague Support (proof reading manuscripts, advice on interpersonal dynamics)
20. Faith community support (emotional support from belief in higher power, i.e., prayer, members of church community)
21. Needs of the family of origin (maintaining traditions, provide emotional, tangible, and education support)
22. Kinship care arrangements (being raised/cared for by relatives, providing in home care of to relatives)

23. Physical distance from family of origin (moving to another state, not seeing relatives as often as before)
24. Needs of the family of procreation (continued interactions with family of origin, relationships with other African Americans)
25. Code-switching (altering self-presentation, i.e., dialect, style of dress, interests, downplaying experiences)
26. Interacting with like others (have same "standpoint", comfort, safe-space)
27. Working with underrepresented populations (working in minority student affairs, being a mentor, intentionally only researching the experiences of African Americans)
28. Desire to control others' views (actively assessing potential losses and risks of disclosing, not wanting to be perceived as "bourgie", proving association with African American identity)
29. Not forgetting background (visiting childhood neighborhood, maintaining values instilled by family of origin i.e., humility, pride in community; conflicting messages about self-sufficiency)
30. Psychological distress (irritability, guilt, anger, grief, loss, fatigue)
31. Coping (family, friends, religion, cognitive reframing, self-enhancement)
32. Not talking about family-related experiences (unaware, not comfortable disclosing, don't talk about, "no venue" to get it out)
33. Reflecting on life experiences (questioning upbringing)
34. Identity integration (using past experiences to prevail in current situation, developing a positive self-identity, self-concept)

APPENDIX G

PERFORMANCE ETHNOGRAPHY

I will perform the data of my study in this performance ethnography. This monologue is based on interviews conducted with 13 African American women, many of whom started out their lives in neighborhoods said to be impoverished and rundown. But for the women interviewed, these predominately Black environments were home. Each of these women have since moved away from their homes, and as a result of earning advanced degrees, now have homes that are quite different than the homes they grew up knowing. No longer do they live in poverty. They have officially "made it"! As you listen to this, let's reflect on what does this tell us about upwardly mobile African American women.

Have I experienced a change in status? I don't know. I don't think I have. Ok. Maybe a change. I do make more money now, have a nice car and house, have food stocked in my refrigerator and cabinets, so yeah, I guess I have changed statuses.

Well I don't know. I don't really like to think about things like that you know. I mean, although I am in a different social class, I am still the same. I may have moved away and although I am not in the ghetto anymore, you know the saying, "you can take the girl out of the ghetto, but you can't take the ghetto out of the girl". I am still the same "Black girl from Atlanta". No degree or making more money can ever change that. I will never forget where I came from.

I wouldn't even be here today had it not been for all of the people before me who fought so hard for my rights. This includes famous people like Martin Luther King Jr and Ida B. Wells,

as well as people like my parents and grandparents who worked their tails off to make sure that there was always food on the table and I had clean clothes on my back. I mean, the clothes may have been hand me downs, worn by my older siblings and cousins, but you can believe that my family made sure that I never went without. They really sacrificed for me. And not just for me, but for all of my relatives. As a member of this family, we will always have each other's backs. I mean, if I have it and you need it, it's yours. Don't even hesitate to ask.

I owe so much to my family and other members of my community. I mean, look, I am no one special and if I can do this, then anyone can do it. A large part of my motivation for getting this degree was so that I could have something and some way to give back. I really see my role as being twofold: I am striving to improve my situation, while at the same time working to improve the situation of the next generation. I want to see a whole family of doctors and lawyers and Obamas. I mean, Black people no longer have to be stagnant. We are as the Jefferson's song says "well we're moving on up, to the east side, to a deluxe apartment in sky. Moving on up".

Anyway, what was I talking about, oh yeah, change in status. Let me tell you, this change in status has been a mixed bag, filled with both good and some bad. For one thing, my family members, it's like they think I am super smart now. It's funny that they think I know so much, when in all actuality, although I do know a great deal, it's in a really specific and narrow area. I mean, they give me way more credit than I deserve.

But not only do they think I'm smart, but they also think I am rich. I mean, don't get me wrong, I am not hurting for money or anything, but I am definitely not rich. My mom and I share a cell phone contract and for the last few months she has not paid her full portion of the bill. At first I was thinking I should confront her about it, but then I decided, why trip, I do have the means to cover her portion, so I might as well pay it rather than make a thing about it. You know, I pick my battles because there are other things that I don't let slide, like last year when I was home for Christmas, I was expected to pay for most of the food needed for the Christmas meal.

Now in the past, everyone has chipped in for the meal, but this year, I guess they thought, let's just have the professor foot the bill. I was fine contributing like everyone else and even contributing a little bit more since I am working with more than many of them, but I was not ok being held responsible for it all. Everyone was shocked when I stood up for myself. I told them how much I was willing to spend and said that it was their responsibility to come up with the rest.

This year, I might not even be able to go home for the holidays. I mean, I have so much to do up here and I was just home a couple of months ago. I would love to be able to run home every holiday and family get together, but honestly I have a life here that requires my time too. This is something my family struggles to understand. It's like they are almost offended when I say I can't come home. It often feels like I have to choose between my family and my career. I really don't think that's fair.

I am becoming a master at juggling it all though. I've learned to keep these two worlds very separate. Because I live so far away from home, all of my visits have to be planned out well in advance and when I am at home, I am completely at home. This means no work, no computer, I don't even use my blackberry. And since no one really understands the work I do anyway, it's easy to just keep this part of my life to myself.

What's cool is that when I do go home and see my family, I can actually go and start speaking like them. I can understand their talk and not speak differently. I can go right back into that environment and it's almost like I never left. Honestly, I value this ability because I never wanted any of my family members to believe I felt I was better than they are just because I went away to college.

If I've learned anything over my life journey, it's the value of my family. We are family and no one or nothing can change that. They see how hard I worked to get to where I am and they are proud of me. Our relationships, although different than they were before I decided to go to college, are still strong. They support, encourage and celebrate me. Once I graduate, I'll return the favor, both to members of my family of origin and the extended Black community. Our sacrifices have not been in vain because this degree represents change and I owe it all to you. Thank you.

APPENDIX H
(Signed IRB available upon request)