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INVISIBLE WOMAN: A CASE STUDY ON BLACK WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES IN
GRADUATE DEGREE PROGRAMS IN CENTRAL KENTUCKY

By

Ciara Nicole Pierce

B.A., Kentucky State University, 2008

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of the University of Louisville

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Pan-African Studies

University of Louisville

Louisville, Kentucky

May 2011

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A Thesis Approved On

November 18, 2010

By the following Thesis Committee:

Thesis Director

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my Mother and Grandmother

Sheree Ann Pierce

And

Lavetta Jean Pierce

You made it possible for me to do what you were not allowed to do.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to give special thanks to my Thesis Chair Dr. Theresa Rajack-Talley. Over the last couple of years you have challenged and encouraged me, pushing me to do my best.

I would also like to thank Dr. Kaila Story, the study participants, and most importantly the late Dr. Clarence Talley for their assistance with this project.

Many thanks to my best friend Tanina, GFK, the Department of Pan-African Studies at the University of Louisville, and my Kentucky State University family for their encouragement and support.

ABSTRACT

INVISIBLE WOMAN: A CASE STUDY ON BLACK WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES IN GRADUATE DEGREE PROGRAMS IN CENTRAL KENTUCKY

Ciara N. Pierce

November 1, 2010

Using black feminist perspective and standpoint this study explored factors that affect black women's matriculation and retention in graduate degree programs by examining how experiences and opportunities connected to race, class, and gender inform their decision to pursue and persist through graduate education. Specifically the study sought to investigate how the outlined factors affect the decision to pursue and matriculate through a graduate degree program. Those factors include: (1) educational preparedness, aspirations, and attitudes; (2) economic opportunities and restraints; (3) family obligations and expectations; (4) networks and mentoring; (5) and perceptions of usefulness. Data was collected by way of qualitative interviews with ten black women graduate students studying in various disciplines at two universities in the Commonwealth of Kentucky. Findings revealed that information from the qualitative interviews was congruent with the literature that focused specifically on black women. Race, faculty mentoring relationships, and personal expectations had the most significant impact on the participants' experiences in their respective graduate programs.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Amongst academics, politicians, theorists, and the public it seems that education has been recognized and mythologized as a tool for providing opportunity, mobility, and effective citizenship skills for members of American democracy (Cohen & Nee, 2000). Thomas Jefferson, who may be considered the father of public education, argued that education was so important that it should be provided to everyone regardless of expense. For Jefferson the function and continuation of democracy depends upon enlightenment and the cultivation of talent and virtue needed in free society (Cohen & Nee, 2000; Padover, 1952). He wrote:

Democracy cannot long exist without enlightenment; that is it cannot function without wise and honest officials; that talent and virtue needed in a free society, should be educated regardless of wealth, birth or other accidental condition; that other children of the poor must be educated at common expense. (Padover, 1952)

Present day education advocates such as James A. Banks have expanded these sentiments with multicultural education. Education works to enable marginalized groups to participate fully in the making and perpetuation of a moral and civic community that promotes the nation's democratic ideals (Banks & Banks, 1997). Political scientists argue that education encourages and provides skills that facilitate participation in politics (Rosenstone & Hansen,

1993). Sociologists and economists focus on the significant role education plays in bestowing human capital skills for individuals and nations that seek to advance in a changing and technology-driven world economy (Duncan, 1996; Gittleman & Joyce, 1995; Wilson 1996).

Many very well known 19th and 20th century black leaders such as Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Dubois, Anna Julia Cooper, and Mary Mcleod-Bethune, who were aware of issues of access to education for blacks, believed that education could lead to human growth, liberation of the race, economic opportunity, and citizenship skills (Cohen & Nee, 2000; Evans, 2007). For who and what purpose is where they differed. For example, Washington, in his "Atlanta Exposition Address", called for greater educational opportunities for blacks for the purposes of utility and economic gains (Cohen & Nee, 2000; Washington, 1967). Dubois, early in his career believed that holistic development and liberation of the race rested upon a select few men who he believed should be trained in liberal education (Cohen & Nee, 2000; Dubois, 1903). Anna Julia Cooper saw education as a tool for moral uplift of the race and human growth and she also believed that black women should play a crucial role in that growth and uplift, in addition to being supported by black men in those endeavors (Cohen & Nee, 2000; Cooper, 1891; Evans, 2007). Mary Mcleod-Bethune saw education as a civil right for all citizens in a democracy (Evans, 2007).

Nonetheless, the belief that education is the foundation for the pathway to social and economic progress has never subsided and still remains intact (Cohen

& Nee, 2000; Evans, 2007). For blacks and women, and black women especially, education has been the primary foundation for social and economic progress, and as other black women scholars might suggest, education is a tool for economic survival (Cohen & Nee, 2000; Gregory, 1995; Ihle, 1986; Kaba, 2008).

Currently, in the area of higher education, women and especially black women have made significant progress. Women, who made up a small percentage of the college-educated population, in the early 20th century, now make up the majority of that population (NCES, 1995). With the exception of Asian men and women, proportionally black women have had the highest increase in college enrollment and degree attainment. However, this is only true for technical, associate, and bachelor degree attainment (Kaba, 2008). Black women have also surpassed black men 2 to 1 in bachelor's degree attainment (NCES, 2010). Still, it is at the advanced degree level where less than half of all black women with bachelor degrees fail to matriculate (JBHE, 2007; Walpole, 2008).

Much of recent research on blacks in higher education has focused its attention on black men's issues; and research on the progress in women's higher education is more representative of white women. According to Bell-Scott (1984), research on black women has been a routinely ignored subject. Ihle (1986) and Johnson-Bailey (1994) found that it is difficult to know what is happening with black women in higher education because major quantitative studies report data according to race and sex, but not within race and sex.

Women and people of color are rarely cross-referenced in data sets. Most studies are done on middle-aged, middle-class white women, which according to Caffarella and Olson (1993) is inappropriate because educators make generalizations about all women based on the data about white women.

While black women are responsible for a great deal of the progress made by African Americans in education they still lag behind white women and men at all degree levels and especially the advanced degree level (Kaba, 2008; NCES, 1983). Considering the vast educational advancement and the importance of education to socioeconomic and political progress it is important to discover what factors affect African American women's participation in graduate level programs and how race, class, and gender affects their progression through higher education.

Purpose of Study

Using black feminist perspective and standpoint this study will explore factors that affect black women's decisions to pursue and persist through graduate degree programs by examining how experiences and opportunities connected to race, class, and gender inform their decision to pursue a graduate degree. Specifically the study will investigate how factors of (1) educational preparedness, aspirations, and attitudes; (2) economic opportunities and restraints; (3) family obligations and expectations; (4) networks and mentoring; (5) and perceptions of usefulness affect the decision to pursue and matriculate through a graduate degree program. These findings allow for understanding of

why there is a gap between undergraduate and graduate degree attainment, and the factors that act as barriers and major motivating influences to pursue and matriculate through graduate degree programs.

Structure of Thesis

Chapter 2 reviews literature on African Americans and women in higher education. This chapter provides context to the study by locating black women within women's higher education literature and that of African Americans.

Chapter 3 explores feminism and Black Feminist Thought. This chapter takes a look at the emergence of Black Feminist Theory, with an emphasis on its use and recognition of the intersectionality of race, class, and gender. Chapter 4 explains the methodology to the study. It includes a detailed discussion on the researcher's role, interview process, and sampling procedures. Chapter 5 presents the research findings. Chapter 6 analyzes the findings by connecting them to the theoretical foundation and the previous literature. It highlights major conclusions and makes suggestion for future research.

CHAPTER II

DEGREE ATTAINMENT

African Americans students account for only eight percent of all college students graduating with bachelor degrees from U.S. colleges and universities (NCES, 2010b) . Within this group women make up nearly two-thirds of the total number of African Americans attending institutions of higher education; and African American women comprise the largest number of students of color at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Women overall make up over half of the students who enroll and graduate from institutions of higher education and women's degree attainment continues to increase. Statistics show that white women's degree attainment has increased significantly more than all other groups at the graduate level. Black women have experienced the smallest increase in degree attainment at the graduate level compared to all other women groups (NCES, 2010a).

This literature review explores trends in undergraduate and graduate degree attainment according to race and gender. It highlights the situation of African American women's matriculation through graduate programs. There is little information about black women in higher education, especially that which makes a distinction between the undergraduate and graduate degree levels.

Much of the literature discusses higher education experiences in general then goes on to discuss black women's experiences as faculty members in predominantly white institutions. Researchers are beginning to discover that drawing conclusions about degree attainment related to race and gender are misleading if the heterogeneity of groups is not taken into account (Lucia & Bauman, 2009). Research samples that look at blacks and women make it difficult to see what is happening with black women, whose situation is unique juxtaposed to black men and white women (Lucia & Bauman, 2009). While the focus of this study is to examine Black women in graduate education, this review also discusses degree attainment at the undergraduate level because literature indicates that participation at the graduate level depends on similar factors and experiences related to undergraduate success.

Within both educational levels the literature discusses factors that inform overall degree attainment such as enrollment, persistence, field of study and career path and how these components are negotiated differently according to race and gender groups. In this review these components are discussed by undergraduate and graduate degree levels and by race and gender. Comparisons between black and white education attainment, men's and women's education attainment, black men and black women, and that of black and white women education attainment are necessary to flush out black women's experiences as they relate to their pursuit of and persistence through graduate education.

Undergraduate Trends in Degree Attainment

Undergraduate Degree Attainment Across Race

(Rates)

While blacks have made extraordinary progress in degree attainment since desegregation, when compared to whites they continue to be underrepresented in undergraduate programs (Walpole, 2008). Currently, 32.6 percent of whites over the age of 25 hold a college degree compared to 19.6 percent of blacks (JBHE, 2009). For blacks this represents a less than two percent increase since 1998. According to William T. Trent (1983) minorities fall progressively behind whites at each stage of education, especially at the graduate degree level.

Much of the research on degree attainment by race and gender began in the early 1970s following higher education legislation that sought to ensure equal access to education for African Americans, women and other minority groups. Several studies done in the 1970s and 1980s that tracked African American degree attainment found evidence there was a stagnation in bachelor degree attainment compared with the steady progress made by blacks during desegregation. Currently there is minimal growth in students receiving bachelor degrees across race (Cohen & Nee, 2000).

As a starting point for enrollment and degree attainment, studies suggest that college enrollment should be proportional to high school graduation (Cohen and Nee 2000). For blacks this is peculiar because the number of black high school graduates and the number of those who enrolled in college do not correlate. African American college enrollment began to decrease in the 1980s

and remained relatively unchanged. However, between 1976 and 1996, the percentage of African American high school graduates ages 18 to 24 enrolled in colleges did not significantly increase or decrease (32.5 percent to 35.9 percent). On the other hand, during the same period, the percentage of white high school graduates and students enrolled in college increased by 11 percent (33 percent to 44 percent) from 1976 to 1996 (Cohen & Nee, 2000). Blacks did not experience the same progress with enrollment and degree attainment as their white counterparts in a thirty-year period; and the rates of degree attainment are not on par with white students.

Black enrollment overall, is representative of the population, however their graduation rates are not. For example from 1998 to 2008 blacks made almost 13.0 percent of enrollment and only 10.2 percent of degrees conferred. Whites made up 66.0 percent of enrollments and 72.0 percent of degrees conferred (NCES, 2010b).

Factors Affecting Degree Attainment

Scholars provide numerous explanations for factors affecting college enrollment and degree attainment such as personal motivations, innate ability, high school achievement, admission standards, parent's education, income, affordability, career path and social class. Several studies point to students' socioeconomic status (SES) as having a significant affect on student matriculation and degree attainment (Cohen & Nee, 2000; Higginbotham, 2001; Ihle, 1986; Miller & Kastberg, 1995; Thomas, 1980; Walpole, 2008). For

example, Walpole (2008) found that African American students with low SES had lower rates of degree attainment and lower aspirations than their high SES peers. Cohen and Nee (2000) argue that while student SES does not have a direct affect on college enrollment, it does have an effect on other factors such as the type of high school students attend; chances of graduation; educational aspirations, attitudes, and preparedness; and financial aid. On the other hand Walpole (2008), generally, low SES African American students have less contact with faculty, study less, are less involved with student organizations, work more, and have lower grades than all other African American students (Walpole, 2008).

While many studies target income and college affordability as two important issues contributing to enrollment and degree attainment, a study by Lucia and Bauman (2009) shows that these factors vary by racial groups. For white students high tuition costs and low income have a negative effect on their enrollment. Black men experience the same effect but to a lesser degree. Income does not affect the probability of their course enrollment, however their socioeconomic status does. For black women, the study shows that income, affordability, and socioeconomic status do not significantly affect their enrollment (Lucia & Bauman, 2009).

Other research focuses more on how postsecondary affirmative action policies affect college admissions and enrollment. According to Andrew Hacker (1992) in the late 1980s and early 1990s schools were admitting black students at higher rates, while limiting admission for whites despite lower test scores. Because of affirmative action policies black students were being admitted on

different standards than other groups. Hacker states that no colleges today turn down black applicants who meet their academic criteria; and virtually all schools say they would like to attract even more black students, since small black enrollments have become a matter of embarrassment. Although, minority attrition was always a cause for concern Affirmative Action programs were thought to be a disservice to some. Students who may not be able to survive academically were being admitted based on their race (Hacker, 1992).

Studies show majors choice and career path contributes to differences in degree attainment across race (Free, Brown, & Clifford, 2007). According to Hall, Mays, and Allen (1984) blacks tended to choose majors that lead to lower status occupations with lower earning potential and this restricts the upward mobility of blacks. Interestingly, research shows that in the past blacks were more likely than whites to major in education and social science and be underrepresented in life and technical sciences. This, however, has changed as figures from the twenty-first century show that blacks are highly represented in life and technical sciences at the early stages of undergraduate study (Ma, 2009), but are underrepresented in degrees conferred because they are more likely to leave life and technical science majors than white students (Ma, 2009; Seymour & Hewitt, 1997). In general, selection of majors and career path vary across race, but are more pronounced across gender and within race.

Undergraduate Degree Attainment Within Race

With a look at degree attainment within race, researchers claim that the

statistics for black's progress in degree attainment is misleading in general (Cohen & Nee, 2000; JBHE, 2009; Trent, 1983). Cohen and Nee (2000) claim that the increasing enrollments and attainment of degrees received during much of the 1960s and 1970s stands in sharp contrast to the temporary regression and relative stagnation in the progress of African American education that took place during the 1980s and 1990s. According to Trent (1983) black men decreased as a proportion of degree recipients between 1976 and 1981. During this same time period black women progressed toward parity with black men. The percentage of degree attainment for black women increased from 45 percent to 49.6 percent. Cohen and Nee (2000) show that the increase in enrollment of African American women matches the declining and stagnating male enrollment numbers through the 1980s.

By the 1990s black women had surpassed black men in degree attainment. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 1992) shows that in 1992 African American women received 63 percent of all bachelor's degrees awarded to African Americans. The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education (2009) provides more recent numbers for overall African American degree attainment by sex. There are 2,670,000 black women with a four-year degree or higher. For black men there are only 1,909,000. As of 2008 black women received 65 percent of black degrees conferred (NCES, 2010b).

Factors Affecting Degree Attainment

In Cohen and Nee's study (2000) special attention was given to the

differences in the educational attainment of black women and men to determine why a disparity between the two groups exists. One significant factor that separated men from women in college enrollment and degree attainment is the rate of incarceration for college age black males. This explains the discrepancy between steady high school graduation rates and decreased college enrollment. Additionally, Cohen and Nee (2000) allude to the fact that women may have an easier time enrolling in college because they are more likely to have dependents and therefore more likely to receive financial aid. Moreover, Cohen and Nee (2000) posit black women's degree attainment as a strategy of economic survival.

As stated earlier differences in major and career path were pronounced across gender and within race. Although black women enrolled at much higher rates than black men they continue to be concentrated in fields of study that typically carry with them less prestige and earning power. The three most popular fields for black women were and continue to be liberal arts and sciences, business management and administrative services, and health sciences. Black men were similar in that they were concentrated in liberal arts and business, but their third most popular field was in engineering and technological sciences (Cohen & Nee, 2000). Given the demand for technological expertise in technologically driven economy the payoff from education in terms of social prestige and income is much higher for an engineering major than an education major. The differences within race translate to the graduate level and are just as salient and consistent at the graduate level.

Undergraduate Degree Attainment Across Gender

(Rates)

The National Center for Education Statistics (2010) reported that in 2008 women received over fifty percent of the degrees conferred at all levels. Degree attainment, however, does not translate to equality in income earnings (Mickelson, 1989) as discrimination relegates women to traditionally female fields and therefore careers with lesser earning potential (Kastberg & Miller, 1995; May, 2006 ; Wilson, 2004).

Progress for women's degree attainment has been quite substantial since the implementation of Affirmative Action policies and Title IX, which was passed in 1972 and pushes for gender equity within federally funded institutions such as universities and institutions of employment. In 1970 there were 1.5 million fewer women than men in higher education. In 2004 women received 58 percent of all bachelor's degrees in the United States, compared to only 35 percent in 1960 (Buchmann, 2006). By 2005 there 2.6 million more women than men enrolled (Mortenson, 2008). Kingsbury (2007) predicts that the ratio of women to men in college is expected to increase 60 to 40 (Kingsbury, 2007).

Factors Affecting Degree Attainment

Explanations for why women have higher rates of degree attainment than men in spite of lesser returns are varied. Research shows that women have different motivations and expectations behind achievement and degree

attainment than men that may explain their higher rates of degree attainment (Cohen & Nee, 2000; Higginbotham & Weber, 1992; Mickelson, 1989). Factors such as the desire for economic survival and independence, sense of obligation, and marriage set men and women apart. Men with high school diplomas have more employment opportunities and receive higher wages than women with high school diplomas. Jobs for women typically require postsecondary training (Cohen & Nee, 2000; Higginbotham & Weber, 1992; Mickelson, 1989; Olneck & Lazerson, 1974).

Researchers found that women's educational experiences and motivations are characterized by systems of interdependencies, relationships, and networks. Women are motivated by a desire for personal and collective gain that is shaped by interpersonal commitments to family, partners and children, community, and the race. This is unlike the image created of white men in which case, income and self-interest are primary factors and seen separate from social and familial obligations (Higginbotham & Weber, 1992; Mickelson, 1989). Another motivation for women's college enrollment and degree attainment is marriage, which is more specific to white women. Many women's parents stress marriage as a means of social mobility and they were expected to find their husbands in college. Educational returns and social mobility are not necessarily expected through degree attainment, but by way of marriage with a degree being a byproduct (Higginbotham & Weber, 1992; Mickelson, 1989).

It has been asserted that differences in choosing a major and career path exist across race, however those differences are much more pronounced across

gender. Researchers highlight that women were highly concentrated in traditionally female fields, but slowly moved into traditionally male fields (Buchmann, 2006; Jacobs, 1996; Kingsbury, 2007; NCES, 1978; Women Gain Doctorates," 2000). Typically, men are more concentrated in higher-earning fields and women are more concentrated in the less rewarded ones, such as education and social work. Jacobs (1995) found that women were spread across as many fields as men. They were not crowding into fewer fields than men; they were just in different fields. Ma (2009) pointed out that women lead in life and health sciences but are severely underrepresented in technical and physical sciences such as computer, physics, and engineering. However, many studies tend to group life and physical sciences together. In the 2000-2001 academic year women received 20 percent of engineering degrees and 77 percent of the education degrees. This is important because gender segregation along fields of study appears to continually contribute to gender disparities in income (Bobbitt-Zeher, 2007; Cohen & Nee, 2000).

The National Center for Education Statistics (2010) reported the median income of men with graduate degrees was at least twenty thousand dollars more than women's income at each graduate degree level. Using NCES data from the early 1990s, Day and Hill (2007) found that women education majors earned 79 percent of what men education majors earned and eighteen percent of what engineering majors earned. Men and women education majors earned 60 percent of what engineering majors earned after one year out of school. This information supports the idea that there are wage penalties for men and women

who enter traditionally female fields. According to Donna Bobbitt-Zeher (2007) even though women's gains in education may have been central to narrowing the gender gap in income historically, gender differences in fields of study continue to disadvantage women. More education for women seems to be necessary for economic survival especially if they enter into fields of study that offer less in economic returns. More education helps women gain wage and salary parity with men.

In a 1984 study about recruitment to school teaching Thomas A. Lyson and William W. Falk found that even with equal opportunity and affirmative action programs occupation stratification is perpetuated. Results from the study show that among professionally oriented young people, a profession such as school teaching is most often perceived as an attractive career option by females, nonwhites, rural residents, those from lower social class origins, and those who have not performed exceptionally well in high school. Women and blacks in contrast to white men were more likely to use teaching as an upward boundary—an expected and achieved status. Lyson and Falk (1984) conclude that sex and race perpetuate traditionalistic division of labor despite legislative efforts to alter it.

Trends in Graduate Degree Attainment

According to Berg and Ferber (1983) today's educational system resembles a pyramid. With every level from elementary to graduate school education attainment decreases dramatically. Considering that those who make

it to the graduate degree level represent such a small and selective group researchers have begun to focus more attention on how those select few make it as far as they do in education. In addition, while there is a plethora of research on differences in undergraduate degree attainment along lines of race and gender, research in graduate degree attainment along the same lines that is nationally representative remains scarce (Perna, 2004). Decisions related to degree attainment at the graduate level are affected by the same factors involved at the undergraduate level; however graduate students tend to have additional constraints such undergraduate performance, required graduate test scores, relationships with faculty and personnel, educational and living expenses and employment opportunities. Furthermore, those factors affect race and gender groups differently (Lei & Chuang, 2010).

Graduate Degree Attainment Across Race

(Rates)

In 2008, NCES (2010) statistics showed that six percent of graduate degrees received went to black students and with regard to graduate degree programs Marybeth Walpole (2008) says that African Americans are clearly underrepresented in graduate and professional schools. The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education (2007) reported that in the 1992-1993 academic year blacks who had earned their bachelor's degree were more likely than whites to go on to graduate study. Despite the likelihood, 25 percent of both blacks and whites enrolled; however after ten years had passed 11.2 percent of blacks were still enrolled in graduate programs compared to 5.4 percent of whites (JBHE, 2007).

This suggests that blacks take a longer time to finish graduate programs. Statistics show that in 1976 blacks were underrepresented and experienced a very slow increase in representation at the graduate and professional degree levels. In a 30-year period blacks went from representing 5.9 percent to 10 percent of the graduate student population; and 4.6 percent to 8 percent of the professional student population (NCES, 2005; Walpole, 2008).

Factors Affecting Degree Attainment

Historically access to advanced degree programs for blacks had been restricted by institutional racism in the form of legal barriers and admissions practices. A series of court challenges followed by pressure from black student activists in the 1960s affected change in exclusionary practices. Thus, from 1965 to 1975 there was a rapid increase in blacks' advanced degree program enrollments. It has been said that along with sex, age, self-efficacy, career path and undergraduate performance, black enrollments in graduate programs are highly dependent upon the presence of black role models such as faculty and administration (Hall, Mays, & Walter, 1984). There is a correlative relationship between the number of black faculty at a particular institution and the number of blacks enrolled in that institution. This has become problematic for black graduate enrollments considering that blacks have made up no more than seven percent of total population of faculty (NCES, 2010c). Where there are relatively high numbers of black faculty there are also substantial numbers of black students. The lesson, however, is that it is imperative for young people to have

firsthand knowledge, via role models, that members of their own racial or ethnic group have become successful in their fields of study (Hall, et al., 1984).

Geneva Gay (2004) addressed negative factors that affect blacks' persistence and retention through graduate programs. She outlined three forms of marginalization that occur with black graduate students in predominantly white graduate programs; which may serve to explain why they do not complete graduate education as speedily or as regularly as their white counterparts. Those forms are physical, cultural and intellectual isolation, benign neglect and problematic popularity. Gay (2004) suggested that marginality has to do with goodness of fit issues between the needs, interests and skills of students of color, and institutional priorities; cultural, racial, ethnic and social differences; prejudices and discrimination; lack of culturally relevant academic and social support systems; and maintaining one's ethnic identity and cultural integrity.

In addition to those factors research shows that career path and field of study also affects black graduate student success. Hall, Mays, and Allen (1984) found that students with aspirations in non-traditional and lucrative fields had lower grade point averages than white students and students with aspirations for traditional fields. This, in effect, has encouraged younger students to lower their education and career aspiration. It has also served as a barrier to social mobility. They concluded that much of the failure and difficulty of blacks at the graduate level represents the culmination of history of educational, economic, and social inequities between the races.

Graduate Degree Attainment Across Gender

(Rates)

As of 2008 women account for over half of graduate enrollment and graduate degrees awarded (NCES, 2010b). Although women are leading men in graduate degree attainment, men account for forty-two percent of enrollments and forty-seven percent of degrees conferred (NCES, 2010b). Men, at the graduate degree level are therefore more likely than women to graduate.

Factors Affecting Degree Attainment Across Gender

In addition to abovementioned factors that affect enrollment and degree attainment at the undergraduate level, Berg and Ferber (1983) found that women at the graduate level compared to men tend to have lower self-confidence, set lower goals for themselves, and are likely to be given less encouragement and attention. Despite having better grades than men, similar to the undergraduate level women receive lower and fewer rewards. They are more likely to be teaching assistants instead of research assistants and in some cases receive less financial support. Once women enter the job market they are paid less and are hired at lower-level jobs than men. Moreover, due to lack of support from family and faculty, women experience more difficulty in particular fields of study, namely the physical and biological sciences compared to traditionally female fields like education. In physical and biological sciences there are far fewer women faculty than men faculty; and women tend to come into contact less with faculty and even less so with men faculty. This is also generally true across all fields of study.

Similar to the situation of race, students and faculty of the same gender interact most comfortably (Berg & Ferber, 1983).

Black Women's Degree Attainment

(Rates)

Black women represent the largest minority group in higher education at all levels (NCES, 2010b). While they have contributed greatly to women's progress there remains a disparity within gender. Black women have experienced the slowest increase in graduate degree attainment in a ten-year period compared to all groups except black men (NCES, 2010a). From 1998 to 2008 white women experienced a 19 percent increase in graduate degree attainment, with largest increases occurring at the professional and doctoral levels. During this same period black women only experienced a 13 percent increase in graduate degree attainment. Although they seem to be doing quite well in total number of degrees conferred compared to all other minority groups, their progress, however, they are nowhere near that of white men and women. The same goes for all other groups represented in U.S. higher education. Black women still receive rewards that are not commensurate with their education; they have experienced the smallest increase in graduate degree attainment (NCES, 2010b); and on average take much longer to graduate than white women (NCES, 2010b); and still fall behind black men and white women in terms employment and earnings related to their majors and careers of choice (Cohen & Nee, 2000; Hall, et al., 1984).

Factors Affecting Black Women's Degree Attainment

Yolanda T. Moses (1989) focuses specifically on barriers to graduate education that black women face. Many of those same barriers exist at the undergraduate level. Additionally, in graduate programs rely more heavily on relationships with faculty and social networking. Blacks and women experience many of the same barriers, however, for black women they manifest differently, and affect them in varying degrees. In this context black women are extremely and uniquely affected by discrimination based on race and sex, thus separating their experiences from that of black men and white women. Barriers to graduate education deliberated by scholars include undergraduate experiences that deal with social segregation; lack of perceived economic returns; and lack of emotional, academic and financial support (Higginbotham & Weber, 1992; Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Menges & Exum, 1983; Moses, 1989).

According to Moses (1989) black women on predominantly white campuses are rarely integrated into the life and culture of their institutions. They are subject to a hostile and indifferent campus climates that lack understanding of black women's experiences. Black women's invisibility is apparent in the classroom, curriculum, residential, and social life. Professors do not recognize them in classroom settings. White women and black men largely control women's studies and Black studies curricula and therefore keep black women's issues at the margins. Residential life at black colleges is safe from racism, but not sexism and on predominantly white campuses black women spend much of their time alone because they find it hard to socialize. Social activities are not typically focused on black women with the exception of programs put on by black

sororities.

Lack of perceived economic returns for advanced degree attainment is also a barrier to black women's enrollment in graduate degree programs (Mickelson, 1989; Moses, 1989). Ogbu (1979) argued that the job ceiling faced by black adults prevents them from receiving rewards that are commensurate with their educational credentials. Cohen and Nee (2000) stated that black women experience much lower employment rates than white women and black men. And according to Menges and Exum (1983) minority women within the academy are the last hired and first fired, thereby diminishing the effect of their presence as role models for black women students. These potential inadequate returns in addition to discrimination and isolation that black women experience on campus may encourage them to choose degrees in areas that prepare them to enter the workforce right after undergraduate school and to never pursue graduate education (Moses, 1989).

Numerous scholars have discovered that support from various places is central to the academic achievement of people of color and women (Gregory, 1995; Higginbotham & Weber, 1992; Johnson, 2009; Mickelson, 1989; Moses, 1989; Schwartz & Washington, 1999; Wilkerson, 1986). Lack of emotional, academic, and financial support serve as barriers to graduate study for black women (Menges & Exum, 1983; Moses, 1989). Black women do not receive encouragement from counselors and advisors to pursue graduate training. And because of their isolation and poor relationships with faculty they may not get to receive the benefits of knowing faculty, such as letters of recommendation,

references, or other connections. Student success is greatly affected by the type and quality of the relationships she develops with faculty and other students. These relationships are usually fostered in close association from being a research or teaching assistant. Black women have even less access than white women or minority men to informal interaction with their advisors. They are less likely to be invited to lunch, to be invited to the homes of advisors, or to be engaged in casual and spontaneous conversation. In short, black women are not in the “in” crowd—they are excluded from social networking in academia (Moses, 1989).

In a study of black women's graduate level participation, Juanita Johnson-Bailey (2004) revealed two factors directly related to support that affect enrollment and participation: 1) accessibility and encouragement of the department's graduate administration; and 2) personal recruitment by students who had participated in the program and by Black mentors who are familiar with the program. Half the participants in the study reported that the friendliness and encouragement of the graduate coordinators really determined whether or not they would participate. Other participants described experiences where they were actively discouraged from applying and even prohibited from applying to graduate programs. Additionally, schools with reputations for being exclusive and historically white made students hesitant about applying.

Students in the study also reported being recruited to their programs by other students and black mentors. Black student recruiters warned of campus racism but judged the academic experience as excellent. Johnson-Bailey (2004)

explained that personal recruitment speaks directly to the social location of women. This group needs the extra assurances that they would be welcomed and well treated.

Issues related to persistence were also outlined by Johnson-Bailey (2004). She found factors that impacted black women's decisions to continue in their programs: (1) the presence of and mentoring by supportive professors and staff; (2) the presence of and networking by black peers; (3) respect from the department's professorate; and (4) the availability of continued funding. On average there is insufficient financial support available to black women for graduate study. Moses (1989) states that black women, whose average salaries are less than those of whites and Black men, are often reluctant to take out additional loans to pay for graduate education; and in addition, many single parents and reentry women do not have the time or money for full-time graduate education.

With regard to black women's graduate level participation, Johnson-Bailey (2004) asserted that larger societal issues related to being a member in a disenfranchised minority group trumped other traditional indicators of future participation such as marriage, children, past successful school participation and family background. Family life is one main place where black women's expectations and experiences differ from that of white women. Unlike white women, marriage and children are not primary interests of black women. They and their families typically consider education to be an investment in their futures, which may not necessarily include marriage or children. For black women it is

said that marriage is problematic as they move up the educational and professional ladder. Generally, black women are more concerned with economic rewards of work than white women. Additionally, as statistics may indicate black women students have fewer options for dating especially since heterosexual black women tend to date within race. With the presence of competition over eligible black men coupled with the danger of living an openly homosexual lifestyle, on predominantly white campus it is much harder for black women to engage in healthy relationships in general, romantic or otherwise (Epstein, 1973; Rosales, 2003).

Overall, many of the primary issues that graduate students in general have that might discourage them, such as inconvenient scheduling, family responsibilities, finances, and insensitive institutional atmosphere, are peripheral to black women's graduate experiences (Johnson-Bailey, 2004). On the other hand, primary concerns for black women graduate students such as inclusion, mentoring, faculty and peer support, and respect, were considered secondary for graduate students (Johnson-Bailey, 2004). It seems that research regarding black women's experiences in higher education point to societal issues dealing with race and sex hierarchies as being the most significant factors that affect their decisions to pursue and persist through graduate education. Other factors that have been found to be integral to graduate student experiences are specific to higher education. With college and graduate education becoming increasingly diverse this may indicate a need for research that addresses students who possess intersecting identities like black women.

CHAPTER III

FEMINISM, BLACK FEMINIST THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE AND STANDPOINT

The theoretical framework used in this study is black feminist perspective and black women's standpoint, which asserts black women as the center of analysis and recognizes the intersectionality of race, class, gender and sexuality (Johnson, 2009). A black feminist perspective provides a way to study black women's lives within their own cultural and historical context and therefore lends validity to their experiences. Black feminist perspective also posits black women as a group unique to the American context and distinct from black men and white women with whom they are almost always conflated. The literature on black feminism uses many terms to discuss black women and feminism. In this chapter the researcher uses the language provided in literature. Here "black" is used synonymously with African American, however, generally "black" encompasses more than just African American. For this body of research the researcher uses "black feminist perspective and standpoint". When citing another author's work, the language from that author is used with similar meanings. For example, when referring to Patricia Hill Collins work "Black Feminist Thought and Standpoint" is used.

In this study, black feminist thought allows for the analysis of the factors

that affect black women's graduate degree attainment, by positioning them in their local context. This will contribute to further understanding of black women's experiences within higher education institutions from their perspective and from their historical and cultural context. Furthermore, a black feminist perspective provides a way to understand how racism, sexism, and classism affects black women on a personal and institutional level.

Feminism

Feminism has and continues to take many forms. Feminist history has been divided into and characterized by distinct periods or waves; and within those waves different types of feminisms have emerged. Those waves include First-wave, Second-wave, Third-wave and Post Feminism. Each of these eras can be studied separately and at length, however this research is concerned with Second-wave feminism and the emergence of black feminism. Much like the first wave, the second wave developed out of social movements having to do with race, class, sexuality, and equal rights to name a few. The second wave swelled from and shared strategies with the Civil Rights, the New Left, the anti-war, Latina, Asian, black nationalist and the gay and lesbian liberation movements (Enke, 2003; Roth, 2004; Taylor, 2001; Thompson, 2002).

According to Enke (2003) the Second Wave appeared to be a white middle-class movement although working-class women of color generated much of the activism of the period. Roth (2003) argues that the second wave has to be understood as a group of feminisms and movements made by activist women

that were largely organizationally distinct from one another, and from the beginning, largely organized along racial/ethnic lines. In other words, there were more than two social bases of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s; feminisms were articulated in diverse political communities. Feminists of color argued that their activism was written out of the histories of second-wave feminist protest; they argued that racial/ethnic and class biases that were part of white feminist ideology and practice have shown up in subsequent scholarship about that ideology and practice (Hooks, 2000; Roth, 2004).

It is suggested that the year 1970 marks the point in which feminist theoretical writing exploded (Sanders, 1999). Other scholars, however, consider the 1963 release of Betty Friedan's work *The Feminine Mystique* as the beginning of the second wave (Lorber, 2005; Thompson, 2002). Freidan argued that the way out of the confines of the home lay in increased access to education and the world of work (Gamble, 2000). Major feminisms that emerged out of the Second-wave include liberal, Marxist, radical, and socialist feminism.

Second-wave feminists were largely concerned with issues such as gender-neutral child-rearing and education; bringing women into occupations and professions dominated by men and penetrating the glass ceiling to positions of authority (affirmative action); bringing women into politics; promotion of gender mainstreaming in policies ensuring attention to women's needs; sharing parenting and subsidizing child care; and legal, accessible, and affordable reproductive services. On the theoretical side these feminisms were concerned with positioning women as subordinates within their economic systems, for

example capitalist and socialist societies. They were also concerned with identifying not only discrimination, but also various oppressions and exploitation with regard to women (Gamble, 2000; LeGates, 2001; Lorber, 2005).

Ultimately, Second-wave feminists were criticized for solely focusing on the plight of middle-class white women and ignoring issues that working-class women and women of color grappled with (Gamble, 2000; LeGates, 2001; Lorber, 2005). Black feminists and multiracial feminists have critiqued and addressed many of the problems of second wave feminism. Problems that excluded marginalized women from the women's movement on the activist and theoretical ends centered on race, class, and sexuality and white women's failure to see these as major components of the identities of women of color and sources of their oppression (Collins, 1991; Hooks, 2000; King, 1988; Lorde, 1995; Taylor, 2001).

Black Feminism

Some scholars position black feminist perspective and standpoint as a part of a long line of critical theory and activist politics (Lorber, 2005; Thompson, 2002). Operating from an intersectionality framework of race-class-gender-sexuality, black feminism encompasses and goes beyond liberal, radical, and socialist feminist priorities (Lorber, 2005; Thompson, 2002). Becky Thompson (2002), who chronicles second wave feminist history, says that including the rise of multiracial feminism in the history challenges the limited categories because it puts social justice and antiracism at the center of attention. The emergence of

Black Feminist theory came, in part, as a critique and response to the white or mainstream feminist movement that did not address the issues of racism, classism and in some ways sexism that affect the lives of black women and other women of color.

In the context of second-wave feminism, activism was central to the emergence of black feminism (Hooks, 2000; Lorde, 1995; Roth, 2004). However it must be noted that Black feminist activism existed well before the second wave of feminism. Many African American women participated in civil rights and black power liberation movement such as the Black Panther Party where they experienced sexism. Others participated in the Women's Liberation Movement where they experienced racism (King, 1988; Taylor, 2001). Still, some even participated in the Labor Movement where the experience was classism (King, 1988). As Ula Y. Taylor (2001) states the ultimate goal of black feminism is to create a political movement that not only struggles against exploitative capitalism, and what Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham calls the "racialized construction of sexuality", but to develop institutions to protect what the dominant culture has little respect and value for--black women's minds and bodies. Taylor (2001) emphasized the importance of theory as a means of stimulating a particular mode of action and an understanding that "all discrimination is eventually the same thing--anti-humanism".

Beyond activism, black feminist perspective has made considerable theoretical contributions to feminist and social theory and social justice. It has advanced the concept of intersectionality by combining the effects of race,

ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, religion, nationality, and other major social statuses in producing a matrix of domination (Collins, 1991; Lorber, 2005). It acknowledges and presents a complex politic of identity that includes but does not necessarily center on gender. Race, class, gender, sexuality and other major statuses interact synergistically. Neither of these statuses can be looked at alone nor can they be considered additive (Collins, 1991; King, 1988; Lorber, 2005).

In addition, black feminist perspective has taken standpoint perspective a step further. It has made racial viewpoints visible in the production of knowledge through the critical perspective of the *outsider within* (Collins, 1991; Lorber, 2005). Standpoint perspective requires that women be viewed as outsiders whose experiences might provide insights that are invisible to the dominant group who are too immersed within dominant institutions to perceive all that comprises reality (Allen, 1998). Black women's standpoint, in addition, can be considered the first level of knowledge to Black feminist theoretical perspective where everyday, taken-for-granted knowledge is valued and articulated by experts who express the group's standpoint (Collins, 1991).

Black feminist perspective demands that not only must social science and social institutions be dissected from a woman's point of view, but also that viewpoint must account for race, social class, and local economic conditions (Collins, 1991; Lorber, 2005). Within black feminist perspective knowledge of the oppressed is privileged and therefore reveals aspects of the social order that have not been uncovered. As a result information and insights are revealed that

may help to describe and theorize about how social order is constructed and maintained (Allen, 1998; Nancy C.M. Hartsock, 1997).

Within the context of higher education, Collins (1991) uses the outsider-within perspective as a part of black feminist perspective to provide the backdrop for a unique black women's standpoint on self and society. When referring to black women's position in the academy Collins (1991) observes that the exclusion of black women's ideas from mainstream academic discourse and their placement within feminist and black social and political thought has kept them as outsiders within all three communities. And because full group membership is founded on whiteness for feminist thought, and maleness for black social and political thought; in addition to the combination of whiteness and maleness of mainstream scholarship, black women's realities are negated (Collins, 1991). The implications of this set the groundwork for the study. Although Collins is discussing the academy from a professional point of view, this reality permeates throughout every level of the academy and treats black women students the same on a fundamental level thereby providing them with a distinctive angle to view higher education institutions and their position within the institution.

Standpoint

Standpoint refers to a position in society, involving a level of awareness about an individual's social location from which certain features of reality become eminent while other features become obscured (Swigonski, 1994). Standpoint theory encompasses the idea that all real knowledge is socially situated

(Harding, 1986/1993); and that less powerful members of society experience a different reality as a consequence of being oppressed (Swigonski, 1994).

According to Harding (1986) and Smith (1987) Standpoint operates as follows:

“start thought from marginalized lives” and “take everyday life as problematic.”

Feminist standpoint theory is rooted in Marxian analysis of the conditions of the working class (Harding, 1986/1993; Nancy C.M. Hartsock, 1983; Swigonski, 1994). Feminist standpoint theorists posit that because of the sexual division of labor men and women’s lives were structurally different.

Nancy Hartsock (1983) outlined five criteria for standpoint that she adapted from Marxian theory: (1) material life sets limits and structures understanding of social relations. It follows that realities will be perceived differently as material situations differ; (2) the vision of each group represents the inversion of the “other” and the rulers vision will be partial and perverse; (3) the vision of ruling class forms material relations in which all parties are forced to participate; (4) in consequence vision of oppressed must be struggled for; (5) the oppressed vision that is engaged with the adoption of standpoint exposes relations of human beings as inhumane.

Standpoint feminism says that women’s distinctive perspectives must be used in producing knowledge and culture about their lives (Lorber, 2005).

According to Smith (2000) starting from standpoint means that inquiry must begin in the everyday actualities of people’s experience; and problematizing the objectified institutional order of corporations, of schooling and health care, and of the academic, cultural and scientific discourses, including mass media.

African American Women's Standpoint

Black women had been defining their standpoint prior to black feminism and alongside the women's liberation movement. According to the Combahee River Collective (Collective, 1977) there have always been black feminists and women activists. Women such as Sojourner Truth, Anna Julia Cooper, Zora Neale Hurston and Maria W. Stewart, in their time, identified issues that African American women still deal with today. While some knowledge from these black women intellectuals has been recovered much of it remains obscure and suppressed by the interests of the white male elite, the white feminist movement, and black liberation movements (Collins, 1991). However, in spite of that suppression black women intellectuals have laid a vital analytical foundation for a distinctive standpoint on self, community, and society (Collins, 1991).

As early as the 1800s and likely before that black women recognized and wrote about their standpoint within society. Sojourner Truth alluded to her standpoint in the famous 1851 women's rights speech "Ar'n't I A Woman":

Dat man ober dar say dat womin needs to be helped into carriages and lifted ober ditches, and to hab de best place everywhar. Nobody eber helps me into carriages, or ober mud puddles, or gibs me any best place! And a'n't I a woman? Lookat my arm! I have ploughed, and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And a'n't I a woman? I could work as much as much and eat as much as a man—when I could get it—and bear de lash as well! And a'n't I a woman? I have borne children, and seen 'em mos' all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with the mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And a'n't I a woman? Den dey talks 'bout dis ting in de head; what dis dey call it? ("Intellect," whispered in some one near.) Dat's it, honey. What dat got to do wid womin's rights or nigger's rights? (Truth, 1995)

Here Sojourner truth has demonstrated that black women bear the brunt of society by being women who were treated as less than, and being just as

capable of work as men and still being able to exist after experiencing extreme heartache within slavery.

Anna Julia Cooper defined black women's standpoint in her book *A Voice from the South*, published 1892 as the first black feminist text. She found that black women occupied a unique position within the context of the United States as a group that was confronted by race and gender, but remained an unknown factor in both. She observed that white women received loyal support from white men to work as they saw fit. On the other hand, black women were hampered and shamed by more conservative attitudes from those they cared for most, black men (Cooper, 1995).

According to Patricia Hill Collins *et al* (1991) black women have a self-defined standpoint on their own oppression, which is comprised of two interlocking components. First, black women's economic and political status offers a unique set of experiences that provides a different view of material reality than that of other groups. Their work and family experiences and grounding in traditional African American culture implies that African American women encounter a different world from those who are not black and female. Second, their experiences stimulate a special black feminist consciousness in connection with that material reality. A subordinate group not only experiences a different reality than the dominant group but they interpret that reality differently from the dominant group.

Professor Brenda J. Allen (1998) described her standpoint as a heterosexual, first-generation college graduate who was raised by her black

mother in the 1950s and 1960s in a lower-class, black Midwestern U.S. community, and an “outsider within” the academy. Allen placed primacy on those socially constructed aspects of her identity because of their physical salience; the accompanying likelihood that she would encounter oppression and discrimination based upon how others saw her; and finally her acute awareness having been socialized into black womanhood.

In relation to black feminist thought, standpoint is described as the first level of knowledge. It includes everyday, taken-for-granted knowledge, shared by members of a given group. Black feminist thought is the second level of knowledge, representing the more specialized knowledge put forth by experts who belong to a group and expresses that group’s standpoint. These levels of knowledge act interdependently. Black feminist thought articulates that everyday, taken-for-granted knowledge of African American women while encouraging them to define themselves in new ways that validate their standpoint (Collins, 1991).

Black women in the academy

Many black women scholars publish autobiographical accounts of their experiences within the academy as professors and sometimes as graduate students. Their standpoints, whether explicit or implicit, are reminiscent of the aforementioned description from Brenda J. Allen (1998). For example Margaret Walker Alexander, poet, novelist, and professor who received many accolades for her talents, described her hellish experiences as a black woman in the

academy during the 1950s and 1960s. She was overworked, underpaid, and treated by her colleagues and superiors as less than human. Growing up in the south she knew the blatant nature of racism, however upon entering graduate school for her doctorate she became aware of sexism and discrimination of women. She concluded: "As a woman, I have come through the fires of hell because I am a black woman, because I am poor, because I live in America, and because I am determined to be both a creative artist and maintain my inner integrity and my instinctive need to be free."

In an interview with Mona T. Phillips (1997), Judy Gebre-Hiwet, journalist, English instructor, and Ivy League graduate, described her student experience in the academy as one in which there was silence in the curriculum regarding African American women. She characterized her experience as "rigidifying". She claimed that the dominant message was for her to do as she was told and to see what she was told to see.

Despite the racism, sexism, isolation, and overall humiliation many black women scholars experience at predominantly white institutions they choose to stay in the academy. Nellie Y. McKay (1997) explained that black women (and men) chose to stay in those contested spaces because they knew they had a right to be there and refused to be driven out by those who would like to see them go. Moreover, McKay (1997) saw their struggles in the context of decades where she tried to minimize the loss of personal dignity and sought out as much fulfillment in life in the work she had chosen to do. Furthermore, McKay (1997) points out, in response to criticism about black women staying in the white

academy, that black women in the academy fail to remember that the academy is a microcosm of the larger society; and that American and all Western society remain provinces where white men, and some white women, of a particular class and dominant ideology determine the nature of all people's existences.

Core Principles in Black Feminist Studies and Black Feminist Perspectives

As black feminist theoretical perspective began taking shape, women in the movement worked to establish scholarship that set the foundation for the study of black women. Patricia Hill Collins (1991) provides a working definition for black feminist theoretical perspective. It consists of specialized knowledge created by African-American women, which clarifies a standpoint of and for Black women. It encompasses theoretical interpretations by those who live it. Within black feminist theoretical perspective and black feminist studies there are five core themes put forth by several black feminist scholars and activists (Collective, 1977; Collins, 1991; Hooks, 2000; Lorde, 1995; Richardson, 1987; Smith, 1995). Activism, research, and other endeavors performed in the name of black feminism have the following principles at their core: visibility, recognition of unique status, empowerment, intersectionality, and resistance.

The first theme in black feminist studies is visibility. Many black feminists are concerned with black women's practical and theoretical invisibility in society (Barriteau, 2008; King, 1988). Their issues have often been forgotten, ignored, or pushed aside in the feminist and black liberation movements. Black women's racialized location within white institutions marginalized them, leaving them over-

worked are under-valued and granted few positions of power (Beoku-Betts & Njambi, 2004; Carroll, 1982). In placing focus on black women, black feminist research brings black women out from behind other groups such as black men and white women to the forefront.

The next principle is recognition of a unique status; black feminist research reveals that being black and female forms a unique identity and material reality that is worth studying (Collins, 1991; Smith, 1995). Black feminists realized that not only were their interests being ignored, but also they were different from white women and black men's interests. Black feminist research also recognizes the variations in those experiences. Moreover, it acknowledges research on blacks and women (Smith, 1995).

Another black feminist studies' principle is empowerment. Black feminist research validates the subjective experience by allowing women to interpret their own realities and defining themselves for themselves, therefore empowering them. Black feminist literature, for example, seeks to use language as a tool for black women to represent and thus reclaim and intimate their identities in a way that is empowering, fulfilling, and joyous (Davis, 2002). Unlike any other movement or discipline, black feminism provides the theory that clarifies the nature of black women's experience and makes possible positive support from other black women (Smith, 1995).

Black feminist studies recognize the intersectionality of race, class, and gender as bases for oppression. The notion of intersectionality is an important foundational contribution around which black feminists have organized

(Barriteau, 2008). Black feminist research looks at black women's experiences and examines how racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression affect them as intersecting elements in the larger system of domination.

According to Deborah King (1988) to look at each type of oppression separately is to undermine the others. Race, class, gender and sexuality are co-dependent variables that cannot be readily separated and ranked in scholarship, political practice, or lived experience. Furthermore, black feminism demonstrates that other feminist theorizing that fails to recognize race as a relation of domination within feminism and society, perpetuates the oppression of black women within the feminist movement and society (Barriteau, 2008).

Finally, black feminist studies supports black women's resistance. Black feminist research not only identifies the negative affects of racism, sexism, classism, and more, but it also presents acts of resistance by black women against oppression and avoids labeling them as victims (Collins, 1991, 2009; Hooks, 2000; Richardson, 1987). Black feminists attempt to disrupt the normalized images of black women as objects of oppression by producing and introducing text that represent them in their multiple and complex situatedness (Beoku-Betts & Njambi, 2004). Additionally the understanding of black women's modes of resistance can be used and is used as a basis for examining the simultaneous oppressions women experience (Barriteau, 2008; Collins, 1991).

Defining Race, Class, and Gender

For this research study it is important to define and explain what each of

the terms race, class, and gender mean.

Race is defined as a human group defined by itself or others as distinct by virtue of perceived common physical characteristics that are held to be inherent (Cornell & Hartmann, 2007). According to Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1994), race is a pre-eminently sociohistorical concept. Racial categories and meanings of race are given concrete expression by the specific social relations and historical context in which they are embedded. In the U.S., the black/white color line has historically been rigidly defined and enforced. Whiteness, a racial category, has been consistently privileged over non-Whiteness with people of color consigned to the margins of American society (Omi & Winant, 1994).

The institution of the state plays an integral role in defining race categories in an institutional context. The state determines how the census should be taken and how individuals should be counted (Ore, 2006). What is important about the construction of race categories is the recognition by social institutions of a person's membership in that race category. Racial categories are significant in that they are constructed in hierarchy from superior to inferior (Cornell & Hartmann, 2007; Omi & Winant, 1994). Individuals use these designations in interpersonal contexts to classify and judge others. One of the first things people notice about each other is race and that is utilized to provide clues about who a person is (Eakin, 2001; Omi & Winant, 1994; Ore, 2006).

According to Brenda J. Allen (2004) social class is defined as a somewhat open stratification system that is associated with a systematically unequal allocation of resources and constraints. Social class is most often viewed as a

result of how much income and wealth a person possesses, when in fact it includes an entire socialization process (Allen, 2004; Ore, 2006). This definition of social class takes into account three types of capital (accumulated goods and their value): economic, cultural, and social capital. Economic capital refers to financial assets. Cultural capital encompasses skills and knowledge such as linguistic and cultural competencies in social institutions such as Ivy League education (Allen, 2004; Bourdieu, 1987). Social capital consists of networks and connections (Allen, 2004; Eakin, 2001).

Social class is constructed in both institutional and interpersonal contexts. It embodies a powerful, persistent predictor of accessibility to resources, potential of longevity and success, and self-esteem. It can also be a major determinant of individual decisions and social actions. Members of the middle and upper classes control social institutions such as healthcare, education, and the labor force. Their values suffuse institutional structures, policies, and materials. They work to reproduce class positions and dominant perspectives on social class (Allen, 2004; Eakin, 2001). In interpersonal contexts people define who is rich, poor, educated, middle-class, and so forth based on their interactions with each other. Meanings are attached to these categories and stereotypes are created. As a result individuals treat each other according to the values attributed to these classes. Furthermore, individuals internalize these messages thereby impacting their self-worth (Eakin, 2001).

Gender is defined as the socially defined roles expected of males and females (Ore, 2006). Gender constructs are created and justified by a variety of

institutions, including the family, the state, and the economy (Lorber, 1994); and are transformed into a gender system in which men and masculinity are at the top of the hierarchy and women and femininity are at the bottom (Lorber, 1994; Ore, 2006). Notions about gender influence the way in which people are sorted into social positions. The expectation for women to be feminine and the corresponding assumptions about their ability to handle certain kinds of strenuous or stressful work contributes to the underrepresentation of women as CEOs and heads of governing bodies. Similarly, the expectation for men to be masculine and the corresponding assumptions that they are less able to be nurturing contributes to their underrepresentation in careers such as nursing and elementary school teaching. Because of the gendered division of labor that has been established within a system of patriarchy, there is also occupational hierarchy in which the work of men is valued over that of women (Lorber, 1994; Ore, 2006).

Gender is also constructed and maintained at the interpersonal level. People act out the two polar sex categories and fulfill the corresponding gendered expectations that have been constructed by the social institutions of the family, the education, and others (Ore, 2006). According to West and Zimmerman (1987) people perform gender through attempts to define others and through the expectations that others display appropriate gender identity. In so doing people aid in the process of constructing a gender system that allows for only two sexes and requires gender categories to be distinct and polar opposites (Ore, 2006).

Understanding the Intersectionality of Race, Class, and Gender

Race, class, and gender are socially constructed and contextually rooted in history and geography (Weber, 1998). Writings and scholarship that address race, class, and gender have grown rapidly and are readily available in college courses and anthologies. However, the major limitation of these anthologies is that they provide very little direction in identifying themes and assumptions that bring these diverse perspectives together (Weber, 1998). According to Lynn Weber (1998), scholars are beginning to search for and identify common themes and approaches that characterize work in race, class, and gender. In building a conceptual framework for understanding race, class, and gender as systems of oppression, Weber (1998) and others identify six themes that characterize this scholarship.

First, race, class, and gender are contextual. While they persist throughout history race, class, and gender hierarchies perpetually go through changes as part of new economic, political, and ideological processes, trends and events. Their meanings vary across historical time periods, nations and regions simultaneously (Weber, 1998). In order to understand the current situation of a particular group one must take into account the group's history and global context. Race, class, and gender must always be understood within a specific historical and global context (Allen, 1996; Collins, 1991; Hooks, 2000; Lorber, 2005; Lorde, 1995; Weber, 1998).

Secondly, race, class and gender are socially constructed, not biologically

determined (Lorber, 1994; Omi & Winant, 1994; Weber, 1998). They are social constructs whose meaning develops out of group struggles over socially valued resources. When these hierarchies are justified with biology or as a part of the design of nature—and not the design of those in power--this implies that their rankings are fixed, permanent, and embedded in nature. Because race, class, and gender are social constructs and are not based in biology their meanings cannot be captured quantitatively and treated as discrete variables (Weber, 1998). Additionally, race, class and gender are constantly undergoing changes at the personal identity level and at the level of social institutions. They are deeply planted in the policies, practices, and beliefs of major social institutions and act as major organizing principles of society and personal identity (Weber, 1998).

Thirdly, race, class and gender not only represent cultural beliefs, values, and practices, but they are historically specific, socially constructed relationships of power. They make up hierarchies where one group exerts control over another as the dominant entity of a system in which resources such as wealth, income, and access to healthcare and education are at stake (Higginbotham & Weber, 1992). Fundamentally, race, class and gender are sources of conflict between groups. The fact that they are situated in social relationships between dominant groups and subordinate groups is the key to understanding these systems. For a greater share of society's resources one group exploits another. According to Weber (1998) there can be no controlling males without women who's lives are restricted; there can be no valued race without races that are

defined as “other”; there can be no owners or managers without workers who produce goods and services that the owners and managers control. Moreover, owing to the fact that one cannot exist without the other, any analysis of race, class and gender must incorporate an understanding of the ways in the privilege of dominant groups is tied to the oppression of subordinate groups. Consequently, scholarship in this field has begun to look at social constructions of whiteness and masculinity (Weber, 1998).

CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGY

Research Objective

Using black feminist perspective and standpoint this study explores factors that affect black women's matriculation and retention in graduate degree programs by examining how experiences and opportunities connected to race, class, and gender inform their decision to pursue and persist through graduate education. Specifically the study investigates how the outlined factors affect the decision to pursue and matriculate through a graduate degree program. Those factors include: (1) educational preparedness, aspirations, and attitudes; (2) economic opportunities and restraints; (3) family obligations and expectations; (4) networks and mentoring; (5) and perceptions of usefulness.

These categories of factors derive from themes found in the literature review. They informed the organization of the interview instrument and research findings. Race, class, and gender are expected to influence how black women students experience and negotiate the five factors. It is important to define what these factors consist of and how they relate to the research study. The first category, "educational preparedness, aspirations and attitudes", covers pre-graduate school experiences, and specifically experiences in undergraduate

school, which are crucial to graduate school enrollment. The literature shows that the level of undergraduate student involvement in campus and organizational activities; the curriculum and academic preparation; the type of institution; and general student, peer, and family feelings about education contribute not only to undergraduate success, but to the decision to pursue advanced degree programs.

The next category, “economic opportunities and restraints”, is important to the study because it captures how financial benefits and issues are connected with graduate school access and experience. This category also lends insight to study participants’ economic situations and therefore their social class background. Economic opportunities and restraints consist of questions dealing with the availability, awareness of and use of financial aid. It also seeks to find out how participants respond to financial difficulties and external circumstances such as childbirth and family obligations that may affect them pecuniarily.

On account of the fact that they are imperative to black women’s educational motivations, family obligations and expectations were examined. The literature says that women’s families play an important role in how and why they seek to further their education. This interview category asks about personal and familial expectations of education how those expectations influence participants’ decisions to pursue advanced education.

The category, “networks and mentoring” addresses participants’ organizational memberships, professional and faculty mentoring relationships, institutional relationships and their personal support systems. This section seeks

to allow participants to evaluate how helpful these relationships and networks are to them and their success in their programs. Research literature says that relationships and professional affiliations are essential to graduate success. Professional, faculty, and peer relationships can also be central sources of difficulty for graduate students.

“Perceptions of usefulness” examines how participants expect to utilize their graduate credentials and how they have already utilized credentials they had prior to graduate school. This section specifically questions participants’ future plans, how graduate school had affected them so far, the ways that they used their undergraduate degrees, previous employment, and whether graduate education seemed to be worth time and energy. How one expects to use her credentials, like the other four factors, is vital to enrollment and persistence.

Research Approach

This study, which focuses on Black women’s diverse perspectives and the ways in which the intersectionality of race, gender, and class affect their educational experiences required the flexibility and focus that qualitative research methods provide. Qualitative research methods refer to research procedures which produce descriptive data: people's own written or spoken words and observable behavior (Robert C. Bogdan & Taylor, 1975). Moreover, qualitative methods avoid reducing a subject of a study to an isolated variable or hypothesis like other research approaches. It allows researchers to know people personally

and to see them as they are developing their own definitions of the world (Robert C. Bogdan & Taylor, 1975).

This study used a qualitative research approach to explore and understand the experience and perceptions of African American women in graduate degree programs. In this exploratory study, qualitative research procedures keeps the participants' meanings in focus. Qualitative methods permit room for change and flexibility in procedures and provide an opportunity to develop a holistic account of the research objectives while capturing multiple perspectives (Babbie, 2007; Creswell, 2009; Freebody, 2003; Patton, 2002). Capturing a holistic account of their backgrounds and experiences is central to the findings and conclusions of this research.

The study used the case study strategy, which focuses attention on one or a few instances of a social phenomenon (Babbie, 2007). With the case study strategy a program, event, activity, process, or one or more participants are studied in depth. Cases are bounded by time and activity, and detailed information is collected using a variety of data collection procedures (Creswell, 2003). The case study strategy provides a unique example of real people in real situations (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2000) . In this instance, information on black women's experiences in graduate degree programs and degree attainment was collected using interviews and document review. The case study strategy was appropriate because the study concentrates on a small group of African American women who were at the time of the the study matriculating through

graduate programs at various universities in the same city, therefore bounded by time, activity, race and gender.

In essence, this case study was exploratory. It may be considered exploratory because it accumulates data and further refines notions about a topic that has received little attention (Freebody, 2003; Merriam, 1988). This research also has explanatory and descriptive qualities, as it attempts to explain how the intersectionality of racism and sexism affect black women's matriculation through graduate programs and because it provided a narrative that describes a social context (Merriam, 1988).

Source of Data

The primary sources of data were in-depth, semi-structured field interviews. The interview instrument consisted of a demographic survey and open-ended questions sectioned according to the specific research objectives. Interview questions were open-ended, and designed to elicit views, opinions, and recommendations. (See Appendix A for the interview instrument.)

Before implementation of the the interview schedule a pre-test was done to guarantee that the interview questions adequately addressed the research objectives. The pre-test was performed on a female graduate student who was also the researcher's classmate. After the pre-test, necessary changes were made to the interview instrument which was then used on the research participants. Field interviews took place in university classrooms, offices, and other venues chosen by the participants.

Due to confidentiality agreements with participants each transcribed interview was numerically coded (i.e. P 1, 2, 3, etc.). Names of the participants were substituted for the numerical codes assigned to the interview. Any other identifying names or places were substituted for aliases to protect the identities of the participants. All forms related to the interviews remain locked in a file cabinet that only the researcher has access to. All electronic documents and recordings related to the research remain locked in the researcher's password protected computer.

In this research the experiences of the participants were instrumental to the research. The purpose of qualitative interviews is to extract interpretations and understanding (Warren, 2002). Interviews were conducted face-to-face with participants.

Prior to each interview participants were required to read and sign a release of information consent form provided by the researcher. The consent form offered the researcher permission to audio-record the interview sessions and to use the information from the interviews for this research. Interviews lasted from one and a half to two hours each. After being transcribed interviews were analyzed and discussed in the findings and analysis chapter of this thesis. Open-ended questions allow for the participants to answer from their own frame of reference permitting them to express their thoughts more freely (Robert C. Bogdan & Bilken, 1992). It is the responsibility of the researcher to create a free and open atmosphere in which the subjects would feel comfortable enough to talk freely (Robert C. Bogdan & Taylor, 1975). Open-ended questions and

meetings places at participants' homes and offices were central to the field interview experience and fulfilling the researcher's responsibility.

According to Bogdan and Taylor (1975) interview transcriptions as qualitative research instruments are considered personal documents. They allow researchers to study facets of people, events, and settings which are not directly observable. Personal documents provide an intimate view of organizations, relationships, and events from the perspective of one who has experienced them; and may facilitate an understanding of premises about the world that the subject may have that is different from the researcher. Researchers are placed in a position to view a person in relation to his or her specific context; and to examine how that person is affected by various social, religious, political, and economic currents.

In this study most participants were very candid and in some cases displayed relief and excitement about participating in the study. They seemed comfortable sharing their views and thoughts about race and gender identities, roles within their programs, personal motivations and future goals. Many expressed that they felt there was a need for research of this nature to be performed and disseminated and all expressed interest in reading the final product.

Qualitative Interviewing

Robert Weiss (1994) defines qualitative interviews as interviews that sacrifice uniformity of questioning to achieve fuller development information.

Qualitative interviews in many cases may appear conversational, however what happens in an interview is very different from what happens in everyday conversation. In everyday conversation each participant is at liberty to voice thoughts and opinions on subjects of choice and can even change the topic of conversation. In a qualitative interview the interviewer, who serves as a representative of the study, is responsible for directing the respondent to topics that matter to the study. The respondent is responsible for providing the interviewer with information (Weiss, 1994).

Since respondents are expected to provide a great deal of information qualitative interview studies are likely to rely on samples that are much smaller than samples from quantitative or survey studies. Also, due to the nature of qualitative interview responses, which tend to be fuller, their analyses rely more on interpretation, summary and integration rather than counting and correlating. What is more is that findings of qualitative studies are supported more by quotations and descriptions than by tables or statistical measures (Weiss, 1994).

Another element that contributes to the nature and function of qualitative interview studies is the element of time. Qualitative interview studies are considered to be labor intensive. In many cases several months might be required for interviewing, transcribing, and analysis of interviews. Much of the time invested in qualitative interview studies is about effort put forth in order to understand the issues of the research. Unlike quantitative studies, in which the researcher may end up knowing more about their statistical software, those who

do qualitative studies always end up knowing a lot about the topic of their study (Weiss, 1994).

Research Population and Sample

The sample population consisted of ten black women graduate students attending universities in the Louisville and Frankfort, Kentucky. This includes the University of Louisville and Kentucky State University. Originally, the goal was to acquire participants from three different institutions in the Louisville Metropolitan area, however personnel and faculty did not respond to requests for research participants, in one of the three. The researcher was then compelled to acquire participants from institutions there were willing participants. With the relatively small sample size of ten, generalizations would not be appropriate, however, it does allow for some degree of qualitative data analysis on factors that contribute to or hinder African American women's decision to pursue and persist at the graduate level.

Participants were acquired through a convenience sampling procedure, which involves the sample being drawn from a research population which is close at hand, readily available and convenient. Participants' contact information was obtained through black graduate student associations; university minority, diversity, and cultural offices and networking with acquaintances. Because the researcher's college career has taken place in the Louisville Metro area she also had access to potential participants from university staff, residents, students, and alumni. Contacts were located through this convenience sampling procedure

and through snowball sampling. Using a snowball sampling procedure the researcher located more participants through other participants. With snowball sampling the researchers collect data on the members they can locate, then ask those individuals to provide the information needed to locate other members of the population whom they happen to know (Babbie, 2007). The sampling procedure accounts for why there were high concentrations of participants from two disciplines. Many of the participants provided names of people were their classmates or in the same discipline.

A convenience sample, according to Weiss (1994), involves pretty much accepting whoever the researcher can get. Convenience sampling is useful and important for learning about a group that is difficult to find or penetrate. In some instances it can be a breakthrough to find any member of the group willing to be a study participant (Weiss, 1994).

In order to acquire participants, the researcher started by informing fellow colleagues of a need for black women participants in the study. The researcher created announcements for the study via social networking sites. The literature alludes to differences in the treatment of minority and women students in traditionally female fields of study versus traditionally male fields. Friends responded to the researcher with names of potential participants and also forwarded the announcements to others who could assist in acquiring participants. Once participants responded the researcher set up appointments to conduct the interviews.

In this particular study most of the participants were the only one or one of few black women in their graduate programs. The researcher intended to interview participants from a wide range of disciplines in order to observe similarities or differences in experiences between disciplines. Literature suggests that blacks and women experience more intense discrimination in traditionally white male fields, which include science, technology, engineering and math fields. Participants represented higher education, black studies, public administration, dentistry, and physiology. Most participants were from dentistry and education. While this does allow for comparisons of treatment of black women in traditionally female fields in the arts and sciences and education versus their treatment in non-traditional fields in biological sciences, the variety of disciplines is still limited.

Findings and Analysis

The findings of this research were organized around the research objectives. The findings, which will be discussed in the next chapter, reflected the results of ten in-depth interviews with African American women graduate students at two universities in the Central Kentucky area. This research sought to explore factors that affect black women's matriculation in graduate degree programs.

The unit of analysis is African American women in graduate school. The unit of observation is the individual women interviewed. Findings are analyzed using a black feminist perspective to determine how race, class, and gender

affect black female graduate student enrollment and experiences in graduate school as well as how the intersectionality of race, class, and gender affect the decision to pursue a graduate degree.

Limitations of Study

As with all qualitative studies findings are subject to interpretation. In this study the sample population was very small and was limited to a convenience sample, to which the researcher had easy access. When specific programs in the Louisville Metropolitan area were solicited for participants there was no response. The researcher, in order to have a sufficient number of subjects, solicited participants from outside the Louisville Metropolitan area. Additionally, much of the literature on African American women graduate students consisted of accounts provided by professionals who were telling stories of their own past experience. The participants in this study had little opportunity to reflect on and make sense of the entirety of their experiences because they were still graduate students at the time of the interviews. Also, because they were still matriculating through their programs and due to the nature of graduate school, the participants may have been reluctant to provide specific details about adverse experiences.

Moreover, the study was not restricted to students in one discipline; however, there are high concentrations of participants in two disciplines. This may be due in part to the sampling procedure.

Researcher's Role

Qualitative research is interpretive research in which the researcher is typically involved in sustained and intensive experience with participants. It allows room for the researcher to include his or her personal values and assumptions at the start of the study. The researcher's contribution to the study can be useful and positive instead of detrimental (Creswell, 2003). Taking this into consideration I realized that my own experience as an African American woman graduate student has shaped my perceptions of higher education and what it takes to progress given the factors that, according to the literature, affect that progression. During the thesis writing process, I was a first-time, first generation graduate student at the University of Louisville in the Master's program in the department of Pan-African studies. The fact that I was concluding my second year of the program as a graduate assistant speaks to my level of knowledge about black women in graduate programs and my experience thus far has shaped this research. Because I shared similar backgrounds and experiences with the participants I brought certain biases to the study. These biases may have influenced the way I understood and interpreted the data and findings, however this type of perspective is paramount to a Black Feminist perspective which enables the inclusion of personal experience. Still, efforts were made to separate my own experiences from the participants' experiences in order to accurately document and interpret their accounts.

CHAPTER V

PLAYING THE GAME: FINDINGS ON THE EXPERIENCES OF BLACK WOMEN IN GRADUATE PROGRAMS

This study explores factors that affect black women's matriculation and persistence in graduate degree programs by examining how experiences and opportunities connected to race, class, and gender inform their decision to pursue a graduate degree. Specifically the study investigates how five factors affect the decision to pursue and matriculate through a graduate degree program in the Commonwealth of Kentucky. According to the literature those factors include: (1) educational preparedness, aspirations, and attitudes; (2) economic opportunities and restraints; (3) family obligations and expectations; (4) networks and mentoring; (5) and perceptions of usefulness. Using qualitative field interviews, participants tell of their views and experiences as they pertain to the listed factors and provide recommendations for how universities can better serve them.

Demographics

Using a qualitative research approach this case study explores the experiences and perceptions of African American women in graduate studies programs. Field interviews were used to draw information from black women

about their experiences in pursuing and persisting through graduate programs. The study sample included ten black, female participants enrolled in graduate degree programs in the central Kentucky area. Participants were chosen through convenient sampling. Their ages ranged from 22 to 30, and all participants were single except for one who was married. Eight were from Southern states and two were from Northern states. At the time of the interview all participants lived in either Louisville or Frankfort, Kentucky. Each participant had at least one degree before entering her respective graduate program. Undergraduate majors included public administration, psychology, English, liberal studies, biochemistry, chemistry, accounting, and communications. Three participants had at least two degrees prior to entering their graduate programs. Two participants had associate degrees, and two participants had prior graduate level education; and only one had a prior graduate degree.

Overall, the women perceived race as both the most significant motivational factor as well as the major barrier to their graduate education. Gender and class were not reported as significant factors that informed participants' decisions to pursue graduate degrees or persist through graduate programs. While participants did not explicitly cite social class as an issue, issues that were related to social class permeated the findings. Many of the participants motivations for degree attainment and their economic experiences within their programs are relevant to their social class status at the time of the interviews and the social class statuses they were seeking to achieve. All participants reported some form of racial discrimination and only one participant reported gender

discrimination. Additionally, economic barriers and family obligations and expectations were identified as peripheral issues to the black women's decisions to pursue and persist in their degree programs.

Participants' experiences related to race and gender in predominantly black and predominantly white programs turned out to be significant to the findings. At the time of the interviews two participants were in predominantly black programs. One was at a predominantly black institution (PBI) and the other was in a black program at a predominantly white institution (PWI). Furthermore, five out of ten participants had previously attended PBIs for undergrad or graduate school before attending a PWI. Altogether seven out of ten participants had received some education in predominantly black programs or institutions. In many instances participants made comparisons between their PBI and PWI experiences, as the first college experiences took place at PBIs.

Educational preparedness, aspirations, and attitudes

Studies show that factors affecting matriculation and persistence in graduate programs include students' educational preparedness, and aspirations and attitudes toward education (Cohen & Nee, 2000). Educational preparedness and aspirations and attitudes, in this study, are explored by examining (1) participants' undergraduate institutions; (2) their feelings of preparation by those institutions; (3) undergraduate grade point averages and co-curricular activities; and (4) aspirations and attitudes prior to and during their graduate programs. Additionally, research demonstrates a correlation between campus involvement

in extra and co-curricular activities and black women's retention and degree attainment (Moses, 1989).

Educational Preparedness

For their undergraduate careers, ninety percent (9 out of 10) participants attended public universities in the Southern region of the United States. One attended a small, private university in the Midwestern United States. Two-thirds (7 out of 10) participants attended small universities that had less than 10,000 students. One-third of participants attended medium to large size schools with student populations of at least 17,000. Just over half of participants attended historically black universities for undergrad, where the student population is predominantly black. Within this group forty percent (2 out of 5) participants also attended graduate school at historically black universities.

All participants excelled at the undergraduate level with grade point averages ranging from 3.2 to 4.0. At the time of the interviews all participants were enrolled in graduate programs in one of the following areas: education, dentistry, black studies, public administration, and physiology. Sixty-six percent of (6) participants reported that they were prepared for graduate programs by their undergraduate institutions through (1) mentorship and encouragement from faculty, (2) participation in professional organizations, (3) undergraduate curriculum, (4) and study practices. One participant reported being introduced to the field of dentistry and prepared by her employer who was a white female

dentist. She recounts what happened during an interview for a receptionist position in dental office:

...the dentist was looking at my resume. I told her I was thinking about going back to dental hygiene, which would get me another bachelor's. And she said well why don't you go to dental school. She showed me around the dental office, told me the benefits, the ups and downs of being a dentist and she basically told me that would be the better option. I stopped looking for a job that day applied to do my prerequisites.

Another participant suggested that attending a predominantly white school for her undergraduate degree program prepared her to be around white students socially for graduate school. She perceived this to be an advantage over the other few black students in her program, who had mostly attended predominantly black undergraduate institutions. She felt that her classmates lack of experience in a predominantly white academic setting, working with white faculty and classmates served as a handicap for them. She had this to say:

College in this aspect prepared me for going here because it's predominantly white at the dental school. And so college was mostly white so I kind of have, I don't want to say upper hand but I tend know how to, you know, with a little bit of everybody instead of just the black people or just my own group of friends. The white people will invite me before they invite other [black] students to go out.

Of the forty percent (4 out of 10) that reported not being prepared or being underprepared by their undergraduate institutions, one participant said, "It was mostly my own individual will and determination to prepare myself for grad school." She explained that her undergraduate program in chemistry prepared her for graduate study in chemistry, but not dentistry. She went on to receive a graduate degree at her undergraduate institution before attending professional school at the University of Louisville. Another participant reported that things she

learned in undergrad were not relevant to what she needed for her graduate program. She had gone from an undergraduate degree program in psychology to a graduate program in education. The third participant reported that her undergraduate institution did nothing to prepare her for graduate school. Advanced degree options were not discussed and the workload was not comparable to her graduate workload. The four participants that reported being not being prepared or being underprepared entered graduate programs that were different from their undergraduate programs.

Aspirations and Attitudes

With regard to aspirations, seventy percent (7 out of 10) participants reported having aspirations for advanced degrees before entering college to pursue their bachelor degrees. One participant reported that her aspirations to be a dentist began in about 5th or 6th grade. All participants cited their mothers and families as sources of their educational aspirations. Forty percent (4 out of 10) of participants were first generation college graduates; however their families still encouraged and supported their pursuits for advanced degrees. Sixty percent (6 out of 10) were second-generation graduates.

The findings reveal that families of second-generation college graduates tended to push their relatives towards specialization in a field similar to theirs. For instance, one participant reported that both her mother and sister had advanced health professional degrees and that they encouraged her to study a health profession and expected her to specialize in her field. One participant

reminisced about watching her mother return to school to be a dental technician. She recounts playing with her mother's class materials, which subsequently sparked her own interest in dentistry. Others felt as though they had to be successful individuals and graduate education was the key to that success. A participant had this to say about her aspirations:

My mother always told me to learn as much as you can until you can become the teacher. So for me I just wanted to learn as much I could and go to school as much I could. And a lot of it is that most of the people in my family barely even finished high school or didn't go to high school so just a personal motivation of wanting to be the person wanting to set the example is where the determination came from.

Degree attainment and family educational background are indicators of current and future social class status. The second-generation graduates in this study came from families that had college degrees so their educational attainment will reinforce their social class status. First-generation graduates will be achieving a new social class status.

One hundred percent of participants reported having friends and classmates in their undergraduate programs that were interested in advanced degree attainment from various fields. Eighty percent of participants reported being involved in extra or co-curricular activities such as cheerleading, student organizations, student government, and sororities during undergraduate school. The researcher observed that while most of those activities did not continue after undergrad all the women, including those who were not involved with activities at the undergraduate level, participated in organizations and activities directly related to their graduate programs and fields of study.

Results revealed that once in graduate programs there were observable changes in aspirations and attitudes. In response to how their status as black women has affected their attitudes and aspirations toward graduate education, eighty percent of women reported an increased need to be more competitive in their endeavors next to their white classmates and faculty who expected little of them. One participant who had previously attended a PBI said this about the change in her aspirations and attitude after enrolling in her graduate program:

It's made me a little more competitive I think, because I know most of my classmates are white men and white women. So, it makes me a little more competitive knowing that I have to go out there and make the most of my experiences...

A second participant, who was the only black woman in her program her first year, suggested that the mere disparity in numbers between black and white students can encourage blacks to persist in their programs. She explained:

I would say it was encouraging. Because I looked at this way, if something happened and I dropped out, who would be there to represent, not even to represent, but to look like me? Who would be there to show all those other students that black women are going toward graduate degrees.

The other two participants who were enrolled in predominantly black programs had different responses. One reported that her program actually made her aware of her identity as black and female. She stated that being a woman played some role in encouraging her to work harder. The other participant reported that her race and gender had a positive effect on her attitude and aspirations. It was encouraging considering that most of her faculty and classmates were black women. Interestingly, the participants in predominantly black programs did not mention needing to become more competitive.

Economic barriers and restraints

Researchers state that there is often insufficient financial support for black women's graduate study and that financial support typically serves as a barrier to graduate study (Menges & Exum, 1983; Moses, 1989). According to Johnson-Bailey (2004) and Lucia (2009) for black women, financing their education is a secondary matter. Overall, twenty percent of participants claimed that financial support was a primary barrier to their education. All participants received some form of financial aid for graduate study. Sixty-six percent of participants primarily financed their graduate education through federal and private loans. Forty percent of participants were supported by graduate assistantships, which paid for tuition, health insurance and included a stipend for living expenses. Seventy percent of participants reported that their financial aid was not enough to take care of their needs. Many reported that sticking to a strict budget was necessary to sustain them month-to-month. Working outside jobs was not an option when studying took up so much time, especially for the dental students who were not permitted to have outside employment. One participant, who received scholarship money and a monthly stipend from the army, claimed the stipend was not enough to live on and she has lobbied to have that stipend increased.

Thirty percent of participants had outside employment. One participant said she always had to work through school so it was nothing new. Here she explained how having a job served as a constraint:

I worked Friday nights and Saturdays and Sundays. So...when everybody would be hanging out and stuff I had to work. ...I'm working on the weekends and then whatever weekend day I had off, I had to do my homework. ...I was already used

to having to work, but I would say it cut me off socially more than I really realized from the school, I mean I did the work and stuff... I'd say the one constraint was I was rarely able to visit my family, because that was extra money. I was rarely able to leave the place where I was and I consider that a constraint.

Participant 9, a student in the health sciences field, and the only one who reported finances as a primary barrier, said that financial aid was insufficient and her 40-hour a week job was necessary for her to live and pay bills, but it cut into her study time substantially, leaving her with little energy to study.

I live in a one bedroom and I'm shelling out \$550 a month, which is hard. I'm paying bills by myself. A lot of people in grad school have parents paying their bills or they're married and their spouses are paying for their school and bills. Yea, it's really hard and the job I work has to be flexible with school and it doesn't pay much so it's really hard to pay bills, go to work and study. I work forty hours a week and I'm a full-time grad student... I feel like if I were given more loan money or if I could eliminate some of my bills I feel like I'd have more time to study and I would perform better. But I've already eliminated as many bills as I can so I just got to pay up and study when I can.

While financial support was not a primary barrier to participants' success it was still considered an issue or obstacle. The fact that participants had access to enough financial aid to persist through their programs makes economic issues secondary to other issues they face.

Organizational Networks, Family and Friend support systems, and Faculty mentoring

Research shows that student success in graduate programs relies more heavily on relationships, networking and support, especially for students of color and women (Gregory, 1995; Higginbotham & Weber, 1992; Johnson, 2009; Mickelson, 1989; Moses, 1989; Schwartz & Washington, 1999; Wilkerson, 1986). However, research also shows that black women come into close contact with racism and sexism in this context (Higginbotham & Weber, 1992; Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Menges & Exum, 1983; Moses, 1989). This section of the study

explored the types of relationships and support that participants were using to succeed in their programs; and the extent to which they addressed issues of racism and sexism.

Organizational Networks

Eighty-nine percent of the participants were members of professional, service, academic and social organizations related to their schools or fields of study.

The black women students belonged to organizations such as the American Psychological Association (APA), National Association of Student Affairs Administrators (NASPA), Southern Association for College Student Affairs (SACSA), Society of Environmental Journalists (SEJ), Student National Dental Association (SNDA), Alpha Phi Omega, National Service Fraternity (APO), The Golden Key Society, and more. These organizations provided professional development, career opportunities, social activities, community service, and educational and networking conferences. Participants used these resources for financial and social benefits. For example members of the Gold Key society had access to discounts and other money-saving options. Members of professional organizations such as NASPA attended conferences to meet other professionals, inquire about jobs, and attend professional development workshops.

Support Systems

Overall family, friends, classmates and colleagues were identified as the strongest and most important support systems. Participants cherished their personal relationships with their parents, friends, and black classmates and colleagues who were very supportive of their endeavors. They showed their support by addressing their material needs and making themselves available to listen to the students' thoughts and issues. Two participants described the functions of their support systems in these ways:

They listen to my vents that I have to have about my students about my residents, about my staff. They're my sounding board as well to listen to ideas and to really help me to be innovative and creative. (Participant was referring to her assistantship assignment, which was connected to her graduate program)

My friends have been very supportive. They're all interested in different fields but they really supported me in working toward this goal. Pretty much my support system is the other 5 black people in my class and the upper classmen that are black so there are like 25 of us.

Mentoring

In addition to personal support systems, professional and faculty mentors served as sources to help the students understand the politics of their programs and to help them navigate their programs. Eighty percent of participants reported having mentors that were either black or white women professionals, administration, or faculty. Two participants reported having black men as mentors. None of the participants reported receiving help or mentoring from white men. One participant reported that her mentor, a white woman, who also encouraged her to enter the field of dentistry, moved to Louisville with her when she started her program and the mentoring relationship continued. Another participant said that her mentor, a black woman, was a former student in her program who left that program to enter a different program. One participant's

black woman mentor attended the same undergraduate institution as her and happened to be working in an administrative position in the participant's graduate program. Here she described their relationship:

She's the person I can talk to about ... not just academic stuff and know that its still between us and not have to worry about her judging me or anything like that and we can kind of separate the school thing... She's been through the process and because she can give me insight on how the whole dental school thing works and the politics of dealing with other faculty members it has kind of helped me avoid certain situations and faculty members.

Sixty percent of participants reported that relationships with faculty were their primary barrier to continuing in their programs. Nearly all participants reported relationships with faculty as being hostile, nonexistent, or cordial and impersonal. Eighty-three percent of participants who reported negative relationships with faculty thought their strained relationships with professors were race or gender related. Participants thought faculty were not supportive and could not be relied on for help. Three patterns of faculty-student interactions in mentoring relationships emerged. These are: (1) differences in treatment across race; (2) faculty perceptions of students by race; and (3) students responses to perceived discrimination.

Participants thought that faculty in their programs treated them differently from white students. One participant who had previously attended a PBI for undergraduate and graduate programs described treatment she received from white professors at the PWI:

It's mostly been here, but in my masters program it was the same faculty as undergrad so it wasn't anything different. But here some of the instructors make it kind of hard to talk to them and for us black students its like they go out of they way to give us a hard time like something that one of the white students would turn in would be fine. They'd get checked off or given an A immediately but you know to them if I turn something like that in then its crap and it just makes it hard because you know they could care less if you're there.

And I get discouraged sometimes because when your trying to get faculty to come over and evaluate something or ask a question you will get passed up many many times and they'll act like they don't see you or they'll come for a second but as soon as a white student tries to get their attention then they're gone and you're constantly trying to rangle them to get that attention. I'm like I know I stand out, I'm the darkest person in the room! I know that you see me waving my hand and waiting on you but it's the hard part, trying to figure out how to work that system.

Participant 2 described a situation where she confronted a faculty member who she and others observed treating black students differently from white students:

At first I was like maybe I shouldn't hold it against her, because maybe she doesn't know any better. But I had to go to her office hours for questions and I said, "Do you think that African American students learn differently than white students?" She said, 'What do you mean?' I said, 'Because, I feel like, and not only me, but other students in the class feel that when you speak directly to us, you start speaking a little slower, your demeanor changes and its almost like you're talking to us like we're in special ed and you have to be very detailed.' And she just looked at me. She said, 'No, well I don't feel that way.' And she was like, 'Well, I have a meeting to go.' And I think she got really embarrassed, because she got really red. And I just sat there. And I was like, 'Well, for the record you don't have to do that, because we completely understand where you're coming from.' And she just blew it off, like 'Well, do you have any other questions?' I'm like, 'No, that's it.'

When asked, participants reported that they felt that their professors had poor perceptions of them and their work. Only three participants reported that professors had positive perceptions of them and their work. Seventy percent thought professors saw them as inferior and had low expectations of them. One participant reported having professors in both of her graduate programs that were not supportive of women. Participant 6 had this to say about faculty perceptions of her, her work, and other black students' work:

It's different being in dental school, being white and being black. There are certain teachers that they warn us about. 'They don't like me because I'm black and they just don't think we should be here... I think my work is a lot better than the grades they give us. Numerous times I've looked over and saw someone's work that looked a mess and I was like I could never turn something like that in. My work is clearly better than there's and we're getting the same grade!

Another participant reported that faculty appeared surprised when she performed well in class:

I could be making something out of nothing, I felt like teachers would, like I would do something and they would be surprised, [as if] I wasn't supposed to. They'd be like, 'Oh my God, you write so well.' It was almost like they were surprised and shocked that I actually knew something. I guess later in my grad career, it was like whatever, I know what I need to do. They see me as a student, but they see me as a black female student first. So, it was almost kind of like I knew that I had to do I needed to do.

In response to perceived discrimination participants reported that some faculty were more supportive than others, but few recalled having faculty mentors. One participant complained that professors would often say one thing but do another, *"It's like they tell you in class if you need any help, come. I come for help and it's like you don't want to help me."* Another participant described her interaction with white faculty as neutral:

I'm not as open with them as I am with [my mentor] or other black faculty. I just try to keep it as short and simple as possible like 'hey this is what I've done what do you think? Can u check this off?' and just keep it moving, I don't really feel like I can talk to them that much, which makes the whole process harder because you have to deal with them a lot. I don't know I just try to keep it very neutral.

Another expressed distrust in faculty, claiming that she always double checked information that they gave her because she doubted what they were saying and was not sure of their intentions. She had witnessed on more than one occasion a faculty member saying something that was untrue or questionable.

Perceived racial discrimination as reported for both black and white professors. Participant 3 described a situation from her first graduate program at

a PWI where she believed she was experiencing racism from a professor who was a black woman:

Yes, at the other program there was somebody, a faculty, member who seemed to have a problem with me and I'm pretty sure it was a race issue. ...Nothing I turned in was good enough. Like, I got a C in her class, and I don't think I got a C before or since. And I'm pretty sure it was a race issue. And so I consider that a barrier [be]cause she was messing with my GPA, you know what I'm saying. And she was also making it harder for me to function. I would have to spend twice as much time on her stuff to get it better, you know, and that impacted other stuff.

With regard to relationships with classmates, participants reported having close relationships with classmates that were also black, but that their relationships with white classmates were cordial at best. Most relationships with white classmates consisted of "hello and goodbye" according to one participant. Another reported working closely with the only other black woman student in her program. She claimed that other classmates would often come up with excuses not to work with her, but would eagerly invite her to social activities and parties. Another participant had this to say about her interaction with classmates, "For the most part a lot of them just don't speak when they see you even though we have the same classes together all day from 8-5 everyday. To them you're not really there." Another participant felt that her classmates thought of the black students as inferior. She described an incident that demonstrated this:

They feel like you're here because we need to fill up some black slots, and if it wasn't for that than I wouldn't be here which isn't fair because a lot of people don't know that we had GPAs just as high as some of them. One student actually asked a teacher is the reason why the incoming class GPA from undergrad was so low because of the black students. They asked a black teacher this! It was a white student asking a black teacher this!

This same participant reported that throughout the program the white students began to see that the black students were just as smart and capable as the white students and began to show them a little more respect.

While the dominant belief was that black classmates were generally supportive, the participants did report have strained relationships with some black peers. Three participants (who were in the same program) suggested that conflict and competition between black women classmates was an issue. One reported that her primary barrier in persisting through her program had to do with a conflict she had with a black woman classmate. The other two reported that the primary barrier they experienced was the competition between the black students for best student in the program and getting the black women students to get along. One, who was also a past PBI graduate, had this to say about black women peers getting along:

I know this is odd but the biggest barrier is actually getting all the black females to get along because even though there's a small number of us there we still cant seem to pull everything together. Its like a competition between us... Even though we try and help each other and make sure everybody gets through... it doesn't necessarily mean that we're all out for the best of each other all of the time. It makes it kind of hard.

Personal and Familial Expectations and Obligations, and Perceptions of Usefulness

According to researchers, in contrast to men, women's educational experiences and motivations are characterized by systems of interdependencies, relationships, and networks. Women are motivated by a desire for personal and collective gain that is shaped by interpersonal commitments to family, partners and children, community, and the race, rather than just money (Higginbotham & Weber, 1992; Mickelson, 1989). Women's motivations are more closely linked to expectations of themselves, their families, and communities. In this study

ninety percent (9 out of 10) of participants reported that their educational experiences were linked to meeting or exceeding their family's expectations.

These women felt encouraged by their families but many of their family's expectations were for them to achieve bachelor degrees and jobs. However there were differences between first-generation and second-generation students. Families of first generation students were more interested in the women being able to find jobs after graduation. Families of second-generation students had more specific and long-term goals set out for them.

All participants gave relatively specific plans for how they expected to use their graduate degrees. In general, the women planned to use their graduate degrees for economic gains, increased social and academic status, and to launch their careers and businesses. Participants' responses to questions of expectations were closely linked to their perceptions of usefulness of their future degrees. This is in spite of the potential difficulties they may face in achieving their goals professional goals. Studies suggest that the job ceiling faced by blacks keeps them from receiving benefits commensurate with their educational credentials. Black women experience much lower employment rates than black men and white women (Cohen & Nee, 2000). According to research lack of perceived economic returns for graduate degree attainment serves as a barrier to black women's enrollment in graduate programs (Mickelson, 1989; Moses, 1989). These women kept going despite grim prospects for rewards.

Personal Expectations and Perceptions of Usefulness

Many of the participants' responded that educational expectations they had for themselves had been realized along the way. For example, one participant shared her expectations of herself and her graduate degree:

This degree I intend to use, A: for connections and B: I've used this process to get access to things that I probably wouldn't have. Like money to do things that I think would be cool. Also, I've been able to go get some funding to go speak at events where I could meet people that I was interested in meeting inside and outside of academia. So, I pretty much plan to use this one to establish my credentials as someone that could write or work around cultural issues, Africa issues... Right now I'm really interested in working for or starting a cultural center or museum kind of place and then also publications. When I came here, the reason I did it was because I wanted to get overseas writing work and I wanted credentials to do that stuff, to get assignments is what I mean. Now that I see the way the degree's taking shape, I'm thinking grants for projects. It's still very similar, basically to have credentials to do what I want to do.

Another participant also shared some of her expectations for her degree, including addressing some of the shortcomings of her own program:

I would like to do some academic dentistry so doing some of the teaching myself. Just the way I've see them teach certain things I feel like there's something I could do a little bit differently. One thing that I want to do is start like a mentoring program for African Americans and minorities students that are interested in health professions. I want to open a health professions charter school at some point and I do want to do private practice.

One participant expected her graduate education to lead to a comfortable life for her and her future children. One dental student discusses her plans for credentials in response to the question, "What benefits do you expect to receive from your graduate education?"

I think it will be fulfilling to me because the stuff that I saw from the patient aspect as a child is what made me want to be a dentist. And so knowing that I would be able to change that personal interaction [between] patients [and dentists] is just gonna be personally fulfilling for me. What I saw I don't want to see that and I don't want other people to experience that. That's my reasoning for going into dentistry.

Another stated, "I expect to receive a job, number one, and number two, really just the accolade of knowing that I've finished a degree." Others reported plans

to use their graduate degrees to get some work experience and go on to doctoral programs or specialize in their fields thereby increasing their earning potential. Nearly all participants expected to acquire both academic and administrative positions in their fields and do public interest work in some capacity.

While sixty percent of participants expressed satisfaction with their accomplishments, the rest felt they had not yet met their own expectations, and most of their responses implied that they felt they could be doing more. Two participants acknowledged that their expectations had changed and most likely will change again in the future. One participant expected to be in medical school, however she was in a master's program and understood the benefit of getting a master's degree first. Being in the master's program allowed her to explore other career paths such as pharmacy school. One participant whose application had been rejected the first time she applied to her program explained how she and her family dealt with her expectations and feelings of disappointment:

When I didn't get into dental school the first time it was kind of hard for me to accept that, because I felt like I had failed or that I would disappoint my parents and my mom told me like you've done more than what most people have done. You have bachelors. You have masters. Its okay and to me it wasn't okay but they just encouraged what I want to do. They [family] feel that I've already done enough and had some major accomplishments so they just encouraged me with the process.

Obligations

Every participant espoused sentiments of racial pride. Obligations to themselves were connected to their racial group also. Moreover, participants felt the need to challenge stereotypes by changing perceptions of the outside world of black people. The participants in this study felt obliged to take advantage of opportunities to which they realized many people, especially black people, do not

have access. They wanted to show others that (1) people like them can achieve; (2) they wanted to show other black people that they can also have goals, work toward achieving them and succeed at that; and (3) that they wanted to use their education to help others as also reflected in their expectations of their degrees. Two participants articulated how being black women has influenced their expectations and obligations. The first student said:

Well, for one I felt like since I was a black female and there was very, very, very few in my program that looked like me, that I had no choice but to work hard and to succeed. ...I felt like if I didn't, that I'd be letting not only my self down, but I'd be letting black females in general down. What does that look like if there's already very few and I'm not doing what I need to do doing and then I ended up not in school. So, it's almost like I felt like I had to do it.

The other black woman student stated:

Let's see, obligations, I mean I definitely feel that thing that I've always felt, that you have to do twice as well as they do, they being I guess white people. So, I still kind of feel that way. ... I feel obliged to do really well, because I feel I had opportunities that I realize that a lot of other black women do not have. Basically, I feel like if I have the opportunity to transcend the b/barriers of race and gender then I should transcend them as far as possible and to help as many people as possible. And my expectations as a black woman, I don't really think of my expectations of myself, I don't really think of them in those terms. It's more about knowing who I am and what I can do.

Effects of Graduate School and Recommendations

Interviews provided the participants with an opportunity to express how graduate school had affected their lives. They were then allotted the chance to give recommendations to other African American women graduate students and university faculty, staff, administrations, and patrons.

Effects

When asked how graduate school had changed their lives, participants' answers varied greatly. Some lives had been affected negatively, others positively, and others learned life lessons. One participant answered that

graduate school had made her a better person, supervisor, colleague, and friend. Another had learned to scrutinize people and their advice before accepting it. Additionally she reported making more friends, learning more about her culture. Furthermore she reported feeling more empowered and less pressured about credentials and the need to be acknowledged. She had this to say:

I think I feel empowered, because I do not feel, anymore, that I have to have this list of letters behind my name to really be somebody. I don't feel like I have to be acknowledged. That's what it is! It's not even about the list of letters, cause it was like I wanted to be, you know, have my name in the biggest magazines and yadda, yadda, yadda. And now I don't feel like being acknowledged by [the] most powerful people is a necessity for me. So, that's probably pretty big, because that's pretty freeing. That gives you a lot more options.

Two participants reported negative changes with how they see life. Both reported feelings of depression, stress, and pessimism. One reported that she was experiencing culture shock because she had moved from a school that consisted of mostly black students to a mostly white program where she sees about five black people daily. According to her, "Going to a black school everything is geared towards you and general interests then I come here and its like you don't exist. It's an interesting transition." The other participant reported that she had become less optimistic about life and prays that she will make it through each day. Another two participants reported having to cut back on their social activities and struggled to make time for leisure. Finally, one of the women reported that she developed better speaking and conversation skills and has become more selective about how she uses her time and energy.

With regard to the most significant barriers faced in graduate school, participants' answers greatly varied. One reported that lack of money was their most significant barrier. Another reported that her own procrastination was her

barrier. Participant 1 reported that the most significant barrier for her was being seen as the angry black woman in the program. She felt there were no people in her program who could understand her as a black woman. Two participants reported that lack of time and the workload were their most significant barriers. One participant said that relating to faculty had made graduate school most difficult for her. Lastly, a participant reported that the most significant barrier she faced was getting the other black women in her program to get along.

Recommendations

As far as participants' recommendations to other black women students were concerned there were two that were most common: Find support and be prepared for disappointment. Two participants, who are from the same program, had these things to say about getting support:

Get connected. Somehow, someway, find somebody who you feel like will be there to support you throughout your grad career. Cause, I mean it's almost like they're not going to seek you out. You have to go and find them. And I don't know it's different because of the program. ...You definitely have to go seek that out. Because, if you don't, you're just going to be there waiting.

I would recommend coming in and finding someone that you can relate to, whether it's in your program or not. And also find that faculty member, that administrator on campus and really get to know how they are and where they've come from and how they can help you.

Another participant offered a valuable piece of advice to students for navigating graduate programs:

I would recommend that they try to become aware of the politics of the place they're in as quickly as possible and as thoroughly as possible. And, I'd recommend that they get out of it what they want to get out of it and not what they're told they need to get out of it. So, I mean if they value moving up through academia or whatever, that's fine. I would tell them to just question the advice that people give them. That doesn't mean reject the information, but definitely question it. Like think about where it's coming from, why they would say that to you, and how does that match up with your own experience, what you know, what you feel and what you want.

Recommendations for how universities can provide more conducive environments for black women students were centered on hiring more and better diverse faculty, providing more funding for black women, and improving faculty attitudes. One participant expressed some pessimism when offering her recommendation for more funding:

Offer more funding, and sufficient funding, that's about it. I don't really think like...the bigger the institution, the less I expect for them to do anything, really. So, like think of like the school I'm in now, I mean, I think they could, there's a lot of money coming in and out of the school. Even though they say there's less and less and increase funding for women. I think that'd be good.

On hiring more black women faculty, two participants had this to say:

Get more African American female teachers. There's not one in my program. There's not one and there's only one black male. And then the program that's probably similar to it, it's one, two, three, that's three black men and no black females. Most of the African Americans that are associated, females that are associated in the program, are in support staff roles.

If they had more black faculty that would help. If I went somewhere like Meharry or Howard (historically black medical schools) that would be the case, but here you got two in the whole school and the other one is in student affairs she's only here twice a week. If there were more people here that reflected me then I would feel so much more comfortable and you know have more people to go to. I think that's something they have to do, get more diverse faculty.

Participant 6 had this recommendation for faculty attitudes, which has been an issue throughout the findings of this study:

I feel like they need to have some kind of workshop. I don't know, they need to have something. They have to be more mindful of some of the things they do, some of the things they say, period. Its not only as black students we get it, but there's some people (faculty) who are disrespectful in general and they feel like they can get away with it because they know they're not going anywhere. They're like, 'I'm doctor so-and-so and I can talk to you any kind of way because you're the student.'

Also, I think they should try not to show favoritism towards the white students because that definitely discourages us when we see it. Maybe they don't mean to do it, but I don't know, maybe they have their favorites and just happen to be white. They definitely shouldn't let everybody else see it because that's just not fair.

When asked about what recommendations they would make to faculty, administration, and classmates about relationships with black women students the most common answer was for university officials and students to acknowledge their biases, get past them, and be fair to everyone. The next most common recommendation was for the university to hire more diverse faculty and specifically black faculty who will represent, connect with, and cultivate relationships with black women students. Some participants also recommended that faculty be held accountable by doing what they say they are going to do and that they should practice what they preach. Participant 3 had this advice for faculty in her all black program:

In this department, which is all African American, I would advise them that black women expect more of them than maybe they think. That the black women in the department are going to expect support and expect to be backed up in ways beyond classes and all that... They need to be more aware of issues that maybe they're aware of academically, but maybe that they're not seeing in their immediate environments, problems that they are aware of in the world, but maybe they're not addressing in the department. You know, just like a lot of misogyny. You know dynamics in classrooms and spaces where men will come in and just take over the space. Stuff like that.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Summary

This case study represents a very small piece of the possible queries into the experiences of black women graduate students that can be explored. Using qualitative interviews and a black feminist framework this research study delved into the lives of black women graduate students. The findings of the study disclose that race, class, and gender do affect the experiences of black women in graduate programs and their decision to pursue and persist through graduate degree programs. Specifically, the women in this study explained how race, class, and gender affected educational preparedness, economic factors, networks and mentoring, familial obligations, and perceptions of usefulness. Moreover, the women described the strategies they adopted and reason why they pursued and persisted in their programs. The findings were most congruent with the literature that specifically focused on black women. Furthermore, this research and the participants' experiences within this study and in their graduate programs support the foundation of black feminist studies and black feminist perspectives by falling within the core principles. The discussion on the findings of this research is organized within race, class, and gender. It is followed by

recommendations for future research and the conclusion, which takes a look at the purpose and role of higher education in the lives of black women and society at large.

This case study maintained the visibility and recognition of unique status of black women by separating their educational experiences from that of black men and white women. The research recognized black women's unique status by problematizing their situation within higher education and graduate degree attainment. The research recognized the intersectionality of race, class, and gender as bases for oppression in the context of higher education. It looked at each identity category and its role and relationship to the research and its participants. Furthermore, black women resisted these forms of oppression by persisting through their various graduate programs. The study shows that black women have different experiences in higher education than black men and white women.

Although race, class, and gender are inextricably linked, race in this study, served as both the most significant motivating factor to pursuing and persisting graduate education, and it was also the major barrier. Gender and social class issues were present, but were not major motivating factors or barriers. Gender and social class proved to be negotiable, but race was much harder for participants to negotiate.

Similar to what was argued by black thinkers, Dubois, Washington, Cooper, Mcleod and others, interestingly the women respond that the purpose in pursuing higher education had to do with accessibility, utility and economic gains,

contributing to society, progress and moral uplift of the black race, and holistic human growth. Each of these were clearly identified in the participants' objectives for pursuing graduate degrees.

Similar to what was reported by Johnson-Bailey (2004) and Moses (1989) the women reported through individual recommendations that persistence through graduate programs was dependent upon the presence of black faculty, administration, peers, respect from faculty, inclusion, and funding. Lack of perceived economic benefits and emotional, academic, and financial support were identified as barriers. However, the women were able to overcome these barriers with jobs, financial aid, loans, and assistantships, and support from family, friends, colleagues, and mentors.

Race

The fact that race was a dominant factor in study could be because most of the participants were in graduate programs at the PWI, in which case race would be a bigger issue than gender and class. Given the nature of race in the U.S., as a way to identify and oppress, include, and exclude others based on physical characteristics, the fact that most of the participants were one of very few black students in their predominantly white graduate programs increased the likelihood of instances of racial discrimination from faculty and peers.

Johnson-Bailey (2004) stated that societal issues dealing with race and sex hierarchies were primary concerns made black women's participation in graduate programs more difficult. This is reflected in the issues dealing with

relationships and support for participants in this study. Race determined how faculty, personnel and classmates treated participants, and consequently whether they would continue on in their programs. The black women student's difficulties were most prevalent in interactions with faculty, administration, non-black classmates and the institutions themselves. Nellie Y. McKay (1997) stated that the academy is a microcosm of the larger society; and that American and all Western society remain provinces where white men, and some white women, of a particular class and dominant ideology determine the nature of all people's existences.

Race not only served as a major obstacle, but also the major motivating factor in participants pursuit and persistence in their programs. The ways in which each participant experienced and negotiated the five factors was informed by race. Their choice of school, preparation, field of study, career path, aspirations, attitudes, expectations, and degree utility were all driven by a need to uplift their race and prove their capabilities as black people. Race also informed participants' resistance to perceived racial discrimination. Once they realized there was a lack of support from faculty and non-white classmates participants were forced to cling to their black peers and their families. Many were careful about trusting white peers. The ways in which participants interacted with other blacks shows the complexity of race relations and hierarchy in a predominantly white environment. It not only brings blacks closer to each other, it also divides them. Some black students see the need to draw from and provide support to each other. Some see fellow blacks as competition or as

sources of detriment to their social and professional success among their white peers.

Within this study race relations between disciplines seemed to differ. The women who were studying health sciences seemed to have experienced more intense discrimination in their programs, whereas students from social sciences and education reported fewer and less intense instances of discrimination. Women from the health sciences also expressed more feelings of depression and pessimism than the women in the education and public administration. Traditionally, blacks and women have been underrepresented in the hard sciences and it has been suggested that these programs, which are dominated by white men, are much harder on women and minorities at every level of postsecondary education. Social sciences and education contain more women and minorities so black women students are more likely to find allies in those fields.

Class

Social class was never directly addressed in the interviews. Most people are unaware of their social class status or the criteria involved in identifying their status. Class as defined in the theoretical framework has to do with unequal allocation of resources and constraints within a system of stratification. The criterion includes economic, cultural, and social capital. Since social class is inextricably linked to race and gender, and access to higher education is linked to allocation of resources, issues of social class--economic, social and cultural--

were expected to emerge in this study. The literature cites socioeconomic status (SES) as a factor that indirectly affects degree attainment. Aspirations, career path, educational preparedness, finances and networking are all issues related to social class. The purpose of degree attainment itself is related to achieving or maintaining a social class status.

First-generation graduates, whether they know it or not, are achieving a new social class status by getting a college degree. Second-generation students are securing their social class status and in some cases are achieving a higher status. Undergraduate and graduate programs not only provide credentials for attaining careers that pay more and provide benefits, they also socialize people for their career fields and society thereby contributing to an educated class with increased access to resources. In this study the families of second-generation students had more explicit educational goals for their relatives, which included lots of educational training to ensure economic benefits and comfort. First-generation families were satisfied with their relatives for achieving bachelor degrees. To them a bachelor's degree meant better job prospects and higher pay than what a high school education brings. Walpole (2008) stated that students with low SES have less contact with faculty, study less, are less involved with organizations, work more, and have lower grades than other African American students. This did not prove to be completely true. Those participants who came from poorer, less educated families had jobs while in school, which was found to have a negative effect on them. Second-generation graduates made up the majority of the sample, but it is not clear whether this was

a coincidence or if there are actually more second-generation black women graduate students. This issue should be looked at in future research.

While social class was not directly addressed, economic capital was. Even though most participants were second-generation graduates and therefore belonged to a higher class all participants used financial aid. Their families may have possessed social and cultural capital, but not enough economic capital to finance their relatives' education. Based on the findings that dealt with economic opportunities and restraints, had participants not been able to secure financial aid, they would not have been able to access their graduate programs. Having enough financial resources was an issue. Most of the participants were struggling to make ends meet; however, finances did not serve as a barrier to degree attainment because participants had access to financial resources. This information is congruent with the literature from Lucia and Bauman (2009) who found that income and affordability did not negatively affect black women's enrollment and degree attainment. This is probably because black women have access to financial aid and may not be fazed by the prospect of taking out loans. The benefits of educational attainment may outweigh the disadvantages of debt.

An issue that did not appear in the study but appeared in the literature was the presence and obligations to family life. The literature stresses family obligations being a barrier for women in graduate school. However, much of the literature is dated and traditionally graduate students were returning students who had entered the workforce after undergrad. This study sample represented mostly students who were single, childless, and had not taken breaks before

entering graduate school. This also coincides with the literature from Johnson-Bailey (2004), which states that education is considered an investment in black women's futures, which may not necessarily include marriage or children.

Gender

While gender was not identified as a primary barrier or motivation, it seemed to work in participants' favor considering the gender make-up of higher education. Only one participant experienced perceived sexism and interestingly it was in the context of a predominantly black program where gender would be more salient. Research says that men and women's motivations for degree attainment differ. Women are said to be more motivated by desire for personal and collective gain that is shaped by interpersonal commitments to family, partners and children, community, and their race. For men, income and self-interest are primary factors and seen separate from social and familial obligations. These statements only seem to be partially true for this case study. The participants were obviously seeking economic gains, but not necessarily for other people as the research suggests. Participants' motivations were very much connected to equally serving their communities and themselves. As already stated in connection with social class, black women graduate students are more interested in economic security than marriage and children.

Other gender issues presented in the literature include women's self-confidence at the graduate level. Women tend to have low self-confidence, set lower goals for themselves, and are likely to be given less encouragement and

attention. While these things were apparent in the participants' responses, it is not clear that these issues can be attributed to gender or separated from race. Because of the context and the way race and gender played out in this case study these issues are more likely to be attributed to racism, although it is possible that sexism also played a role.

The large gap between undergraduate and graduate degree attainment and black women's comparatively slow progress in graduate degree attainment, while not explicit in this study, were referred to in the findings of the interviews. For example, the black women students from PWIs talked about how fatiguing it was in their undergraduate programs. The prospect of entering an even more exclusive environment may be discouraging. In addition, social class background may play a role. In this study most of the women were second-generation graduates, making them more closely connected and aware of advanced degree options and social mobility. Many black women are first-generation graduates, in which case the family and the student usually have little knowledge of advanced degree options and the benefits of advanced degrees.

Black women's slow progress in graduate programs may be attributed to issues of racial discrimination and lack of social relationships and social capital. While it was not an issue in this study, family and dependents may make more difficult for black women to get through their programs at a faster pace. Traditionally, graduate students do not transfer into their programs from undergraduate school. They usually take time off for work and family. Much of the research on black female graduate students consisted of older sample

populations than the one for this study. Moreover, as universities attempt to accommodate increasingly diverse populations, resources that were originally being extended to and used by mostly black women are possibly being extended to other minority women groups.

Recommendations for Further Research

Recommendations for further research include more research on graduate programs and how those programs treat their minority populations and how those minorities negotiate their way through graduate programs. Longitudinal research must also be done on black men and women's persistence through Science Technology Engineering Mathematic (STEM) fields from undergraduate school through graduate school to get a better understanding of retention and dropout rates within these fields. Also, more research needs to be done on the composition of the alien population. Statistics show that resident aliens held at least a quarter of the doctoral degrees conferred in 2008. Research that addresses how and why students who are resident aliens are able to receive doctoral degrees at higher rates than every other minority group.

Further research should also take a closer look at black women and white men's relationships within higher education at every level. Most research looks at black women's relationships with black men, white women and each other. However considering white men and black women have a lot of access to each other in postsecondary education it would be helpful to know more about how they negotiated personal and non-personal relationships with them. This would

also lend more insight to how black women and white men negotiate relationships with each other outside of college also. Actually more research should be done how black women relate to other groups socially and vice versa, within and outside of higher education. That research should be intentional about displaying relationships with specific groups. Finally, more research looking at black women lesbians in higher education must be performed to better understand how their intersectional identities are treated within higher education and how they negotiate their way to graduation.

Another recommendation for further research has to do with the role and function of faculty. To students, administrators, personnel, and even faculty this may not be clear. How do faculty get to be faculty and what does that entail? What are expectations of faculty from graduate students?

Conclusion

This case study served as a pilot study to a much larger future research project. This research does provide some insights to the situation of black women in higher education. Based on the information drawn from qualitative interviews in addition to the literature it can be concluded that not only are black women succeeding in graduate education, but also they are doing it under hostile and repressive circumstances.

For black women access to education means progress, social mobility, moral uplift, contributing to democracy and personal growth. Many great thinkers including Thomas Jefferson, W.E.B. Dubois and Anna Julia Cooper agreed that

this is the purpose of education. For that reason, it is difficult to make sense of the fact that after over 40 years of legal and economic access to higher education that black women are still being held back from reaching their full potential by racism, sexism, and classism—not by finances, intellectual ability, or personal motivation. It is deplorable that this oppression is being played out in an American institution that is supposed to facilitate the production and cultivation of democratic ideals.

Considering American democratic ideals and the contributions made in the past and present, it is reprehensible that black women have yet to be recognized by the dominant social class as major contributors to the birth and growth of American society, worthy of equal treatment and rewards. Black women are constantly relegated to the margins and rendered invisible despite their strength and will to persist through the gravest conditions. For an institution created by a society that calls itself democratic to perpetually treat one of its greatest assets unjustly and to continually reproduce hierarchy and oppression only lends foresight to a fatal end. Black women cannot continue to fight for equality and recognition alone. And an American society that lives a lie cannot continue to prosper and develop. Everyone has to work together to make our democratic ideals material. Audre Lorde said, “Without community there is no liberation.” We will know we have found liberation when black women can see themselves and be seen. Nobody deserves to be invisible.

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APPENDIX
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

A. Demography

1. Name _____
2. Age _____
3. City and State of current residence _____
4. Marital Status? married single divorced widowed separated
5. From what institution did you receive your degree? _____

B. Educational Preparedness, Aspirations, and Attitudes

1. What type of undergraduate institution did you attend?

Vocational private public historically black liberal arts

2. In what ways do you think college prepared you for graduate school?

- a. Did your professors, counselors, and staff discuss graduate school?

yes no

- b. Were your assignments and classes geared toward preparation for grad school? yes no

If yes, explain.

3. How early do you remember thinking about an advanced degree?

a. Explain where your aspirations for graduate school came from

4. Do you remember your friends and classmates having aspirations for grad school?

yes no

a. If yes, explain their attitudes about and plans for grad school.

b. How did they feel about grad school? excited anxious indifferent
scared

c. How did you feel about attending grad school? excited anxious
indifferent scared

5. In what ways do you think your family influenced your attitude toward grad school?

a. What are some things they said about grad school?

b. Did any of your family members attend college? yes no

c. If yes, did any of your family members attend grad school? yes no

e. If yes, what did they study? _____

f. Did your family members encourage or push you to focus on a particular area of study or profession(psychology, education, business, teaching)? Yes
no

g. If yes, what area of study or profession?

6. Were you involved in any extra-curricular activities in college?

Athletics student government arts/crafts theatre/performance discussion
groups special interest clubs professional clubs Greek organizations

a. Did those activities influence your decision to attend grad school? yes no
maybe

If yes, how so?

b. Did those activities continue in grad school? yes no

7. Why did you think you attended grad school?

8. Do you think you were prepared for grad school?

extremely for the most part somewhat not really no

9. What was your GPA upon graduation?

10. How do you think your race and gender has affected your attitude and aspirations toward graduate education? -

C. Economic Opportunities and Barriers

1. Were you able to afford graduate school initially? Yes no I don't know

2. Did you receive benefits, special opportunities, or scholarships for being a woman or member of a minority group? Yes no I don't know

a. If no, were you aware of such opportunities? Yes no

3. What kinds of funding resources have been available to you during matriculation?

Loans family church tuition remission scholarships grants
assistantships fellowships

a. Did you use federal aid? Yes no I don't know

b. If yes, what type of federal aid? perkins loan stafford loan work-study
scholarships

c. Was federal aid sufficient in covering your graduate education costs? Yes
no I don't know

d. If no, explain. _____

4. What kinds of financial restraints have you experienced?

- a. What have you done to address your financial issues? Work loans scholarship
- b. How did your financial remedy affect academic performance? Experience? Attitude?

c. If child birth was an issue, how did it affect the financing of your education?

5. What other barriers, problems, or difficulties have you experienced in grad school? Child-birth family obligations study habits mental health

6. How has your status as an African American woman served as a barrier (if at all) to your education?

D. Family Obligations and Expectations

1. How do you expect to use your graduate degree?

2. What expectations do you have of your education?

3. What were your family's expectations of your education?

a. How did your family's expectations affect your college experience and career outlook? ___add stress and stipulations for job and location of job so that she can help the family

4. Would you say that you met their expectations? Yes No

a. How so?

b. How have you met your expectations?

5. How do you think your status as a black woman influenced your expectations and obligations?

E. Effect of Networks and Mentoring

1. What academic networks or organizations do you belong to? APA ASA Honor's Society

a. what kinds of resources do they provide?

b. How helpful are they? Very somewhat not very helpful

2. Did you have professional mentors that have been helping you through grad school? yes no

a. If yes, describe your relationship(s).

3. Which mentoring relationships or organizations have been most useful to you?

a. How so?

4. Do you have a system of support, friends, family, and classmates that have been helping through grad school? yes no

a. How would you describe your support system?

b. Who/What does it consist of?

5. How would you describe your relationships with faculty? Administration? Staff? Classmates?

6. Does your institution have mentoring programs available to you? Yes no

a. If yes, do you use those resources? Why or why not?

7. Would you say your support system is making grad school bearable more enjoyable? Explain.

8. Out of your networks, mentoring relationships, and support systems, which has had the greatest impact on you? Why?

9. How do you think your status as an African American woman has affected your mentoring relationships?

10. How do you think your race and gender influences your professor's perceptions of you? Your work?

11. What recommendations would you make to university faculty, administration, staff, and students about relationships with African American women students?

F. Perceptions of Usefulness

1. What benefits do you expect to receive from your graduate education?

2. In what ways has your experience in graduate school affected your life?

3. What were you doing before grad school? School work internship
unemployed

- a. If work, are you still employed? Yes no
- b. Why have you chosen to remain employed?

- c. How did you acquire your current/previous position?

- d. Was/Is it related to your undergraduate field of study? Yes no
- e. Is a degree a necessary qualifications for your current occupation? Yes
no
- f. How would you describe your level of career/job satisfaction?
Very satisfied satisfied somewhat satisfied dissatisfied

4. Has your degree been instrumental in achieving your specific goals? Yes no

a. How so?

5. Why are you pursuing a graduate degree?

6. If you had known then what you know now about college and graduate education, would you have attended? Yes No

7. What are your future career goals?

a. Do your future goals require a graduate education? Yes no

8. Overall, what is has been the most significant barrier you've experienced with your graduate education?

9. What other recommendations would your make in relation to graduate education and African American women students?

10. What would you like Universities to do in order to create a better and more conducive environment for African American women students at the graduate level?

CURRICULUM VITAE

Ciara N. Pierce

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Education

University of Louisville , 2008-10

M.A. in Pan-African Studies

Master's Thesis: Invisible Woman

Kentucky State University, 2004-08

Whitney Young Liberal Studies Honors Core

B.A. in Political Science with minor in Liberal Studies (Pre-Law)

G.P.A 3.49/4.0 scale

Senior Thesis: Why Hillary Clinton Will Not Be President of the United States

Honors and Awards

Graduate Assistantship, full tuition with stipend and health insurance, 2008-09

Whitney M. Young Jr. Scholarship recipient, \$1500, 2007-08

Presidential Scholarship recipient, full tuition, 2004-08

Dean's List, 2004-08

Pre-Professional Experience

Graduate Assistant for the Department of Pan-African Studies

Department Chair, Dr. Theresa Rajack-Talley, University of Louisville, 2009-10

Continued research on black women's courses offered at higher education institutions, taught classes in professor's absence, supervised and organized study abroad programming, planned department social and academic events

Graduate Assistant for the Department of Pan-African Studies

Associate Professor, Dr. Ricky L. Jones, University of Louisville, 2008-09

Conducted research for funding sources and statistics, created advertisements for lectures, community forums, and other events; scheduled community

lecturers and panelists for campus and community events, constructed academic programming, and performed clerical tasks

Researcher for the Department of Pan-African Studies

Department Chair, Dr. Theresa Rajack-Talley, University of Louisville, 2009

Searching for number of Black women courses offered at institutions with Black Studies and Gender Studies programs or departments

Teaching Experience

Teaching Assistant for PAS/WGST 321, Racism and Sexism

Associate Professor, Dr. Theresa Rajack-Talley, University of Louisville, 2009

Facilitated class group projects about sexism and racism using media; assisted in designing tests, organized attendance and assignment records, served as intermediary in professor's absence

Teaching Assistant for PAS 200 Introduction to Pan-African Studies

Assistant Professor, Dr. Denise Martin, University of Louisville, 2009

Lectured on Black politics and economics to class of 20+ students, assist in planning course syllabus, and aid in creating quizzes, tests, and assignments

Guest Lecturer for PAS 301 Race, Sports and the Law

Assistant Professor, Brian Edwards, J.D., University of Louisville, 2009

Lectured and facilitated discussion about media images of Black baseball athletes and steroids controversy to class of 20+ students

Peer Tutor for Summer Academic Bridge Program

2008

Instructed developmental students in reading and writing, mentored incoming freshmen on college life, participated in class sessions with students, assisted instructors in teaching students

Peer Tutor for the Academic Center for Excellence

2008

Tutored students one-on-one in college level english, political science, latin, and math; assisted professors with teaching in classrooms, and proctored exams for honors students

Presentations

Pierce, C. N. (2009, March). Sources of White Aggression. Paper presented at University of Louisville Graduate Student Symposium, Louisville, KY.

Pierce, C. N. (2009, March). Sources and Manifestations of White Aggression. Paper presented in roundtable discussion, "Elemental Forces: From Africa to America", at the National Council of Black Studies Conference, Atlanta, GA.

Pierce, C. N. (2009, September). "Leadership and Culture of Dissemblance". Discussion facilitated at 4th Annual Kentucky State University Leadership Retreat, Louisville, KY.

Pierce, C. N. (2008, March). Black Studies at Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Paper presented at Southern Interdisciplinary Roundtable on African Studies, Frankfort, KY.

Panel Discussions

Saturday Academy, Student Success, 2010

Urban League Young Professionals College Fair Panel, 2010

Kentucky State University Leadership Retreat, "Life After K-State", 2009

Kentucky State University "Sister to Sister", 2009

University of Louisville Graduate School Fair, 2008

University of Louisville, Cultural Center Let's Talk Series, "The Well", 2008

Leadership

Graduate Advisor, Association of Black Students, University of Louisville, 2009

- Advise executive board members on administrative decisions
- Assist in creating programming for students of color and organizations
- Maintain information exchange with other advisors and university administration

Historian, Pan-African Graduate Student Association, University of Louisville, 2009

- Chronicle programs and events created by the association and its members
- Serve as photographer for programs, events, and meetings
- Compile and archive documents chronologically for future members

Chief Justice, Student Government Association, Kentucky State University, 2007-08

- Interpreted Student Government Association Constitution
- Presided over Student Court cases
- Managed Student Court justices
- Aided in program planning for student body

Technology Skills

Hardware

PC, Apple Mac, DSLR Camera, Xerox scanners and copiers, video projector, fax machine

Operating Systems

Windows XP and Vista; Mac OS X

Software

Microsoft Office, iWork, Adobe Creative Suite CS3, Blackboard, Wiki

Educational Social Networking

Wordpress, Tumblr, Blogger, Facebook, Twitter, SKYPE

Community Service and Volunteering

Weed and Seed

2010

Assisted professors in community organizing for Weed & Seed program, facilitated workshops for community officials

Lost Sheep Ministries

2008

Served food and clothes to the homeless

Jamaica Service Learning Project

2008

Spent quality time with severely handicapped children, baby-sat orphan infants, assisted foster children with homework, constructed a schoolhouse

Kentucky State University's First-Year Experience

2007

Mentored freshmen honor students

Sunshine Center

2006

Supervised children while parents attended parenting class

Bridgeport Elementary School

2006

Entertained children with games and story-telling, assisted children with school work

References Available Upon Request