THE INTERFACE OF RISKS AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS AMONG AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN IN CLINICALLY FOCUSED GRADUATE PROGRAMS

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ABSTRACT

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Black females must navigate higher education as a gendered racial minority in solidarity or at the very least, one of a few Black females within their environment. This experience can create a lot of stress, isolation, or lack of support and direction. Within the Black community, Black women are obtaining PhDs at record numbers; however, compared to other female counterparts across racial ethnic groups, Black female PhD holders are lagging behind (NSF, 2011b). When accurately represented, Black women are lagging behind as a result of the intersection of their race and gender within higher education. Research shows Black women as high academic achievers, yet, it fails to capture their contextualized experiences (Chavous & Cogburn, 2007).

In clinically focused doctoral programs, Black women are influenced by the overrepresentation of women, yet there remains a racial disparity among graduates (NSF, 2011a). Further, they are equated as the token representation of culture within the classroom and toward therapeutic practices (Maton et al., 2011; Wieling & Rastogi, 2003). Less is known how Black women have endured multiple levels of discrimination to obtain the doctoral degree. Further, it is unclear if there are certain identified protective factors that are more valuable to coping.

This study utilized various theories to capture the contextualized experiences of Black women within these specific graduate programs: human ecological theory, risk and resilience framework, Black feminist theory, and critical race theory.

Results revealed various risk factors within each ecological system of their graduate program. The risk factors included being an outsider because of minority status, witnessing visible tension among faculty members, and transient faculty. Interactions with faculty were described as both risk and protective factors. Participants described lack of diversity among faculty and negative interactions that influenced their experiences within the program. On the contrary, having a faculty mentor was essential to progressing through programs. The risk factors influenced participants' mental health and self-confidence. Finally, participants identified multiple coping mechanisms that protected them as they progressed forward.

Eco-map findings revealed spiritual coping, a community of support, racial identity, faculty mentor, and family were frequently utilized supports among the participants. Participants described these supports as essential to helping them manage the stressors they experienced within their environment. Findings of this study suggest the importance of increasing supports for students and faculty members of color within academia. It is important students of color are not marginalized as a result of their race, but rather supported and accepted.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In 2011, Black[1] females earned 65% of PhDs among the 6.1% of overall Black PhD holders; however, among female racial and ethnically diverse PhD holders, 6.3% were Black, 6.4% were Latina/Hispanic, 56% were White, 22% were Asian, and 0.3% were American Indian or Native American (NSF, 2011b). When accurately represented, African American women are lagging behind as a result of the intersection of their race and gender. In clinically focused doctoral programs, African American women are influenced by the overrepresentation of women, yet there remains a racial disparity among graduates (NSF, 2011a). Further, they are equated as the token representation of culture within the classroom and toward therapeutic practices (Maton et al., 2011; Wieling & Rastogi, 2003). This study focused upon how African American women self-care and managed stress within the multiple layers of their environment as graduate students.

This chapter begins with an overview of the current issues within higher education for African American doctoral students. Following this overview is the rationale for why this study is important, followed by a brief description of the research methodology. Next, the theoretical framework is described, and this chapter concludes with the primary qualitative research question.

Background Context

> After three years of doing my job in semi-isolation, someone suggested that I deserved a raise and promotion to the rank of assistant professor on tenure track…I had been receiving solid teaching and annual evaluations, so I thought this sounded like a good idea. I had absolutely no idea what it meant or how to

[1]The term African American and Black will be used interchangeably throughout this document. The term describes individuals who are racially categorized according to the U.S. Census as Black and born within the United States.

> prepare an academic-promotion dossier properly. Someone from the dean's office simply handed me a red folder that had three sections in it to hold my documents and gave me a sheet of basic written guidelines of what was required for review…needless to say, a few months later I learned that my request for promotion had been denied. (p. 428)

This quote is taken from the Wallace, Moore, Wilson, & Hart (2012) study on African American women in academia. The quote is a narrative from an African American female instructor describing her path to advancement as a faculty within the university. Within the narrative, the instructor receives little guidance and direction on preparation for tenure. This results in her promotion being denied at the expense of her lack of preparation. This is a classic example of the atmosphere African American women must endure within higher education. An environment filled with hostility, isolation, and unwritten rules.

Within higher education, the process of obtaining the degree and successfully advancing within the university is wrought with challenges and difficulties that are often ignored and unnoticed for African American women. Lack of context has resulted in misrepresentation of Black women in higher education (Chavous & Cogburn, 2007). Research portrays an inaccurate comparison of Black females to Black males. This inaccurate comparison results in competing beliefs about the roles of Black males and females within higher education. Furthermore, there is a subjective focus on the underachievement and despair of Black males and the overachievement and tenacity of Black women (Chavous & Cogburn, 2007). Such research lacks a contextualized process of academic achievement and suggests Black women do not encounter obstacles.

Within higher education, Black women face a multitude of barriers that differ from Black males. These barriers range from oppressive and discriminatory experiences such as sexual harassment and assault, lower pay than males, and less representation in leadership positions (Buchanan, Bergman, Bruce, Woods, & Lichty, 2009; Settles, Cortina, Malley, & Stewart, 2006;

Vakalahi & Starks, 2010). Although Black women have outnumbered Black males in degree achievement, they are still challenged by various barriers.

Furthermore, African American women have been socialized differently than African American males. Research shows Black women as high academic achievers, yet, it fails to capture that women are socialized to be caretakers (Chavous & Cogburn, 2007). Black femininity has been characterized as an extreme version of nonthreatening nurturing caretaker or a sexual immoral harlot (e.g., Mammy, Jezebel) (Collins, 2000). Such images are in contrast to the Black matriarch image that dominates many Black families; this image portrays strength and resilience in the face of difficulty (e.g., single Black mother). However, the Black matriarch image is criticized because her assertiveness emasculates males, specifically Black males.

Black males are introduced into masculinity from birth (Hill, 2002). Black masculinity is defined as strength, acceptance for aggressiveness, and dominance (Hill, 2002; Staples, 1978). They are privileged by their gender, yet as a racial group they are ostracized and treated as powerless. Despite being disadvantaged by their race, Black males are able to benefit from the sexual subservient roles relegated to African American women by receiving higher wages compared to Black women, and not having their physical qualities subject them to unwarranted sexual advances (Collins, 2000; Staples, 1978; Watson, Robinson, Dispenza, & Nazari, 2012).

These contrasting gender-socialized norms reveal differences in how African American males and females are taught their position and role within society, additionally strengthening the argument that comparison between Black males and females provides an incorrect comparative framework. It is important to locate the multiple identities of individuals, specifically when referring to Black women. Black females' multiple identities (e.g., race, class) influence their professional status in such a way that regardless of whether or not they adhere to traditions of

being permissive and nonthreatening or progressively assert their capabilities, they receive less pay than males and are less represented in leadership positions compared to males (Christie-Mizell, 2006; Collins, 2000).

Intersectionality in academia. Higher education is described as an open pipeline of success for women. Over 50% of graduate enrollments are females (Monroe, Ozyurt, Wrigley, & Alexander, 2008). Increasingly, females represent approximately 46% of doctorate recipients (NSF, 2011b). This reflects an institution that recruits and graduates a large portion of female scholars. Based upon these statistics, it appears that higher education is an institution where women strive and advance; however; when closely analyzed, multiple barriers narrow and block the pipeline to success. The barrier of sexism challenges women's ability for promotion and visibility through advancement in higher education. Women represent approximately 50% of full-time faculty, however this number decreases as they advance. In 2011, women represent approximately 42.1% of tenured faculty and only 29.1% of full professors. In comparison to women, as males advance in their careers, their representation increases. Males represent approximately 50.7% of full-time faculty, 57.8% of tenured faculty, and 70.9% of full professors (IPEDS, 2011). Although women increasingly receive PhDs, the same cannot be said of their representation in advanced leadership positions (e.g., tenured faculty).

Particularly for African American women, promotion and visibility within academia is not only influenced by sexism but also racism. Black women are presented with the disadvantage of the intersection of their race and gender (Wallace et al., 2012). Within higher education, their numbers are reportedly even lower than their White female counterparts. In 2011, Black women represented approximately 4.1% of full-time assistant faculty members (IPEDS, 2011). This is in contrast to White women holding 37.6% of those positions in academia. Among tenured track

faculty, Black women represented 2.9%, and 33.9% were White women. Even more challenging is that Black women represented only 1.4% of full professors (IPEDS, 2011). This reflects a disparity among Black women achieving success and advancing in higher education. Black women are achieving degrees at lower numbers in comparison to other females of ethnic racial diversity, marginalized by the intersection of their race and gender, and the pipeline for advancement and use of their professional degree is less visible.

For Black women, their pathway for advancing within academia is narrow and less visibly represented by other Black women. Less visibility in advanced faculty and administrative positions reflects the lack of diversity as well as the gendered and racial bias that continues to permeate throughout academia. Research has shown that the intersection of race and gender creates additional barriers that invalidate their experiences, and impede their progression within higher education (Henderson, Hunter, & Hildreth, 2010; Jean-Marie, Williams, & Sherman, 2009; O'Connor, 2002; Schwartz, Bower, Rice, & Washington, 2003; Sulé, 2009; Myers, 2002). In faculty positions, Black females are isolated without mentors and are held to expectations that are incomparable to their colleagues (Holmes, 2008; Wallace et al., 2012; Wilson, 2012). Black female faculty members have reported having a lack of knowledge when preparing a dossier for promotion, being strategically overburdened with committee responsibilities that result in substandard performance, as well as having their service and research devalued and not considered eligible as part of their preparation for advancement (Holmes, 2008; Wallace et al., 2012; Wilson, 2012). Thus, these African American women have careers within educational environments challenged by barriers that limit advances and promotion.

The narrative of marginalization and discrimination resounds throughout higher education among African American women of varying positions. Black women have reported

experiencing social isolation from peers (Sulé, 2009), lack of faculty support and guidance (Myers, 2002; O'Connor, 2002, Sulé, 2009; Walker, Wright, & Hanley, 2001), discrimination, and having to work harder than their White peers (Ellis, 2001; Hinton, Grim, & Howard-Hamilton, 2009). Encountering such multilayered barriers influences the professional and personal development of African American females (Ellis, 2001; Jean-Marie et al., 2009; Schwartz et al., 2003; Sulé, 2009). These women have to survive within an environment that is too often experienced as hostile. The ongoing management of such factors can disrupt, slow, or halt their success in academia.

Although the narratives are similar regardless of one's position (e.g., student or faculty) within academia, African American women's individualized experiences may differ as a result of their specific department, program of study, and demographics of the department. In clinically focused PhD programs such as clinical and counseling psychology, as shown in table 1, female graduates are overrepresented in comparison to males (NSF, 2011a). While the higher numbers among women in these programs reflect the progression and success among females within the mental health field, there remains a racial disparity among graduates. The intersection of race and gender remains underrepresented. Rather, gender overrepresents the lack of racial and ethnic diversity. In comparison to White women, African American women graduating from clinically focused PhD programs are underrepresented (NSF, 2011a). Given such demographics, the multilayered barriers present within clinically focused graduate programs may be experienced differently in comparison to fields that are dominated by White males.

Table 1
2011 Doctorate Degrees Conferred by Race & Gender of U.S. Citizens by Clinically Focused Program

	Type of Program		
Race & Gender	Clinical Psychology	Counseling Psychology	Social Work
Total degrees conferred	1,236	432	289
Black	**55** (4.4%)	**55** (9.0%)	**28** (9.6%)
White	**806** (65.2%)	**271** (62.7%)	**148** (51.2%)
Male	**274** (22.2%)	**120** (27.8%)	**65** (22.5%)
Female	**962** (77.8%)	**312** (72.2%)	**224** (77.5%)

Little research has addressed management and self-care for African American women within their graduate school environment. Among those who are successful in advancing to obtain a PhD, research reveals they have endured multiple layers of discrimination and obstacles as a result of their integrated status. Their coping and successful management of their stress has not been adequately studied or measured in a way that reveals the meaning behind their successful coping. Less is known regarding how African American women have been able to endure multiple levels of discrimination and marginalization yet continue to obtain the doctoral degree. Further, it is not clear if there are certain identified protective factors that are especially valuable to coping among African American women. Therefore, this research study sought to explore how African American women manage their self-care and stress within clinically focused PhD programs.

Importance of Study

This study illuminated self-care and management of stressors for African American women within their graduate school environments. Understanding self-care and stress

management will allow researchers to assign meaning to certain coping styles reflective of African American women who graduate successfully with a doctorate degree. Secondly, this study expanded current literature that has identified protective factors for African American women. This study highlighted the value of those identified protective factors that helped African American women complete their graduate studies. This will inform potential resources that future African American female doctoral students can utilize to enhance their quality and well-being as a student. At the departmental level, the protective factors identified as valuable within this study (e.g., mentoring) can inform specific trainings (e.g., importance of cultural mentoring versus academic advising) relevant for faculty members to assist African American women completing graduate studies within clinically focused programs. Furthermore, this study provided greater evidence validating the experiences of African American women who have been silenced and secluded within their graduate programs.

Research Design Overview

Few studies have explored self-care and stress management among African American female doctoral students. This study provided a qualitative analysis on the lived experiences of African American women who had recently completed a doctorate or were completing final degree requirements (e.g., dissertation).

Theoretical Framework

This study utilized human ecological theory as a framework for understanding the multiple contextual layers of graduate environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Additionally, a risk and resilience framework was used to provide a context for the examination of risks and protective factors among African American female PhD students (Masten, 1994). Black feminist theory provided a context for the examination of the intersection of race and gender within

academic institutions (Collins, 1990), and finally, critical race theory (CRT) highlighted how race structurally privileges and defines the experiences individuals receive within higher education. CRT explained how White privilege exists within institutions of power and marginalizes people of color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Burton, Bonilla-Silva, Ray, Buckelew, & Freeman, 2010).

Human ecological theory. The human ecological theory developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979) describes the process of human development as embedded within multiple systems. Humans are interdependent on their environment and development occurs from consistent change in relation to the environment (Muss, 1996; White & Klein, 2008). The framework's consideration of societal and political influences within an individual's immediate setting is ideal for understanding the effects of one's context of individual development and well-being (White & Klein, 2008). For instance, the limited availability of faculty members within a department may influence availability of mentoring. As a result, an African American female may experience isolation by not having a mentor to guide her professional development.

In addition to understanding the contextual influences of development, the García Coll et al. (1996) framework extends the relevance of human ecological theory by focusing more specifically on issues of culture that influence the development and outcomes of African American women. More specifically, the García Coll et al. framework brings the issues of culture to the forefront of development and outcomes. For instance, the García Coll et al. framework recognizes the cultural risk associated with limited availability of faculty mentoring, specifically a lack of faculty of color or faculty sensitive to cultural challenges. Within a graduate program, an African American woman without faculty support may be subjected to additional racism and sexism. Therefore, under the García Coll et al. framework, risk is

understood through African American culture. This focus on culture identifies that race along with gender has a critical bearing on her guidance and professional development as a graduate student.

In addition to understanding human development within multiple systems, Bronfenbrenner (1979) asserted human beings are influenced by five interrelated systems—the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and the chronosystem. The *microsystem* includes an individual's day-to-day contact with their immediate environments such as their family of origin, school, and close friends. Through these relationships women develop. The *mesosystem* refers to the relationship between multiple systems. For example, women's involvement in Black graduate student organizations or attendance at weekly religious services (e.g., church) reflects the interactions between multiple systems. The *exosystem* refers to the indirect influence of a microsystem. For instance, an African American woman's exosystem may include the support or lack thereof from faculty of color within the department. The woman is not involved in the faculty system; however, when faculty of color experience difficulty meeting work demands and negative relationships with colleagues, it influences the level of support and guidance they are able to extend to students (Salazar, 2009; Vakalahi & Starks, 2010). The *macrosystem* consists of the overarching patterns, organizational structures, and norms of a given society. Examples of relevant components of the macrosystem include racism and sexism. Finally, the *chronosystem* refers to the influence of time on the process of human development. For instance, direct and indirect discrimination experienced within a graduate program is influenced by departmental leadership and governing departmental policies. Over time, as leadership changes, departmental rules and regulations transform; therefore, a woman may not experience the same type of discrimination as her graduate school peer if they entered the

program in different years and under different leadership. The passage of time reflects the nature of change within environments influencing development.

Risk and resilience. A risk and resilience framework was utilized to contextualize the influence of risk and protective factors within clinically focused graduate PhD programs. According to the literature, stressors are universal to all environments and individuals (Masten, 1994). Stressors occur throughout development, while some are more severe than others (Masten, 1994). Stressors are considered problem areas that impede an individual's development or normative functioning. While stressors are considered negative in their influence on functioning, some stressors are able to provide strength (Gore & Eckenrode, 1994). Among African American women in higher education, their commitment to represent their race is a source of stress; however, it also motivates them to press forward toward their educational goal (Sulé, 2009).

Although stressors are universal, they are considered risks factors when they elevate a group of individuals' chances of negative outcomes (Masten, 1994; Keyes, 2004). Within the context of graduate school, lack of faculty mentoring is a risk factor for African American women (Ellis, 2001; Walker, Wright, & Hanley, 2001). Mentoring provides support socially navigating academia (Provitera McGlynn, 2002; Nettles & Millett, 2006; Walker, Wright & Hanley, 2001).

On the contrary, resilience demonstrates positive adjustment and adaptation within the context of risk and difficulty (Masten, 1994; Keyes, 2004). Resilient individuals are protected from the effects of the environment on development (Keyes, 2004) and can achieve positive outcomes in the face of challenges (Masten, 1994). Protective factors are those individual or environmental characteristics that facilitate positive outcomes among those exposed to adversity

(Masten, 1994). Within African American culture, religion and spirituality can have or have been protective factors. They buffer life's hardships while providing a sense of community and leadership opportunities among Blacks (Boyd-Franklin, 2003).

Black feminism. Black feminism was used to identify how institutions operate under the power of racist and sexist ideologies. Black feminism was valuable in explaining the challenges related to the intersection of race and gender Black women have encountered as a racial minority within clinically focused PhD programs dominated by White female students.

Black feminism originated from the feminist movement in order to recognize the influence of global issues specific to Black women (Collins, 1990). Although Black women were included within the global movement of feminism, their race made them invisible. Not only did black feminism bring visibility to issues specific to Black women, but it also challenged Black women to deal with the oppression and sexism existing within the African American culture (Collins, 1990). Negative historical images of Black women have enabled male dominance and abuse against women (Yancy, 2000). According to black feminism, it confronts male patriarchy by re-educating women to reclaim a new identity, equalizing male and female gender roles (Collins, 2000). Accordingly, this framework focuses on advocating gender equality and breaking down barriers of privilege and abuse (Yancy, 2000).

Critical race theory. Critical race theory (CRT) was used to identify the influence of racial power and privilege on systemic institutions such as higher education. CRT is important because it acknowledges race as socially constructed to hold greater merit than innate human traits such as genetics. The concept of race determines one's social status, economic value, and self-identity within the U.S. (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Burton, Bonilla-Silva, Ray, Buckelew, & Freeman, 2010). For instance, whiteness in the U.S. has been equated to the standard of

beauty, wealth, power, and educational intelligence. According to CRT, African American women in higher education will be influenced by the socialization of White privilege and be subjected to subordinate experiences as a result of their race.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of African American females who are recent doctoral graduates or completing the final requirements of a clinically focused graduate program. This study explored the process of self-care and stress management among African American women within the context of graduate school. Secondly, this study identified specific risk and protective factors of African American women and how they managed them. Finally, this study generated a theory defining the experiences of African American female doctoral students in clinically focused PhD programs.

Research Question

The following primary research question was used to conceptualize the ecological influences within the multilayered experiences of African American female PhD students:

- How do risk and protective factors within and between the macro, exo, meso, and micro system/s influence African American women's experiences within clinically focused graduate programs?

Summary

In summary, research has shown that within higher education, African American women have been silenced and falsely represented in research. As a result of misrepresentation, their academic achievements have overshadowed the difficult pathways of their accomplishments. Through this study, African American women were understood from a contextualized framework outlining the multiple barriers they encountered as graduate students. Furthermore, their voice

and perspective were represented within this work so that theory about African American women's self-care and stress management were informed from their experiences.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The graduate school experience is wrought with challenges. Some of those challenges include difficulty integrating within the department, lack of direction from an advisor, and difficulty making the long-term commitment (Lovitts, 2001). Research reveals that the graduate school experience can be complex. However, when influenced by the intersection of race and gender, additional barriers are present. The additional barriers are important to consider since attrition rates are higher for underrepresented minorities (Nettles & Millet, 2006). Their status as minorities creates vulnerabilities that increase the amount of stressors not otherwise experienced by those of majority cultures. Exposure to additional barriers creates psychological and emotional distress in addition to the stress of graduate school (Nettles & Millet, 2006).

Within the literature on higher education, a number of unique experiences have been identified among those in graduate programs as influenced by the intersection of race and gender (Jean-Marie et al., 2009; O'Connor, 2002; Sulé, 2009, Swartz et al., 2003; Watson et al., 2012; Myers, 2002). Specifically, for Black women, research reveals the presence of racism and discrimination, lack of available mentoring sensitive to cultural influences, unwanted sexual advances, and isolation from other non-racially ethnic minorities within their program of study (Hinton, Grim, Howard-Hamilton, 2009; Myers, 2002; Watson et al., 2012). These collective experiences represent the unique multi-layered challenges that influence the process and feasibility of obtaining a PhD.

Few studies have addressed how the experiences of Black women exist within these multiple layers (Chavous & Cogburn, 2007). For instance, within the social sciences, in programs that include training on clinical practice, women are represented among the majority;

yet, racially, Whites are the dominant race (NSF, 2011a). As such, Black female graduate students' experiences as racial minorities occur within multiple layers. For instance, at the student level, Black females within graduate programs experience racial and social isolation from their White student peers (Sulé, 2009; Schwartz et al., 2003). At the faculty level, Black faculty members are less visible and available to mentor and advise graduate students (Nettles & Miller, 2006). Black women are in a forced position to manage a cross-cultural faculty mentor–advisor relationship despite evidence suggesting the difficulty of developing trust and managing the influence of racism and privilege found between faculty and students of different racial groups (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2004). Finally, outside the graduate program, within the university environment, Black women remain racial and gender minorities in administrative and leadership positions (IPEDS, 2012). As a result, the stressors she encounters as a racial minority are constantly experienced at all levels of her interactions; whether she is in the classroom with her White peers, within a meeting with her White male faculty advisor, or attending a university function, she experiences the stressors of being a gendered racial minority at all times.

It remains unknown how Black women manage and self-care through the multiple layers of challenges they encounter as minority doctoral students within clinically focused graduate programs. Using an ecological framework, this literature review identified the multiple layers of risk and protective factors within the graduate environment at each ecological level. This literature review provides an understanding of context in order to further explore self-care and stress management.

In table 2, the primary research question is listed, along with an identification of risks and protective factors at each ecological level. The second column includes the risk and protective factors identified at each level to provide context to the environment of African American

females within clinically focused PhD programs. The third column lists sub-research questions that address how risk and protective factors influence African American women's experiences at each level.

Table 2
The Interface of Risks and Protective Factors Among African American Women in Clinically Focused Graduate Programs

Primary research question: How do risks and protective factors within and between the macro, exo, meso, micro, system/s influence African American women's experiences within clinically focused graduate programs?

Ecological Levels	Risk & Protective Factors	Sub-Research Questions
Macrosystem	• Racism • Sexism	• How do racism and sexism influence experiences?
Exosystem	• Availability of faculty of color within department • Cohesiveness and support among faculty • Cultural diversity within the graduate department	• How does the presence and availability of faculty of color and the overall faculty environment influence experiences?
Mesosystem	• Clinically focused graduate program • Availability of mentoring • Black graduate student organizations	• How do program of study and the availability of mentoring influence experiences? • How does the availability of Black Graduate Student Organizations influence experiences?
Microsystem	• Microagressions • Microinsults • Microinvalidations • Religious/spiritual practices–coping • Cultural responsibility to represent the community • Community, family, and racial Socialization • Self-identity and racial identity self-efficacy	• How do microaggressions, microinsults, microinvalidations influence experiences? • How do cultural practices and self-identity influence experiences?

This literature review begins with a review of relevant literature identifying the influences of the macrosystem and concluding with the microsystem. This review of literature provides an overview identifying relevant risks and protective factors experienced by Black women in graduate school. Through this systemic organization of literature, readers see the context of risks African American women are exposed to as graduate students within clinically focused programs.

Macrosystem

The macrosystem includes the overarching laws, norms, and values of a cultural system. Within this layer, racism and sexism are institutionalized through policies and laws that govern the country, state, and city of residence. The racism and sexism inherent within these laws and policies are covertly interwoven and present as natural occurrences. This layer influences academic environments.

Racism

Within the United States (U.S.), the historical legacy between African Americans and European Americans reveals two distinct differences. European Americans entered the U.S. under the notion that their culture was superior and with disregard toward the acceptance of other indigenous cultures (Locke, 1992). African Americans were forced to enter the U.S. as slaves under the control and dominance of European Americans. This subjugated relationship promoted inequality, power, and a polarization between European Americans and African Americans. Because European Americans were privileged by the experiences of slavery, they expected the hierarchy to continue despite post-slavery laws that made slavery illegal (Locke, 1992). This hierarchy influenced the environment to create experiences among African Americans, producing both resilience and distress (Locke, 1992). As a result, European Americans

maintaining thoughts of privilege and oppression became commonplace and acceptable despite movements and laws that regulated such behaviors (Locke, 1992). Historically and legally, the 13th amendment declared slavery illegal in the U.S. in 1865, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 banned discrimination based upon race, color, religion, or national origin. However, racism became embedded in the American way of life and, to some extent, became more covert and insidious. This covert form of racism is harmful because the stress experienced as a result of racism is misunderstood and dismissed since racism is no longer overtly visible or legal within the U.S.

Despite the movements and advancements among African Americans post slavery, members of the dominant culture, European Americans, maintained their notion of privilege and reinforced oppression in a legalized manner (Locke, 1992). As a mechanism, racism maintained inequality and the capability of White privilege and control over African Americans to become common and acceptable through institutional racism. Institutional racism is a structured form of racism that occurs within institutions such as education, government, or public policies (Feagin, 2006). This systemic form of racism favors and supports the successes, advancements, and opportunities of dominant European Americans over other minority groups such as African Americans (Feagin, 2006) through dominant representation of White males in university settings (IPEDS, 2012); the higher salary of White males compared to Blacks in equal status positions (Settles, et al., 2006); and the low representation of Black women represented in leadership positions in higher education (IPEDS, 2012).

Institutional racism exists due to dominant groups of individuals maintaining certain attitudes about and having the power to exercise those attitudes in the form of receiving privileges or denying opportunities from those of less dominant cultural groups (Feagin, 2006).

Within higher education, institutional racism is evidenced in the differential experiences of White and Black graduate students. African American students consistently report less mentoring, less involvement in scholarly research, experiences of racism and discrimination, and lower sense of perceived belongingness (Clark, Mercer, Zeigler-Hill, & Dufrene, 2012; Johnson-Bailey, Valentine, Cervero, & Bowles, 2009). They are the least likely to complete the doctoral degree in comparison to White American graduate students (Nettles & Millett, 2006).

Discrimination, isolation, and invisibility are experiences that present in a variety of different ways. These include a lack of faculty of color available to guide and mentor African American students and limited research opportunities offered to African American students for professional development (Johnson-Bailey et al., 2009; Nettles & Millett, 2006). Such experiences concretize the institutional affect of racism within a structured environment such as graduate school. White American graduate students are privileged and protected from the experiences of isolation or limited research opportunities because their race is overrepresented among students and faculty. This form of racism is subtle and less identifiable as racism but influences the experience of graduate school for Black women.

Consequently, the stressful experiences of racism are woven into the institutions that Black women encounter in such a way that it is inevitable that Black women will experience its effects. The stress from racism can negatively affect one's mental, physical, and emotional well-being (Settles, 2006; Sue et al., 2007). In addition to racism, Black women are also subject to discrimination from their gender. Their identity as racial and sexual minorities sets them up for an intersection of discrimination.

Sexism

Sexism is a form of discrimination against someone based upon his or her gender. Sexism is a form of oppression based upon the dominance of male privilege (Feagin & Feagin, 1978). Historically, males and females were socialized to specific labor roles. Despite women's advancement and recognition within the labor force, Black women maintain a struggle of recognition within the labor force (Collins, 2000). They receive less pay than males and are less represented in leadership positions (e.g., faculty and administrative leaders) than males (Settles, et al., 2006; Vakalahi & Starks, 2010). This structural form of exclusion from leadership and professional roles within dominant institutions such as universities permits White male dominance and control over education (Collins, 2000).

Gendered division of labor reinforces the notion of institutional sexism. Institutional sexism is a structured form of sexism existing within institutions such as education and government (Feagin & Feagin, 1978). This form of sexism continues because those individuals of the dominant group (males) have maintained attitudes about the social positions of women while also benefitting from their lesser status. This reinforces a culture of oppression such that male privilege has become normalized (Feagin & Feagin, 1978). As a result, women within higher education settings, dominated by males, are continuously experiencing sexism in the form of gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and beliefs that their competence is questionable (Buchanan & Fitzgerald, 2008; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Settles, Pratt-Hyatt, & Buchanan, 2008). Additionally, research has shown that women continue to be at greater risk to experience harassment and assault at higher rates than males on college campuses (Buchanan, Bergman, Bruce, Woods, & Lichty, 2009; Myers & Dugan, 1996)

Intersection of race and gender. The persistence of sexism makes it clear that women are still struggling for equality and respect. However, the intersection of racism and sexism presents specific challenges that are solely unique to women of color (Buchanan & Fitzgerald, 2008; Buchanan & Ormerod, 2002; Collins, 2000; Settles et al., 2008; Settles, 2006). The double burden and intersection of race and gender creates a greater problem. Evidence suggests that Black females' double minority status puts them in danger of multiple forms of sexual harassment in addition to racial discrimination (Buchanan & Fitzgerald, 2008; Buchanan, Settles, & Woods, 2008). This inherent vulnerability has painful effects on their psychological well-being and overall mental health (Buchanan & Fitzgerald, 2008; Buchanan et al., 2008; Settles, Navarrete, Pagano, Abdou, & Sidanius, 2010). Black women are in uncomfortable positions where they have to be prepared to face not only the discriminatory experiences perpetrated by others but must also manage their response to those experiences. The burden of this vulnerability stems from dominance by majority White culture.

More specifically, within higher education, Black women are subject to discrimination, racism, invisibility, devaluation of their work, and unwarranted sexual advancements (Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Settles et al., 2006; Vakalahi & Starks, 2010; Watson et al., 2012). Such discrimination has negative effects on Black women's job satisfaction, workplace performance, psychological distress, and academic performance (Huerta, Cortina, Pang, Torges, & Magley, 2006; Settles et al., 2006). These discriminating experiences resonate differently with Black women because of their awareness of being targeted at the intersection of gender and race. Among Black women advancing in leadership within higher education, there is less representation at the higher echelons along with varying obstacles (Patitu & Hinton, 2003). Research reports Black women encounter many unwritten rules to obtaining tenure or securing

research to financially support their careers (Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Vakalahi & Starks, 2010; Wilson, 2012). Historically and through the present day, Black women have constantly had to defend their status as women and as members of an underrepresented racial group. As a result, Black women have developed an inner strength that has enabled them to endure and prevail over the ongoing mistreatment from society (Settles et al., 2008; Settles et al., 2010). This inner strength has protective aspects but also contributes to higher stress loads.

The intersection of race and gender can make African American women vulnerable to enduring abuse and discrimination. If their graduate program is within an environment strongly influenced by the institutionalization of racism and sexism, this can largely influence their experiences. Their coping and adjustment to predominately White graduate programs will vary based upon prior experiences encountering discrimination and their racial social identity. At the exosystem level, experiences with faculty sensitive to cross-cultural relationships can buffer the effect of racism and sexism experienced at the macro-level (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2004).

Exosystem

The exosystem layer describes the presence, availability, and experiences of faculty advising and mentoring of graduate students. It is through this layer of graduate school that students receive their professional identity and development. At this level, African American women interact with faculty. Their interactions with faculty are also influenced by faculty members' personal experiences and support received within their department.

Advisor/mentor. Upon initial acceptance into a program of study, students are assigned an advisor (Nettles & Miller, 2006). The advisor is described as a faculty member that will be responsible for signing departmental forms and making sure that students meet course requirements. This is a formal designated relationship. At times students will refer to their

faculty advisor as a mentor. However, research shows a distinction between an advisor and a mentor (Nettles & Miller, 2006). A mentor is described as someone with whom students can confide, is sensitive to cultural influences, and concerned about their well-being. Students select mentors, whereas advisors are assigned upon entrance of the program (Nettles & Miller, 2006; Walker, Wright, & Hanley, 2001). Advisors can also serve dual roles as mentors, and mentors the same; however, in the absence of having a mentor, students may not receive support and guidance necessary to their development (Nettles & Miller, 2006).

The relationship with a mentor/advisor is an integral part of the program (Blair & Harworth, 2004). Not only does the mentor/advisor provide direction and support navigating through the department, but also this relationship is vital in order to prevent attrition rates among graduate students. A positive relationship between faculty advisor/mentor and doctoral student is indicative of successful completion of a PhD (Blair & Haworth, 2004). Furthermore, among those of minority status, mentoring has an important influence on their socialization, and their professional development within academia (Holmes, Land, & Hinton-Hudson, 2007; Nettles & Miller, 2006). For Black women specifically, having a positive relationship with an advisor/mentor provides a role model, and it boosts their confidence and transition into an environment where they are underrepresented (Holmes, Land, & Hinton-Hudson, 2007).

Currently, there is no evidence of reported advantages, greater socialization, or greater match among same-sex or same-race advisors (Nettles & Miller, 2006). Some evidence suggests that having a same-sex or same-race advisor does not necessarily predict a strong positive faculty–student relationship (Nettles & Miller, 2006). However, Johnson-Bailey & Cervero (2004) found challenges associated with cross-cultural mentoring in terms of developing trust and acceptance, recognizing the influence of racism and privilege, as well as managing the

hierarchical power relationships between faculty and students. As a result, African American students report preference for an advisor/mentor of the same racial background and same sex (Nettles & Miller, 2006). Therefore, having a Black faculty advisor/mentor eliminates the stressors associated with cross-cultural mentoring by removing the burden of responsibility Black students face with managing the historical racial hierarchy between Whites and Blacks (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2004).

Given the limited availability of Black faculty members within higher education, unfortunately, African American students' options for same-race advisor/mentor are limited. Even further, Black female faculty members are less dispersed within higher education, making it more difficult for Black females to have an advisor/mentor of the same race and gender (Patton, 2004; Wilson, 2012). In certain fields of study (e.g., engineering, math, physical sciences), Black women experience greater isolation not only because of their racial identity, but also those programs lack representation of women. In such fields of study, they are at a greater disadvantage for receiving racial and cultural support. Subsequently, it is important to have an advisor/mentor who is sensitive and aware of the additional barriers African American students face (e.g., racism, discrimination, isolation) (Holmes, Land, & Hinton-Hudson, 2007; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2004; Walker, Wright, & Hanley, 2001). Optimally, faculty advisors/mentors would be aware of the privileges they hold and feel comfortable discussing the barriers African American students encounter in addition to the general difficulties associated with being a doctoral student.

Female faculty experiences. Black female faculty in graduate programs report diverse challenges such as marginalization, imbalanced expectations, work overload, underpaid salary, and an absence of guidance and mentoring through the tenure process (Patitu & Hinton, 2003;

Hinton, 2010; Vakalahi & Starks, 2010). These challenges send messages that Black women are invisible, and neither their position nor research projects deserve any support (Hinton, 2010; Vakalahi & Starks, 2010; Wilson, 2012). These experiences create hostile work conditions that further isolate and invalidate Black women as faculty members.

The challenges experienced by African American female faculty create obstacles to provide valuable mentoring experiences to African American students (Hinton, 2010; Patitu & Hinton, 2003). Considering the value of mentoring relationships to underrepresented African American female doctoral students (Holmes, Land, & Hinton-Hudson, 2007; Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001), it is unfortunate they are indirectly denied this opportunity. Because of the challenges Black female faculty experience within their work environments, it may be difficult for them to extend support and protection to students (Vakalahi & Starks, 2010). Furthermore, the in-depth style of mentoring necessary to support Black female graduate students is not rewarded or recognized as part of their tenure and promotion (Hinton, 2010; Wilson, 2012). This is ironic, considering the experiences of African American female faculty are isomorphic to those of African American female graduate students.

Mesosystem

The mesosystem refers to the interaction between multiple systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This layer is described as the connections individuals make with other systems. For instance, an African American female student's involvement in departmental activities and a graduate student organization reflects her connection with multiple systems. The transactions that take place between her and other systems demonstrate the interrelationship. For an African American female graduate student within a clinically focused program, the mesosystem can refer

to her department and her participation in any other social organizations or activities. Her interactions within these multiple systems are valuable to her development.

Culture of clinically focused graduate programs. In clinically focused graduate programs, the culture of the environment is to train students to become scientist practitioners (APA, 2013b). As scientist practitioners, students are capable of teaching, conducting independent research projects and assessments, as well as providing clinical service (i.e., therapy, counseling) to treat individuals with mental health illnesses (APA, 2013a; COAMFTE, 2005). These graduate programs are structured to represent their commitment to cultural diversity and clinical practice from a social justice perspective.

Previous research has looked at how well clinically focused programs operationalize this commitment to cultural diversity by examining the experiences of racial and ethnic underrepresented students (Maton, Wims, Grant, Wittig, Rogers, & Vasquez, 2011; Weiling & Rastogi, 2003). Although there is limited research within this area of focus, evidence suggests that there is a lack of in-depth theoretical training and general clinical knowledge related to diverse family experiences (Weiling & Rastogi, 2003; Wilson & Stith, 1993). Students in these programs expressed concern regarding their lack of experience related to working with underrepresented racial and ethnic populations. They described inadequate preparedness to work with various cultural groups (Wilson & Stith, 1993). In one study (Maton et al., 2011) found that students perceived barriers within their programs related to their race as well as stereotypical representation of their cultures. This lowers satisfaction and feeling of belonging among students of color within their programs. Additionally, students of color equate their experiences as racial and ethnic minorities with being token representatives of their group or culture within the

classroom, program, or even therapeutic practices (Weiling & Rastogi, 2003; Wilson & Stith, 1993).

Given the intense challenges associated with being a doctoral student of color within a clinically focused program, an African American female graduate student may be subjected to the burden of being a token Black woman constantly defending her racial background. In addition, she may graduate lacking preparedness to work with other minority populations such as herself or other underrepresented groups as a result of her program's inadequate training. These collective experiences can debilitate the professional and academic development of a Black female graduate student.

African American women will respond to such experiences of discrimination differently based upon their own identity. Accordingly, racial socialization provides a foundation of protection and support against discrimination within one's life (Constantine & Blackmon, 2002). Their past experiences being racially socialized will influence their self-esteem following exposure to discrimination, how they perceive discrimination, and interpret its influence on their identity. Additionally, having a sense of pride in one's race will protect them from internalizing discriminatory experiences (Sellers et al., 2003, 2006; Settles et al., 2010). This explains the varying effect of intensity African American women experience from oppression within their department.

Social organizations. Given the institutional racism and injustice found within higher educational systems (Feagin, 2006), it is imperative that Black students have opportunities to disconnect from their academic studies and receive social support. An important part of progressing through graduate school is socialization. This socialization process refers to not only how well students adjust and adapt within their program of study, but also the relations they

make within the university and surrounding communities (Nettles & Millett, 2006). Social organizations are a system of the graduate environment that research has found valuable for socializing Black graduate students at predominately White institutions (PWI) (Henfield, Owens, & Witherspoon, 2011; Museus, 2008). These social organizations describe support groups such as Black Graduate Student Associations (BGSA), American Association of University Women (AAUW), fraternities and sororities, and religious and spiritual groups.

Student organizations focused upon bringing together racially ethnic minorities provide an invaluable socialization experience such as a community of support and shared grievances otherwise not available within many departments. This community of support normalizes the shared experiences among students of color while also creating a community of trust and acceptance among the students (Henfield et al., 2011; Museus, 2008).

Socializing within racially ethnic organizations whether formal or informal gives African American students the opportunity to relax and connect with individuals of similar backgrounds without having to explain and account for their racial background (Guiffrida, 2003). This type of socialization opens opportunities not only to convene with other African American students, but to meet other African American faculty members, learn more about their ethnic heritage, provide community service, and advocate for change at the university (Guiffrida, 2003; Museus, 2008). Although such organizations are not available at all universities, involvement within a social organization focused upon racial and ethnic minorities can buffer the negative experiences associated with being a token representative for a Black female within a clinical program.

It is important that Black women are engaged in opportunities that allow them to connect culturally as racial minorities and to receive balance from the challenges often encountered within their programs of study. Social organizations designed specifically for racial and cultural

minorities create a space of support and connection. Such experiences are vital to the identity and well-being of African American women in graduate school.

Microsystem

The microsystem describes the daily contact and interactions one has with family, friends, peers, and coworkers. The microsystem is the environment the individual participates in on a consistent basis. The African American female graduate student's microsystem includes socialization experiences with family, friends, and peers. It also includes her self-identity and her perceived capability to complete her doctoral program of study. Finally, for the African American female, this layer includes personal coping strategies to advance through the program.

Microaggressions. Microaggressions are subtle forms of racism presented through attitudes, behaviors, and verbal conversations that convey negativity through racial insults (Sue et al., 2007). Microaggressions are both intentional and unintentional attacks against a person based upon their race (Sue et al., 2007). They are not institutionalized forms of racism embedded within laws and policies, but rather microaggressions are personal attacks against an individual based upon racist and discriminatory prejudices. They validate and confirm that racism still exists, although it is presented in a hidden manner. For example, a professor consistently calling all the African American female students within a department the same name. Combining the identity of all the African American female students together suggests that their individual identity is unimportant. It also sends a message that all the African American females look alike.

Microaggressions also appear in other forms such as microassault, microinsult, and microinvalidations (Sue et al., 2007). Microassaults are considered direct acts of racism. They are direct verbal attacks or deliberate discriminatory actions toward individuals based upon their racial status (Sue et al., 2007). An example of a microassault would be someone hanging a noose

around the doorknob of an African American female faculty member's office door. This noose is a blatant symbol of slavery and violence directed toward the Black faculty member.

Microinsults are subtle demeaning comments about one's race and ethnic identity (Sue et al., 2007). For instance, suggesting an African American female was accepted into a graduate program in order to fulfill the diversity quota is a microinsult. This statement suggests the female student is only accepted based upon her race and not her intellect. It also sends the message that she does not belong in the program and she is intellectually inferior. Research has shown such messages are regularly encountered by African Americans (Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008). These messages consistently communicate degrading, insulting judgments that are hurtful and come from a privileged place of ignorance.

Finally, microinvalidations dismiss the emotional and mental effects of subtle racial encounters (Sue et al., 2007). For example, when an individual asserts racism is no longer a problem, it invalidates the effects of a racial encounter toward the receiver. This can further isolate an individual by making them question their response to the racial encounter. The individual could feel emotional hurt but also uncertain, wondering if they actually had a racial encounter. Such an experience is demeaning and debilitating to the core of individual confidence.

African American women experience microaggressions within their graduate programs whether through negative stereotypes, reviewing research that negatively displays African Americans, being questioned about their existence in the program, or being excluded from study groups (Schwartz, Bower, Rice, & Washington, 2003; Settles, 2006; Sulé, 2009). Such racially demeaning experiences are psychologically harmful and negatively influence self-esteem and

depression rates (Settles, 2006). Therefore, African American women are constantly encountered with indirect messages of unimportance and not belonging within their environment.

Cultural responsibility to the family and community. African American women have been responsible for their community, both in the past and present (Boyd-Franklin, 2003). They hold the burden of caregiving and of being the matriarch for their family. This dominate role carries a burden but also an honorable badge of independence (Boyd-Franklin, 2003). As African American women within graduate programs, their educational success and opportunity places them in a position to lead and guide other African Americans within their communities. The privilege and status upgrade accompanied with their education allows Black women to become role models to members of their family and friends as an example of the opportunities available through education (Sulé, 2009; Schwartz et al., 2003). Additionally, as educational leaders and researchers within their communities, they are able to show relevance and provide resources to communities that otherwise have been ignored and hidden.

Being made to bear the responsibility of African American culture, race, and history can be a source of pressure and a source of gratitude. African American female students describe the pressure of positively representing ancestors as well as truly making a difference in the lives of other Black students (Sulé, 2009). Among African Americans, there is a legacy of pain and tragedy within education. This legacy is a constant reminder of the barriers ancestors overcame in order for education to be accessible to all Black Americans (O'Connor, 2002). Black women stand on the shoulders of those who succeeded despite the barriers and those who were constrained by them. Given this legacy, Black women also describe the honor to obtain a doctorate and a mandate to empower other Blacks through research or direct services (Sulé, 2009).

Family socialization. The African American family is considered a protective factor. Within African American culture, family is valued as a source of strength (Boyd-Franklin, 2003). The family is close and interdependent. Thus, the African American family and community is a reciprocal, encouraging, supportive, and social environment (Boyd-Franklin, 2003). They are the link to those who know, understand, and have developed strategies for managing the exigencies of race. It is within one's family that African Americans describe receiving encouragement to sustain pursuing higher education (Hanson, 2007; Schwartz et al., 2003; Sulé, 2009). It is valuable for Black women to be able to confide in family and feel connected to a community while in graduate school. African American women report feeling comforted by being able to confide within their families regarding their stressors and receive emotional support (Schwartz et al., 2003). Having a foundation of support and security is valuable considering the multiple challenges they may encounter throughout the course of their program.

Self-identity. Literature has identified Black women as historically being the matriarch, or head of the family (Boyd-Franklin, 2003). Within this role, Black women have not only endured harsh criticism, but also this role reflects the strength of her capabilities. The positive aspects of this identity have helped Black women positively view themselves as capable of achieving goals and completing tasks (Sulé, 2009). Specifically within education, Black women have achieved and obtained success. Through their educational accomplishments, success has not only increased their confidence and self-efficacy toward themselves, but also generated respect and pride from others such as family and teachers (Sulé, 2009). This self-confidence, along with the encouragement of others, influences Black women's abilities to endure and succeed through completion of doctoral programs (Sulé, 2009). Furthermore, Black women also recognize the privilege of obtaining educational success as a threat to others, specifically those of

the dominant culture. They are perceived as a threat because they have transcended the barriers placed against them and are defying the negative stereotypes (e.g., Mammy) (Schwartz et al., 2003).

Racial socialization and racial identity. Racial socialization occurs through socialized messages of pride and confidence in an individual's race. Racial socialization, received from primary socializing agents (e.g., parents), refers to the messages African American parents share with their children regarding their current existence within a society where they were historically judged by the color of their skin and the possibility of its continued occurrence (Peters, 2002). These messages are protective factors against discrimination.

One's racial identity, or how she perceives herself in connection to her race, also allows her to connect with people of the same race. Racial identity goes through multiple phases. According to Cross (1971), racial identity occurs through different stages of development. For example, an individual in the *Preencounter* stage unconsciously internalizes racism and does not identify with African American culture. This is different from an individual in the *Internalization* stage who strongly identifies with African American culture while also making meaningful and trustworthy relationships with people of different ethnicities and races. Racial identity development also varies according to one's environment and the intensity of racial discrimination experiences.

When Black women and men encounter racially discriminatory experiences (Sellers, Caldwell, Schmeelk-Cone, & Zimmerman 2003; Sellers, Copeland-Linder, Martin, & Lewis 2006), the experiences can be associated with negative effects toward their overall mental health. Such discriminatory experiences are internalized and can penetrate the core of one's identity in such a way that it leads to depression, lower self-esteem, or diminished life satisfaction (Settles,

Navarrete, Pagano, Abdou, & Sidanius, 2010; Yap, Settles, & Pratt-Hyatt, 2011). However, research shows that having positive central regard to one's racial identity, viewing one's own race as an important part of their identity, buffers the effects of racism. Also, having a sense of pride and acceptance in one's race buffers the negative effects of discrimination (Sellers et al., 2003, 2006; Settles et al., 2010; Yap et al., 2011). Although having a strong positive racial identity is a protective factor, it also makes one more sensitive and alert to discriminatory practices (Sellers et al., 2003). The increased sensitivity has individuals constantly interpreting practices as personal attacks against their race (Sellers et al., 2003). This high positive racial identity is a risk factor because the over sensitivity toward race heightens one's stress level and psychological well-being associated with their race (Caldwell, Zimmerman, Bernat, Sellers, & Notaro, 2002; Sellers et al., 2003). On the contrary, this increased level of sensitivity can be valuable for women because it prevents them from allowing individuals of the dominant culture to falsely and inappropriately label their race. Within institutions such as higher education, these occurrences are commonly experienced (Wilson, 2012).

Settles et al., (2010) research has shown Black women's positive racial identity and belief that others view Blacks in a positive manner are associated with positive mental health. This shows that Black women are influenced by how others perceive their race to the extent that their mental health is compromised. Among Black women, there is value within group membership. This group acceptance is important to recognize in terms of how it influences Black women's well-being in graduate school.

In graduate school environments, Black women report isolation and being marginalized because of their race. Such experiences may influence their mental health not simply because they are the token representative or their race, but also their race is viewed negatively by their

peers. So they perceive rejection from them. Without addressing the contextual layers of their environment, this detail of their experience may go unnoticed.

African American women have been socialized to connect and take care of others while being responsible for the Black community. This may have occurred through her role as the matriarch of the family or in religious settings (Boyd-Franklin, 2003). Whether an African American woman actually filled that role or watched someone else, there is still value in others accepting her race and connecting with her. Unfortunately, within education Black women are often in roles where their commitment to their personal relationships must be balanced with the success of their careers. This type of balance and well-being remains difficult to maintain.

Religious/spiritual coping. Spiritual and religious networks have historical roots within the African American community. Faith institutions such as churches and mosques have been used not only for religious worship but also a platform for economic, social, and political issues (e.g., National Advancement for the Association of Colored People [NAACP]) (Chandler, 2010). Religious and spiritual practices such as prayer, fasting, and attending Bible study provide protection against discrimination and challenges faced by African Americans (Bierman, 2006; Howard-Hamilton, Hinton, & Ingram, 2009; Utsey, Bolden, Lanier, & Williams, 2007). Specifically within graduate school, Black women describe the importance of their spirituality as a reminder of their purpose, blessings, and strength to persevere through challenges (Howard-Hamilton et al., 2009). Therefore, spirituality and religion serve as a foundation of support to cope with stressors of graduate school.

Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the current literature addressing the direct and indirect influences on African American female experiences in graduate school. African

American women are influenced at multiple levels that can affect their emotional, mental, and physical well-being. Research has identified the multiple challenges Black women experience in graduate school, yet it has not addressed the multiple layers and interactive aspects of her experiences. Using an ecological framework, we explored the contributing influences that undergird the graduate experience. From the findings, we understand, for example, the context by which she may experience depression or the context by which she may need access to culturally diverse social organizations.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

Introduction

Using a constructivist grounded theory approach, this study enhanced and created theory regarding the experiences of self-care and stress management among 20 Black women within clinically focused PhD programs. This study focused on successful coping styles and meaning making among African American women within a clinically focused doctoral program. From this study, African American women's experiences within their programs were understood through a contextualized lens. The theory that emerged from this study shed light on the juxtaposition of Black women's successful completion of their doctoral degree with their actual experiences. This chapter focuses on the following areas: rationale for qualitative methodology, qualitative research approach, role of the researcher, data collection methods, and data analysis. Finally, the chapter concludes with ethical considerations.

Rationale for Qualitative Methodology

Qualitative research was used for this study because it embraces multiple realities (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative research is useful for studying largely undeveloped social topics. It provides an in-depth understanding of the individual or phenomenon being studied through detailed interviews, videos, focus groups, or observations (Creswell, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Moreover, qualitative methods allow for the exploration of feelings, concerns, thoughts, and traditions in greater detail and which might otherwise be difficult to obtain using quantitative or observational methodologies (e.g., surveys) (Creswell, 2007). Finally, this approach is useful in capturing the values, belief systems, and multiple realities of participants from which a common meaning reflective of their lived experiences can be constructed (Creswell, 2007). This

methodology will be essential to exploring some of the challenges (e.g., discrimination, isolation) African American women face during their graduate school experience.

Qualitative research privileges the perspectives of individuals' lived experiences (Creswell, 2007). Gaining a better understanding of African American women's coping experiences while in graduate school is critical to the further development of current theories about this population. Additionally, it is important to promote a richer, more diverse perspective on the current literature regarding the paradox of their success with their qualitative experiences in graduate school.

Qualitative analysis builds its findings from the patterns and themes that are gleaned from the data inductively. This provides a contextualized representation of the sample being studied (Creswell, 2007). The use of qualitative research affords an understanding of African American women based upon their position and interactions within multiple environments. This is a useful methodology because research has largely ignored the context by which African American women exist, resulting in misidentifying the experiences and accomplishments of African American women (Chavous & Cogburn, 2007). Through the use of multiple data collection methods such as interviewing and observations, context, feelings, and nonverbal behaviors will be analyzed and interpreted to accurately reflect the array of perspectives and issues faced among African American women. Table 3 presents the primary research question along with the linkages between the theoretical framework, sub-research questions, and interview guide.

Not only does qualitative methodology provide a contextualized understanding of individuals' experiences, but through various formats such as interviewing, it also creates opportunities of reflection and sharing among participants (Stein & Mankowski, 2004). Interviewing formats are able to collect the context, feelings, and nonverbal responses not

otherwise obtained in quantitative data collection (Stein & Mankowski, 2004). Using interviews, African American women will be able to share their experiences in graduate school to enlighten and support other African American women with similar experiences. This will create an opportunity that allows their stories to be revealed as a way to critique the dominant discourse of assumptions sustaining these occurrences (Stein & Mankowski, 2004).

Finally, qualitative methodology enables a "witness" to participants' experiences because the researcher is in a position to validate their reality. Within communities that have been marginalized and silenced, having their experiences validated can provide a source of empowerment and minimize hierarchical differences between research and participants (Creswell, 2007).

Table 3
Linkage Between Theory, Risk and Protective Factors, Sub-Research Questions, Interview Guide Questions

Primary research question: How do risks and protective factors within and between the macro, exo, meso, and micro system/s influence African American women's experiences within clinically focused graduate programs?

Theory	Risk & Protective Factors	Sub-Research Questions	Interview Guide Questions
Human Ecological Theory, Critical Race Theory, Black Feminist Theory	Macrosystem: • Racism • Sexism	• How do racism and sexism influence experiences?	• What does stress look like in your program? • What were sources of stress received as a student? • Were there various contexts in which stress occurred (e.g., with faculty member, classroom, clinic) more than others? *Possible probes: Were there any stressors related to your racial identity as Black/African American? Or as a female?*
Human Ecological Theory, Critical Race Theory, Black Feminist Theory	Exosystem: • Availability of faculty of color within department • Cohesiveness and support among faculty • Cultural diversity within the graduate department	• How does the presence and availability of faculty of color and the overall faculty environment influence experiences?	• How would you describe the faculty environment within your program of study? *Possible probe: Did faculty members collaborate together? Was there tension among faculty members?* • Was there diversity among faculty members? If so, describe the demographic breakdown. • Were you involved in any collaboration projects with faculty members? If so, compare and contrast experiences working with different faculty members.

Table 3 (cont'd)

Theory	Risk & Protective Factors	Sub-Research Questions	Interview Guide Questions
Human Ecological Theory, Critical Race Theory, Black Feminist Theory	Mesosystem: • Clinically focused graduate Program • Availability of mentoring • Black graduate student organizations	• How do program of study and the availability of mentoring influence experiences? • How does the availability of Black Graduate Student Organizations influence experiences?	• Did you have a mentor? If so, were they a faculty member within your program? Department? Outside department member? Professional community member? *Possible Probe: If not, did you want a mentor? If so, what would have helped you obtain a mentor?* • Describe your relationship with your mentor? How did you develop a relationship with this person(s)?
Human Ecological Theory, Risk & Resilience Theory Critical Race Theory, Black Feminist Theory	Microsystem: • Microagressions • Microinsults • Microinvalidations • Religious/spiritual practices–coping • Cultural responsibility to represent the community • Community, family, and racial socialization • Self-identity and racial identity self-efficacy	• How do microaggressions, microinsults, microinvalidations influence experiences? • How do cultural practices and self-identity influence experiences?	• Describe any experiences when you were discriminated against? Perceived as an outsider within your program? • How did you feel after those experiences? How did you cope with those experiences? *Possible probes: What are examples of specific things you did to cope? Exercise? Eating habits? Sleep patterns? Drinking? Smoking? Sex behaviors? Drug use?*

Grounded Theory Approach

The qualitative research approach most useful for this study is grounded theory. Grounded theory is particularly useful for areas of inquiry that have not been previously theorized about as the interpretation of the data can generate a grounded theory based on the sample (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Less is known about African American women's experiences in graduate school; therefore, through grounded theory, findings contributed to the literature in understanding their in-depth experiences and challenges as graduate students. The discovery of this theory has accurately guided and enhanced the research that followed. Grounded theory takes multiple forms of data collection (e.g., interviews, observations), analyzes and interprets them in a way that creates theory about the underlying patterns and themes expressed within individuals' lives (Creswell, 2007; Glaser, 2012). Furthermore, through a grounded theory approach, the process of graduate school for African American women was understood.

More precisely, constructivist grounded theory was used because it accounted for the social interactions and multiple realities of the participants as well as the researcher. It weaved them into data analysis so that theory was not solely construed from the data analysis but also the interpretations and experiences of the researcher (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 2012). According to constructivist grounded theory, the researcher is an active participant (Charmaz, 2006; Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006). This role was valuable considering the vulnerability of information being shared. Likewise, the researcher was not objective but, rather, co-constructed the meaning of participants' experiences by locating her own (Mills et al., 2006). The researcher's perspective, values, nonverbal observations, and feelings regarding interactions with participants and their experiences were incorporated into the data analysis (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 2012). This was important to incorporate because it reflected the significance of the social interaction

between the researcher and participant. This reciprocal relationship was valuable because it served to eliminate hierarchy between the researcher and participant as well as generated knowledge based upon context, insight, and reflexivity of thought (Mills et al., 2006). Hierarchy and power are important to consider when working with a marginalized population such as African American women. Considering the multiple influences of power that have dominated the experiences and representations of Black women in higher education, it was imperative to display sensitivity to their role as research participants and their interactions with the researcher.

Role of the Researcher

Based upon constructivist grounded theory, the researcher was an active participant (Charmaz, 2006). Given this notion, it was important I addressed my role as the researcher and the initial bias I brought to the research project. As an African American female PhD student enrolled within a couple and family therapy program, I was positively inclined to research this topic. I was also aware that I shared similar social positions as some of the participants. Therefore, it was important that my experiences, values, and perspectives were acknowledged throughout data collection and analysis. Also, given my bias and social similarities, it was important I accurately represented the participants' experiences.

In order to capture bias, I wrote reflective memos and through journaling, recorded my thoughts and feelings regarding the interpretation of the interviews (Mills et al., 2006). Journaling explicitly captured my internal reactions to the interviews. It also allowed me to separate my experiences from the participants so that I did not construe them together.

Data Collection and Procedures

Sampling. Twenty individual interviews were conducted. A homogenous group of participants were sampled in order to build specific theory regarding African American women

in graduate school. Participants in the current study included self-identified: (a) female, (b) African American or Black, (c) graduated with a PhD within the last two years, or (d) completing the final requirements of their program (e.g., dissertation or internships), and (e) enrolled or received a PhD from a clinically focused program such as couple and family therapy, clinical psychology, or counseling.

The sampling criterion had two major goals. First, based upon this criterion, this study tracked the progression of women who had successfully managed their stressors to completion or near completion of the PhD. Since women were asked to recall sensitive information that they may or may not be currently experiencing, it was important the women were not far removed from their experiences as graduate students. Therefore, the limitation of two years post graduation was set in place. Second, this sample included women working and progressing on the final requirements of their program. Considering program requirements varied, women were not eligible to participate if they had remained in the final stage of degree requirements within their program of study for longer than five years.

Snowball sampling occurred because of this study's focus on specific doctoral programs (e.g., Couple & Family Therapy). Potential participants were encouraged to pass out fliers and share recruitment with other eligible participants within their programs of study or supportive networks. Data was collected until saturation of categories occurred and no new information was being represented in the categories (Creswell, 2007).

Recruitment. Initial recruitment occurred through social media websites such as Facebook, American Association for Marriage & Family Therapy (AAMFT) listserv, and LinkedIn. Once participants started agreeing to participate, snowball sampling occurred. Participants shared fliers with other Black women within graduate programs. Upon completion

of an interview, participants were encouraged to share the researcher's contact information with potential participants.

Participants would also share the contact information of potential participants with the researcher. Those potential participants were emailed a copy of the flier and asked to contact the researcher if they were interested in participating. An example of the recruitment flier is shown in appendix A.

Sample description. All participants self-identified as an African American or a Black female and resided in the U.S. Participants represented clinically focused graduate programs across the U.S. There were a total of 20 participants. Five of the participants had graduated with a PhD within the last two years. Fifteen of the participants were completing final degree requirements. The age of the participants ranged from 26 to 38, with an average age of 30 years old.

Location of interviews. All interviews were conducted and recorded online via Skype. All participants were informed the interviews were conducted via Skype and they must have access to a Skype account to participate. Participants were emailed the consent form, eco-map worksheet, and Skype contact information prior to the interview.

Semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured individual interviews were the primary method of data collection. Interviews were recorded using a digital audio recorder. The researcher and a professional transcriptionist transcribed interviews. The semi-structured interviews allowed for greater in-depth exploration of participants' personal experiences as a graduate student. Interviews are important because of the large quantity of data obtained (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Interviews allowed participants to share personal and sensitive information. Additionally, they explored participants' unfiltered experiences, and there was

immediate opportunity for the researcher to clarify interpretations (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). An example of the interview guide is located in appendix B.

Interviews began by the researcher joining with the participant to learn more about them and help ease any anxiety of being interviewed by the researcher. Next, demographic information was collected to locate each woman's social position within her program. Participants were asked their age, current status within the program (e.g., ABD through two years post graduate), type of program (e.g., clinical psychology, counseling), region of the program (e.g., Midwest, East Coast), demographics of their cohort (e.g., number of Black students, number of students within cohort, number of males/females), and demographics of the faculty members. To support the data acquired from the in-depth interviews, participants completed an eco-map of resources that they identified as being important during their experience as a doctoral student.

Eco-map construction. Eco-maps were an additional supportive method of data collection. The eco-maps allowed a visual representation of the resources and supports utilized within the participants' graduate school career. Eco-maps are used to identify the relation between individuals and sources of support (Rempel, Neufeld, & Kushner, 2007). They identify the closeness, stress inducing, disconnection, intensity arousing, and mutual flow of energy between individuals and their support systems (Rempel et al., 2007). Research has identified several supportive factors among African American women in graduate school such as religion or spirituality, family, and social organizations (Sulé, 2009; Henfield et al., 2011); therefore, the eco-map visually depicted the usage of those supports within their lives.

At the end of the semi-structured interview, participants were told the purpose of eco-maps as visual representation to better understand identified supportive factors and any

additional factors in their ecology. Before the interview began, participants were emailed a blank copy of the eco-map. The eco-map was a blank sheet of paper with several smaller circles surrounding a central large circle. The central circle identified the participant being interviewed, and the surrounding circles represented supportive networks identified within the literature. Each surrounding circle connected to the central circle by a line. After participants received the worksheet, they were asked to identify any additional supportive networks not listed. As participants described additional supports, the researcher wrote each additional support on the worksheet in a separate circle. Next, participants were asked to rate the strength of each specific support on a scale of one to three. Depending on the strength of the support, the researcher listed one to three lines connecting the identified support to the participant on the worksheet. For example, participant A was given a worksheet with "Church" and "Black Graduate Student Organization (BGSO)" listed within separate circles surrounding the central circle, participant A. Then, participant A described how many lines should connect herself to "Church" and "BGSO" depending on the strength of those supports within her life. Multiple lines connecting surrounding circles to the central circle represented a strong connection. Finally, participants were asked the flow of energy between identified supportive networks. This was described as a unidirectional relationship or reciprocal relationship. An example of the eco-map is located in appendix C.

Consent. Participants were emailed one consent form prior to the interview. That consent form was for their records. Consent was given verbally and audio recorded. The consent form described the research study, including possible risks and benefits, assured confidentiality and anonymity, and participant rights. An example of the consent form is located in appendix D.

Incentives. Participants were informed about the study's incentives through recruitment and again prior to providing consent. Participants who completed the individual interview and eco-map activity were placed in a drawing to receive a $50 gift card. Two gift cards were chosen at random for two separate participants at the conclusion of data collection. The two participants were notified they had been selected and each received a $50 VISA gift card, along with a thank you note.

Data Analysis

Qualitative analysis occurred inductively. Data was repeatedly analyzed to understand and make meaning of the perspectives and culture of participants (Creswell, 2007). Data was analyzed according to grounded theory analysis of constant comparative method through a sequence of open to axial to selective coding.

Organizing data. Data was organized in several files. The first file linked participants' names with their assigned id and date of interview. The second data file was organized into worksheets according to each level of coding. The first worksheet was identified as the open codes, the second worksheet was labeled categorical codes I, the third worksheet was labeled categorical codes II, the fourth worksheet was labeled major themes and categories. Interviews were coded using Microsoft Excel. All of the data was logged into Microsoft Excel files and password protected.

Description of the coding process. Initially, the researcher read the interviews line by line, analyzing the data and breaking down the meaning of the text. As the researcher made meaning of the text, she developed codes to describe the experiences. This line-by-line coding is referred to as open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The researcher grouped together commonly reported experiences that represented the open codes until they were saturated (Creswell, 2007).

As open codes were developed from the data, the next step was moving from the open codes to more specific categories about the data. This level of analysis is axial coding because it is interconnected to the open codes (Creswell, 2007). From those categories, selective coding allowed for generating major themes based upon the participants' experiences. This is the process of developing a theory. Constant comparative method provided further analysis to strengthen the framework by comparing whether certain themes appeared more often than others and under what circumstances (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

For example, line-by-line coding identified the open code of a participant being on her own within her program. By continually comparing line-by line coding of other participants' interviews, the following categories appeared: figuring stuff on my own, feeling powerless with faculty, and limited options for mentoring. Selective coding identified a theme of negative interactions with faculty as an experience of African American women in graduate school.

The primary research question of this study asked about protective factors between multiple systems within African American women's lives. The eco-maps allowed greater exploration of identified protective factors. The eco-maps were analyzed to visually represent the protective supports used by African American women. The researcher compiled the eco-map data and provided a visual of the supports used by participants. This study's use of the eco-maps expanded current literature on protective factors of African American female doctoral students by revealing which supports were better utilized within African American women's lives.

Trustworthiness of Data

To ensure trustworthiness of the data, the researcher used collateral data to enhance the study's validity. The main source of data collection was the interview guides. Eco-maps, along with a triangulation of theory, were utilized to further strengthen the validity and rationale of the

study's findings. The eco-maps were utilized to further enrich the data and support participants' responses. Theory triangulation was utilized to conceptualize research and interview questions as well as data analysis.

To enhance trustworthiness of the study, the researcher met with an expert qualitative researcher—one of the dissertation chairpersons. The chairperson read several transcripts and convened with the researcher to compare and contrast open coding. Coding consistency was reached, and the researcher continued open coding of the interviews.

Throughout data analysis, the researcher consulted with the dissertation chairperson to help the researcher extrapolate the data and shift from open coding to categorical coding. Additionally, the chairperson assisted in helping the researcher shift the findings to extract the major themes of the data.

In addition, the researcher met with an expert who has worked extensively with African American populations in research—the other dissertation chairperson. Peer debriefing occurred with this advisor as well as reviewing of major themes that emerged from the analysis.

Finally, the researcher kept an audit trail and wrote memos as a tool for reflecting bias.

Ethical Considerations

This study followed the guidelines for the protection of human subjects outlined by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Additionally, participants were requested to consent to being audio recorded during the entire interview. The transcribed interviews are stored on a password-protected hard drive available only to the researcher. All printed transcriptions are stored in locked file cabinets in the researcher's office. Participants were informed their identity was protected with id numbers and all information was confidential. Participants were also informed they had a right to stop the interview at any time or refuse to answer.

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore the process of self-care and stress management among 20 African American women in clinically focused graduate programs. This chapter presents the key findings obtained from 20 qualitative individual interviews and eco-map analyses. Five major themes emerged from the analyses that were present within the ecology of graduate school. The major themes found were: (1) position within the program, (2) program environment, (3) interactions with faculty members, (4) influences from risk factors, and (5) coping mechanisms. These themes represent the risk and protective factors embedded within Black women's experiences during graduate school. Figure 1 shows the research question, along with the themes presented in each ecological system.

The findings are organized according to the major themes that were present within each ecological system. The eco-maps were utilized to show the importance of support systems, how the supports were used, and the nature of those relationships in the lives of Black women. Findings from the eco-maps will be presented following explanations of the major themes. A breakdown of the themes along with the subthemes and categories are presented in table 4. This table shows the linkages between the ecological system, major themes, and subthemes that emerged from the data. The first column lists each ecological system. The second column lists the major themes that arrived from the constant comparison process of grounded theory. These are the selective codes. The third column lists subthemes that were derived from relating categories together in axial coding. The fourth column labeled as categories lists major categories that were richly saturated among the open codes.

Figure 1
Major Themes Within Each Ecological Level

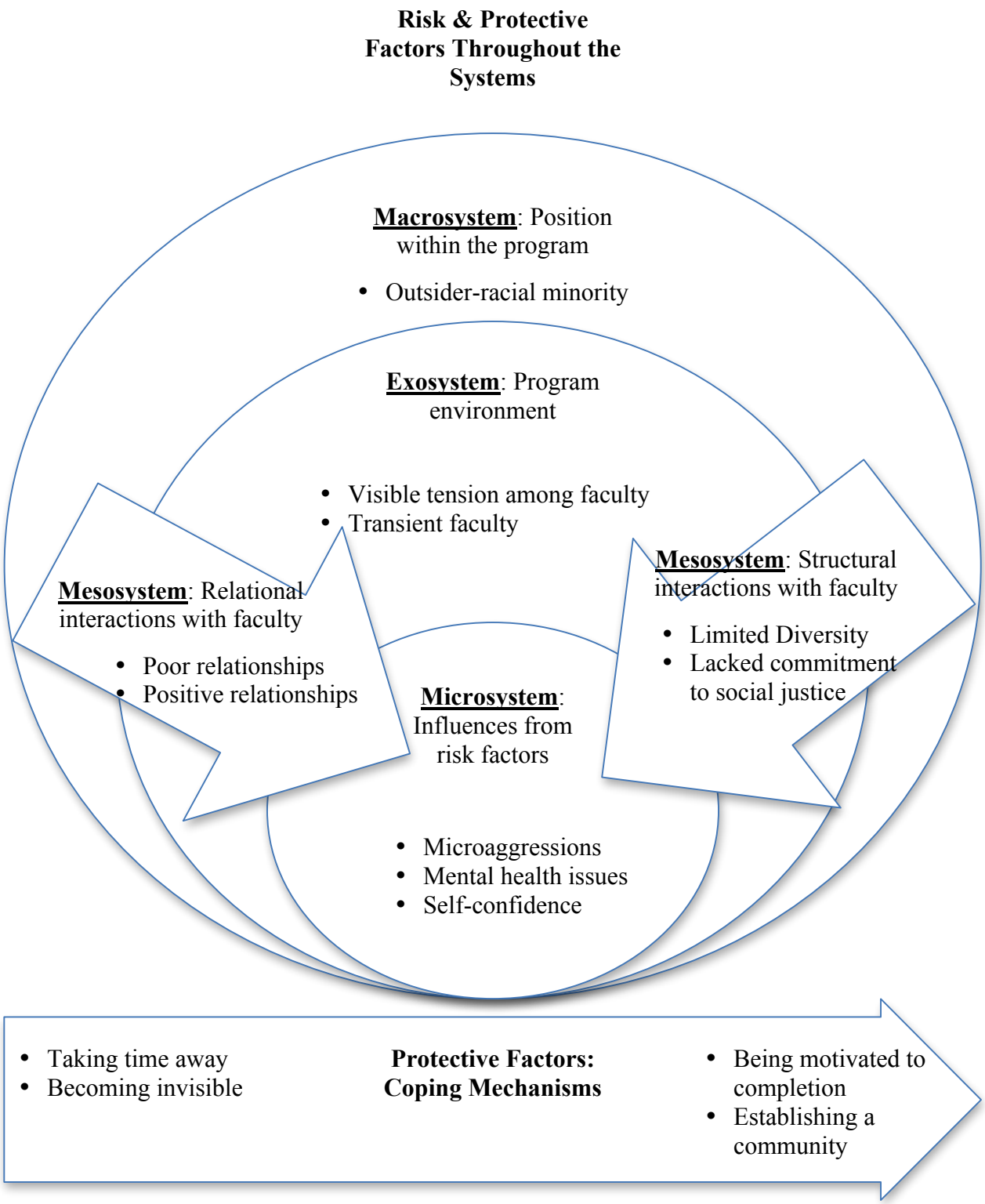


Table 4
Links Between Ecological Systems and Major Themes

Ecological Levels	Risk & Protective Factors	Subtheme	Categories
Macrosystem	• Position in the program	• Outsider	
Exosystem	• Program environment	• Visible tension • Transient faculty	
Mesosystem	• Influence of faculty	• Relationships with faculty • Structural interactions with faculty	• Poor relationships • Positive relationships • Limited diversity • Lacked commitment to social justice
Microsystem	• Influences from risk factors	• Self-confidence • Mental health • Microaggressions	• Differential race-based treatment • Stereotyping and misrepresentation
Microsystem	• Protective factors: Coping mechanisms	• Taking time away • Becoming invisible • Motivation to completion • Establishing a community of support	• Connecting with cohort members • Connecting with other Black professionals

Demographics

Twenty women between the ages of 26 and 38, with an average age of 30 years old, who identified as African American or Black were interviewed. The majority of participants (n=18) attended predominately White institutions (PWI) across the United States; 10% of participants (n=2) attended historically Black institutions. The graduate programs represented a continuum of clinical science and research practice. These programs included a focus on research as well as training and development on clinical skills and assessment. Women were in a range of clinically

focused doctoral programs: clinical psychology; marriage and family therapy; and counseling psychology. All of the programs were predominately female students; the majority, 80% (n=16), were predominately White students, and 20% (n=4) included a significant group of individuals of color. Each year a cohort of students entered the program together. The average number of students within a cohort was 16. Across the programs, there was an average of 2 Black female students in each cohort. The average number of faculty within these programs was 8, with a range of 2 to 15. The average number of female faculty was 4 and males 3. Of the faculty members, the average number of Black female faculty was 1; Black male faculty in these programs was even less (n= .4). A breakdown of each program represented within the study along with the number of participants represented from each program is listed in table 5. The first column lists each graduate program represented within this sample. The second column lists the number of programs represented from that field of study. The third column lists the number of participants that attended those graduate programs among the participants. The fourth column lists programs that had representation from multiple participants within different cohorts. The fifth column lists the regional areas of the programs represented in this study.

The primary research question asked how risk and protective factors influence Black women's experiences within clinically focused graduate programs. The findings are organized within Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework.

Table 5
Breakdown of Clinical Programs Represented

Graduate Programs	Programs Represented	Number of Participants from Each Program	Number of Programs with Multiple Participants in Different Cohorts	Regional Areas of Programs
Counseling Psychology PhD	1	2	1	North
Couple and Family Therapy PhD	9	12	3 programs had 2 participants in each program	West Coast, North, South, Midwest
Clinical Psychology PsyD	1	1	1	West Coast
Clinical Psychology PhD	4	5	1 program had 2 participants	South, Midwest, West Coast

The next section presents the findings, along with quotations taken directly from the interviews to describe the major themes and subthemes. The quotations derived from the data allow the process of re-telling the participants' stories. Each participant has been given a pseudonym to honor confidentiality.

Macrosystem: Position Within the Program

Most participants described their position within the program as an outsider. However, participants attending the historically Black institutions (HBCU) did not identify their position as an outsider because they were the racial majority at their institution. Such findings did not waver the data analysis, rather it was noted that their position as a racial majority was not a risk factor. A majority of the participants were in predominately White institutions, and their position as an outsider was considered a risk factor because it isolated them and negatively influenced their

self-confidence and mental health. They were considered outsiders within multiple systems of their graduate school experience. One participant described it as, "I was there, but not really a part." Participants described being an outsider among cohort members, within the classroom, or within the community. Their position as an outsider was predetermined by their racial status. Another participant described the compilation of her program; "In the cohort above me and in my cohort there were no students of color, no less any African-Americans or Black women." Several of the participants described their racialized outsider experience.

Sharaya socialized with her peers, yet being the only racial minority within the classroom still positioned her as an outsider.

> The people in my cohort, we can get together and talk for a school function, but, I think not as a female but as an African-American (AA), it just felt weird, as again I was the only one. It's just like, wait; I thought that was over in high school but now back in the PhD program, the only Black girl.

Jennifer described not only being an outsider because of race, but also the cultural adjustment associated with being the sole representation of a racial group. As a racial minority, it was her responsibility to understand the majority culture, and it was expected she would assimilate into their culture. Her inability to assimilate to the majority culture contributed to her experiences of isolation from her colleagues.

> Most of the time I was the only AA student in the class; sometimes I didn't understand what they were talking about...you feel isolated, and they [White students] don't even realize they're doing that because they're expecting you to just be already assimilated to mainstream culture.

Tasha described her experiences going from an environment where African Americans were predominantly visible, to an environment where few Black people were present. She reflected her outsider experience extended from the program to outside the university.

> Being in a very rural area where the only thing in the area is the university which is predominantly White, so going from [an] area where all you see is predominantly African-Americans, after being there for so long, that switch was a little bit of a stressor.

These experiences displayed their position as an outsider within multiple levels, and it contributed to their experiences of isolation and adjustment. Because of their racial status, it was expected that they would assimilate into majority culture as part of their socialization. A consequence of not assimilating resulted in the women being secluded and disconnected from their peers; feelings of seclusion transferred outside the university. Their experience as the "only" within their program labeled them as different, evoked feelings of being alone, and made them feel unprotected.

Exosystem: Program Environment

The participants described the program environment in such a way that it represented only risk factors. Two subthemes emerged from the coding: (1) transient faculty members, and (2) visible tension among faculty members. Participants' experiences in the faculty environment influenced the faculty they could work with and their experiences within the program. The faculty environment was isomorphic to the students' experiences because the faculty environment set the tone of the program.

Transient faculty members. Some of the women described the faculty members as being very transient within their program. The shifting of faculty members reflected a program that was unstable and constantly in change. The constant change limited the types of faculty that the participants could work with. This theme of transient faculty reflects larger departmental changes that occurred and trickled down to the students' experiences. One woman described a dramatic shifting among the faculty environment during her tenure in graduate school: **"**From the time I interviewed for the program until the time I graduated, 90% of the faculty left."

Another participant described having key faculty members leave the program: "We had one faculty member come...she was the only faculty member that would work with all of the ethnic (students)…and then she left after we graduated, got our master's." The transitions among faculty members influenced the faculty–student relationships. High faculty turnover suggested instability within the programs. Participants did not know the reasons why the shifting among the faculty occurred. Participants witnessed underrepresented female faculty of color as well as majority White faculty members leaving the program. The costs associated to the faculty members leaving influenced dissertation committees, opportunities for research collaborations, and faculty mentoring.

Visible tension. Some of the participants described the faculty as "not practicing what they preach." The faculty members presented the way to work as future clinicians was to be collaborative, consider clients' context, and promote equality and social justice; however, the faculty members did not appear to be able to embrace this philosophy, and there was visible tension. This emerged as a risk factor because it limited the collaborations students could have with faculty members, and it negatively influenced how students orchestrated their dissertation committees. Within smaller programs with fewer faculty members, the tension was difficult to avoid. Participants described the tension among the faculty members as negatively influencing their experiences.

Chelsea described interviewing for the program and the faculty members presenting themselves in a way that reflected the philosophy of the program, yet once she entered, the faculty members' behavior was inconsistent with the way they advertised the program. This inconsistency influenced her perspective of the faculty.

> I got on the inside and realized...all this conflict and all of this hypocrisy and all of these ways that we say things that we don't do, and it has and is becoming more so that it's really jaded my perspective.

Jessica saw the hostility among the participants. The hostility lessened her desire to interact with them because it was thick and uncomfortable:

> The environment with the faculty was hostile. I always wondered why they couldn't just get past their differences; it's very passive-aggressive, and it's almost like I don't even wanna do this because the way they act towards each other.

Kiesha described being a recipient of the tension among faculty. Because the faculty members did not collaborate together, she suffered as a result of their differences. It indirectly influenced her experience within the program.

> People felt that we were kind of getting targeted because [the faculty member] didn't like our advisor…the faculty kind of got on [our advisor] about [our advisor's] students...I mean we were being affected.

These stories reflect the influence faculty environments have within the microsystem of students' experiences. The tension among the faculty members was difficult to avoid, targeted students, and at times distorted the perception students had toward the faculty. More than anything, it reflected an inconsistency with how faculty presented themselves as clinicians and how they displayed poor professional boundaries.

Mesosystem: Interactions with Faculty

The major theme found in the mesosystem was the influence of faculty. The influence of faculty was described as the interaction between students and faculty in multiple systems, within the classroom, working on research and teaching assignments, through clinical supervision, and as dissertation chair members. Two subthemes emerged under the theme of faculty influence: (1) relationships with faculty and (2) structural interactions with faculty. Relationships with faculty described the interactions students had with faculty on a daily basis. Structural interactions

described the diverse characteristics of the faculty environment. Students attending the HBCUs contributed to the collective experience of being within a graduate program challenged by hierarchy and male privilege among faculty.

Relational interactions with faculty. Relationships with faculty were defined by the interactions students had with faculty members. There were two subthemes of relationships with faculty: (1) poor relationships, and (2) positive relationships.

Poor relationships. Poor relationships were described as a risk factor because of negative interactions with faculty members. Participants were asked an open-ended question to describe experiences they had working with faculty members. The following three categories reached saturation in the coding process: (1) feeling unsupported, (2) managing power dynamics, and (3) feeling uncomfortably monitored.

*Feeling unsupported***.** Many of the participants felt unsupported within the program. They described not receiving guidance in various ways. Participants reported seeking a faculty mentor relationship and not obtaining a mentor or managing through the program requirements without any guidance on the department policies.

Latoya initiated a faculty–student relationship by directly asking faculty members about opportunities for collaboration and mentoring. Unfortunately, the faculty did not follow through with her requests for guidance. Her experience also reflects the disconnection between the philosophy of the program and what actually occurs:

> The support is not really there; I know when I first started, they talked about mentors and things like that, and I actually pursued that, and there was nothing.

Rachel verbalized her weaknesses and requested additional help so that she could receive faculty mentoring. Despite verbalizing her weaknesses, faculty did not address her concerns or guide her to receive support.

> I told my faculty that, 'Hey, I'm not really good at this like whole exchange [interacting with faculty], I've never been good [at] it.' So I almost sort of feel like at some point it would've been nice for them to say, 'Okay.' Maybe even like, 'Let me show you how to be good at that exchange' instead of just like, 'Okay, well, call me if you need me.' I've already told you I'm probably not gonna call you…

These women initiated relationships and sought after resources to help them progress through the program. They encountered a lack of support and poor follow-through from faculty supervisors. As students, these women were in vulnerable positions seeking help. They were unsupported and ignored. The faculty members' behavior sent a message that mentoring them was not valued within the program. Despite the lack of guidance from the faculty members, the women continued to press forward, although isolated.

Jessica managed through departmental requirements without the support of or concern from a faculty member.

> I basically figured out how to get as many of my needs met as possible without having that kind of optimal relationship that I think most Black students want.... I did the pilot study, I collected data, I wrote up a manuscript…[the advisor] didn't care about me, my program of study, my dissertation, and it just felt like I had to do everything by myself.

The participants desired mentoring and support from faculty. Despite it not being readily available, the women were taking the lead to seek out guidance.

Managing power dynamics. Participants described managing power dynamics with faculty as both a challenge and even oppressive. They described being under highly controlled faculty. Faculty members ultimately determined their fate, character representation within the program, as well as their experiences. One participant described her experiences working with faculty as, the "power remains with the faculty." Participants described experiences where they would advocate for their personal needs, yet they were encountered with "push back" or resistance from faculty. In some instances, no matter what they said or did, faculty ultimately had control and the final say over their experience within the program.

Lisa experienced frustration repeatedly, negotiating professional boundaries with a professor and having the professor dismiss her requests. Additionally, the burden was on her to continuously set the tone of the relationship.

> [The professor] creating an environment of hostility but me bearing the responsibility to approach [the professor] to see if I could lessen the hostility in the environment. I remember having repeated meetings to see if we could set up appropriate boundaries.... [The professor] was receptive, only to shortly thereafter kind of fall into the same patterns.

Tasha described being in a position against the faculty members. The faculty members were not collaborating with her, but rather she felt like they were against her.

> Faculty always would tell us, we look at you guys as peers because you're at the PhD level. Even though they said that, the actions and the environment that was created were very different. It was really like us against them...bad situation with faculty.

Participants experienced the controlling practices of faculty exerting their position against the students. There was a disconnection between the stated philosophy and the faculty behaviors. The faculty used their position of control to conflict their philosophy with their behaviors, and there were no repercussions to this behavior. The students were the recipients of this behavior and were left with feelings of frustration moving through their programs uncomfortably.

*Feeling uncomfortably monitored***.** Participants felt uncomfortably monitored within their program of study. They felt that faculty closely watched them across a range of departmental contexts: within the classroom, during clinical practicum, and during research meetings. They were constantly aware and cautious about how others were viewing them. They described being labeled and "keeping their guard up"; "I had this label I was pretty much under a microscope, so anything I did would be magnified." "I always feel as if I have to keep my guard up because I know what they're [faculty members] capable of...can't really be authentic with them." Brittani described her experience of being monitored:

> You were constantly observed, you were constantly, you know, supervised in everything that you did whether it was taking lunch at a certain place on campus or whether it was you sitting with a group of more than three or four African American students or anybody of ethnic descent type of students, that would ultimately reflect on your performance in class and also your grade performance from faculty members.

Participants were discriminated against, being uncomfortably monitored in a way that portrayed them as having done something wrong. This contributes to feelings of being an outsider when your behaviors are magnified in a way that sends a message that you do not deserve to be within academia. Additionally, it contributes to paranoia regarding one's race and how others perceive it. As racial minorities, the women felt rejection within their programs. These women were not accepted within their programs although they were progressing and socializing in the same manner as their majority White counterparts.

Positive relationships. Participants also described positive interactions with faculty who influenced their experiences within the program, and these were coded as protective factors. Faculty members with whom positive relationships were forged were described as "saving graces" because they supported the women through their graduate experiences. These relationships were considered critical to their progression in the program. Additionally, these faculty members were considered as mentors. Two categories were saturated: (1) awareness of their experiences with race, and (2) a safe space of acceptance.

Awareness of their experiences with race. Participants described faculty members who were cognizant of their experiences as racial minorities because of personal experiences or the faculty member was culturally sensitive. One participant thought that her faculty mentor "got it" because that faculty member was cognizant of and empathetic to her experience as a racial minority. Another participant talked about a faculty member being aware of student experiences as racial minorities, "[The faculty member] understands kind of the difficulties that we [Black

students] have in navigating professionally at times... [the faculty member] was really supportive." Other participants described additional ways that faculty members were empathetic to racial issues.

Stacy compared experiences working with a White professor and an African American professor. She described working with the White professor as valuable because that professor went above and beyond to understand the research about African Americans. She noticed the White faculty member was committed to working with diverse populations and made the additional efforts to understand that population despite being an outsider. When working with the African American faculty, she described the African American faculty connected with the literature on African Americans better through personal experiences and past work on this population, yet she acknowledged that both of the faculty members' efforts were equally valuable to the project. That experience of working cross-culturally with the White faculty member reflected a professor who was accepting and open to learning about other cultural groups. Considering Stacy was a racial minority within her program, it was valuable for her to work with a White professor who was willing to go above and beyond to understand a racial minority group. She described:

> [Working on a project about African Americans]… [The faculty member] was not African American; [the faculty member] was White and made the effort to dig into the research, and I think we found a lot of good data there, and the other one was African American, and I did feel that [the faculty member] could connect a little bit more with the literature, but I think they equally made the same amount of effort in the research study.

Lisa described being able to go to a faculty member's office and talk about all of the hardships she was experiencing. The faculty member was nonjudgmental and opened up about similar challenges experienced at the faculty level. The faculty member was able to sympathize with the participant's experiences, and it allowed for an open respectful relationship.

> When we had conversations, ...I could go to [the faculty member's] office and talk about some of the stories, and it was interesting because [the faculty member] commiserated and could offer similar stories from [the faculty member's] faculty position at the same institution.

These experiences revealed the importance of having faculty members that acknowledged the existence of racial privilege and sympathized with the challenges associated with being a racial minority within academia. This acceptance of the participants' racial identity came through various forms: having personal experiences as a racial minority, conducting research on African Americans, acknowledging the challenges associated with being a racial minority within academia, or recognizing the privileges of racial status. Acknowledging and maintaining an awareness of the participants' racial identity was a valuable support for these women because they were within a system that constantly invalidated their position as racial minorities.

Safe space of acceptance. Participants described having a safe space of acceptance with some faculty members. These interactions with faculty were described as helpful and provided opportunities for students to be vulnerable without being judged or criticized. These relationships were considered unique because the faculty members accepted them and provided them with the support that at times they were lacking from other faculty members.

Jasmine experienced working with a research team, and the faculty member accepted her by socializing her with the team so that she would not feel like an outsider. Jasmine had the same equal opportunities as the other students to collaborate on projects with that particular faculty member.

> [The faculty member] really just took me in, showed me a lot, gave me a lot of resources and information and really did, treated me as equal with [the faculty member's] students.

Michelle described her relationship working with a faculty member. This relationship was important because she was neither inappropriately monitored nor was she evaluated by her behaviors when interacting with this faculty member. She was accepted.

> There was no need for me to always watch what I had to say or how I said it because we built that rapport where [the faculty member] was, [the faculty member] had an open environment that I could be who I was.

These women reflected on the importance of working with faculty who accepted them and supported them. These faculty members represented professionals who had an invested interest in the well-being and success of these women. These faculty members wanted these women to succeed, and it was evident by the level of guidance they provided. Receiving this level of faculty investment was a breath of fresh air to their experiences of isolation and discrimination.

Structural interactions with faculty. Structural interactions were a subtheme of "interactions with faculty" theme. Structural interactions described the diverse characteristics of the faculty environment. Two subcategories emerged from the data: (1) lack of commitment to social justice and (2) limited diversity.

Lack of commitment to social justice. Participants each noted that their individual graduate program spoke very highly of its commitment to social justice and diversity within the program. However, in their experiences, the women felt the program had not lived up to these standards. The women were attracted to these graduate programs because they promoted social justice and diversity. Upon entering the program, the women described getting "the okie doke"; they experienced complete opposite from what was promoted at the interviews. The program lacked an awareness of diversity and commitment to social justice.

Ariana reported that the faculty members were aware that the minorities struggled within the program. The problem was the lack of efforts to reduce the struggling. Nor were there efforts to find out why the racial minority students were struggling and how to improve support.

> I think their attitude is—we expect minorities to struggle, but we don't really have a system in place where we really know how to help them through that struggle...it's the lack of support that's there, and I think the change needs to come in their attitudes toward issues of diversity, and I don't think they're willing to acknowledge or explore quite yet because that requires too much personal introspection and change.

Stacy also commented on the faculty members' lack of willingness to commit to issues of diversity.

> [The program] has good intentions, but I think it's also a program that is not ready to like take a good look at themselves and critique themselves on how they are serving their minority students. I just don't think they're ready for that.

Lindsay witnessed discrepancy between the values of the department and her personal experiences.

> The inconsistencies that I see within the department, in the philosophies that we supposedly lead…our department has this huge social justice supposedly focus, and they're supposed to be really progressive in terms of understanding social construction...it's the disconnect between that vision and what I experience.

These programs lacked the infrastructure to support students of color, but also there was a lack of willingness among the faculty members to find out what was contributing to the disparate experiences for students of color. These programs gave lip service to philosophies on social justice, when, in fact, the students of color were experiencing quite the opposite—marginalization. As recipients of the inconsistencies within the programs, the burden was on the women to bring awareness to these issues.

Limited diversity. Many of the women described an inability to work with professors of diverse ethnic groups because representation of faculty of color within the department was so limited. One participant described it, "I guess that's like the rule, you have one Black professor."

Another participant described the composition of faculty within the program, “In our clinical program, there was literally only one [faculty of color] and that was it; that was the extent to our diversity.”

Participants pointed specifically to the lack of African American representation among faculty members as a reflection of the inequalities within the ecological system of their program. “It [limited diversity among faculty] just keeps getting perpetuated because there’s no one who’s in power to ask, “Is there a reason why we don’t have any Black faculty on staff? We don’t have any African American professors.” This reflects the lack of value placed on promoting and maintaining professionals of color within academia. They saw it at the student level, and they also witnessed it at the faculty level—that race was an isolating factor that was not supported by the institution.

Microsystem: Influences From Risk Factors

In the microsystem, the findings were coded as risk factors. Particular risk factors existed and were influential in the microsystem of Black women. Within this theme, were three subthemes: (1) self-confidence, (2) mental health, and (3) microaggressions.

Self-confidence. Participants often experienced their self-confidence as fluctuating. Self-confidence varied in relation to their progression through the program. As participants completed course requirements, they felt positive about their capabilities to complete the program. Yet, their progression was based upon their interactions with and support from faculty. In essence, their experiences throughout the program contributed to the variability of their self-confidence. The self-confidence of participants was sometimes influenced by the confluence of three factors: (1) being in a challenging graduate program that shook their self-confidence, (2) being in an outsider position, and (3) not having adequate faculty support.

Rachel questioned if she was qualified to earn a doctoral degree because she was not progressing and her colleagues were moving forward while she was in a stagnant position. She was feeling alone and internalized her lack of progression as something wrong with her.

> I was questioning like, okay maybe this isn't for me, like maybe I'm not a PhD student, maybe I'm not; golly, everybody else is graduating so it must be, it must be me; so I know that there were definitely times when questioning my abilities was holding me back.

Ariana mentioned she had been a top student through all of her academics until she entered graduate school. Graduate school was a new academic challenge; however, her position as a racial minority within her program contributed to her stressors. As a result, her self-confidence was shaken.

> I had confidence until I got to grad school 'cause I'd never struggled in school until I got to grad school, so any confidence I had…disappeared…we all talk about the imposter syndrome in grad school, it was just exacerbated by some of the racial disparities, exacerbated by some of the lack of support at times, which resulted from some of the racial disparities.

Participants said as they progressed forward, reached milestones within their department, and expanded their support systems, their self-confidence increased. Stacy described that her self-confidence had increased as a result of her personal development and growth of her support system.

> I think towards the beginning of the experience, I would say it was low with everything I was going through...ignorant comments in class and the racist ideas that weren't being challenged, and me just being the only one in class that was saying anything...some personal growth as well as the new supports—using those, I think allowed it to grow more.

Kiesha described a boost to her self-confidence occurred as a result of her mastery over tasks within the program.

> I went through this period of not feeling worthy of being where I was...then I was like on track, I'm like doing everything, finishing coursework when I'm supposed to, I'm going on internship, I'm busting that out, so I was really self-confident.

Self-confidence was connected to their completion of milestones toward their degree. These women entered as academic scholars, yet they equated their self-worth based upon the completion of tasks within the program. In addition, their experiences and lack of support was internalized and devalued their self-confidence.

Mental health. Mental health was described as another influence of the risk factors within the ecological system. Participants' mental health often suffered as a result of experiences in the graduate program. In a follow-up to the question about being an outsider, participants were asked how they coped with that experience. Some participants described feeling depressed in relation to their sense of being an outsider. They coped with those feelings of depression by isolating themselves from those within their programs. These women felt as if they were different because they were positioned as outsiders, and also some entered the program with a different philosophical background. Some of the women described an outsider experience layered with the intersection of race and philosophical training. There were not mechanisms in place within the programs to transition students entering with different educational backgrounds.

Lindsay managed her feelings with outward emotional expressions and prayer.

> I cried a lot. I cried a lot. I think I cried a lot, I prayed a lot...At the end of my first year I found myself really depressed because I felt so odd and I felt like on top of feeling odd, I felt like what I needed to integrate into my training wasn't at my training or in the program.

Tiffany also expressed her feelings outwardly. She used her faith to help her cope with her pain.

> I cried a lot. I cried a lot, I cried, prayer...I would go in [the house] Friday, and I wouldn't come out of the house until Monday. There were times when I was lonely, but more than lonely, I was alone a lot, but I didn't really spend a lot of time with a lot of other people.

These women described removing themselves from the environment; although it was isolating, it was their source of support. Additionally, religiosity was a tool for countering depression and removing themselves from the scene without other supports within the program. Experiencing issues with mental health reveals the level of influence the risk factors affected the participants and the level of seclusion the women experienced within the program.

Microaggressions. Participants described various experiences of microaggressions. According to the literature, microaggressions are defined as subtle forms of racism presented through attitudes, behaviors, and verbal conversations that convey negative racial insults (Sue et al., 2007). Microaggressions were coded as experiences participants noted as a form of mistreatment related to their status as racial minorities within the graduate program. One participant described some of her experiences as "indirect, it wasn't in your face...it was more covert, and you're kind of like, did they do that because I was Black; like you never really knew exactly…." The severity of microaggressions is that they are indirect insults. Since they are indirect, it is difficult to label them as offensive; therefore, they silence those affected by them. Under the subtheme of microaggressions, two categories were saturated: (1) differential race-based treatment, and (2) stereotyping and misrepresentation.

*Differential race-based treatment***.** Participants described experiences where they noticed that they were receiving different treatment in comparison to White students. One participant described, "The majority students who actually complete the program, even though we have a pretty diverse program, are the White students." Another participant observed that, "There's certain people [more of our White students] whose rules are overlooked for and others of us we have to cross our T's and dot our I's." This differential treatment came in the form of not

receiving praise for obtaining an award, seeing majority students move through the program faster, and seeing majority students have overall better experiences.

> I know a lot of students in my program who aren't minorities who have a totally opposite [experience]. If you were interviewing them, they would say it was great, it was super supportive. Somehow they got done and finished and graduated in like half the time.

Students witnessed blatant discrimination toward them based upon their racial status. This type of discrimination conveyed a message that Black scholars within these programs were inferior to their White counterparts.

Stereotyping and misrepresentation. In addition to experiencing a different level of support and training based upon race, participants also described being misrepresented. The misrepresentation was described as stereotypical racial representations of themselves as a result of being Black or because they spoke out in class on a topic. Participants described being labeled as the spokesperson of their racial group because they were often the only Black person. As a result of their position, actions, or the interpretation of their actions, participants described being stereotyped.

Natalie described being misrepresented because she gave voice to the inconsistencies that were occurring between the departmental philosophies and her experiences. Since she acknowledged those inconsistencies, she was labeled. Her actions were not applauded or supported within the program, but rather she received a label that was a misrepresentation of her identity. This was the result of her speaking up about an injustice.

> And so one of my faculty members said, currently you're a risk taker. It was really interesting to hear [the faculty member] say that because I don't feel like I do anything like odd or that I'm challenging the system. A lot of what I do is just consistent with my identity. But because it's not the status quo, because it's not the norm, and because I give voice to it, I'm seen as a risk taker, which is crazy.

Jasmine spoke about herself and other Black colleagues receiving a stereotypical label of having an attitude. The complaint was a false accusation against her and other students of African descent within her department.

> They [faculty] would always talk about my attitude. Like I had an attitude. I mean, I didn't think I had an attitude...several of my friends who were of some African descent, and we all got the same complaints...And we all looked at each other like, we're good, we don't have an attitude.

Brittani discussed how the misrepresentations were used against her within evaluations. Essentially, the evaluations were a mechanism to keep the Black students in line and control their behaviors.

> There were times that you could not speak; you definitely had to limit your questions because if you were asking too many questions, then you were seen as too aggressive and that would be shown on your evaluations; then again, you couldn't be too quiet because if you were too quiet, then you were seen as lazy.

These women described experiencing stereotypes that conveyed a message that the Black students were problems within the system. They were considered lazy, aggressive, edgy, having an "attitude"; they didn't belong.

Participants reported being subtly assigned as the "designated minority representative." This label was given within the classroom or in the clinical setting because no one else would speak up about the research or clinical implications of being a minority. They described experiences within the classroom or a clinical setting where their colleagues pressured them to act as or responded to them as representatives of their entire race. This experience displayed insensitivity toward their cultural experiences. Ariana described her experience:

> It was a time in class, it was an attempt at dealing with multiculturalism and trying to understand characteristics of different races, and I didn't particularly care for the characterization of African Americans which was very stereotypical, ... and I made it a point to bring more to the table and present another side, another view. I actually presented an article that gave a more in-depth analysis about experiences of African-Americans...sometimes I would think, if you had a Black client and you went in there

> with that attitude or that statement, they will react to you as I'm reacting, which is not good; I doubt they would come back.

Jennifer described her experience as the minority representative for clinical cases.

> They [White colleagues] would try to push me towards all of the minority cases, just assuming that I was the designated representative for that group; and in addition to that, they would misdiagnose a lot of them because they didn't get the—they didn't understand the culture.

In these experiences, being the designated minority representative meant there was a lack of cultural awareness within their clinical training. Their colleagues' lack of cultural sensitivity resulted in the participants being responsible for bringing awareness and diversity to the program; otherwise it was not there. This put pressure on the participants by placing them in a subjugated position to have to represent diversity among their colleagues. Further, the implications of the lack of cultural awareness within the program affected clinical practice with racially diverse clients.

Microsystem: Protective Factors and Coping Mechanisms

The final theme that emerged from the data was coping mechanisms. Throughout the ecological system, these were clearly protective factors. The four subthemes of protective factors were: (1) taking time away, (2) becoming invisible, (3) establishing a community, and (4) being motivated to completion.

Taking time away. The subtheme of taking time away was described as "no one can touch you when you are on home base." Participants described a healthy coping of physically distancing themselves from their program. Distancing themselves from the program resulted in them taking some time away to disconnect from being a graduate student. Participants described leaving the area frequently.

> I would fly home at least once a month and go home. I was probably gone the first year a lot. I went out of town a lot...at least once a month, I either went home or I went somewhere 'cause I didn't want to be in [city]. I escaped.

This finding reflects the severity of the risk factors within their environment, and one of the ways to avoid the harm from those risk factors was to escape. Within the programs, there were not enough protective factors to shield them from the messages that they don't "belong" and the amounts of discrimination they encountered. Physically removing themselves from the system was a way to separate themselves from those experiences.

Becoming invisible. Another protective factor was becoming invisible. Participants described coping with the stressors of their environment by silencing themselves and becoming invisible. Through their experiences, participants learned that becoming invisible would help them progress through the program. This was a learned behavior. Although this coping mechanism was maladaptive, it served its purpose within their graduate program. Participants described this coping as a form of self-preservation; moreover, remaining visible had its repercussions.

Chaunté would freeze her outward emotions in addition to remaining silent; this helped her to become invisible and move forward within the program.

> I would watch my language...body movements...facial expressions...I would kind of try to be more...invisible...the more visible you were, the more likely you were [to have to] fight for yourself. For you to get through the program, your best option is to stay quiet.

Kenya described becoming invisible because she could not continue to question the norms and rules within the program. She did not have support or authority to question the policies that allowed the program to function.

> There's only so much voice you can give to something because then it [turns] into self-preservation. I need to graduate, and I don't need to do or say things that's going to jeopardize that because the system has norms that they're not willing to change...if I

> continue to push in the ways that I have and the ways that I've been socialized and trained…I might find myself not graduating.

The participants saw their graduation as dependent on their ability to manage invisibility. This form of oppression meant they had to stifle their identity in order to progress and acclimate to their environment. There were no repercussions to being invisible because the women no longer questioned the hierarchy or the incongruent structures within the programs. They acquiesced under the expectation that this would help them graduate, and it did.

Being motivated to completion. Participants described being motivated to complete the degree gave them the drive to finish. This motivation stemmed from resentment toward the department and a determination to overcome the obstacles they had encountered. Several participants referred to this drive intensively as "going to finish this no matter what, come hell or high water." This was a protective factor because it helped them move through the program and stay committed to finishing this degree despite the stressors they encountered.

> Getting this like feeling of resentment and it's like almost like stubbornness of like, 'Okay, well I'll show you...I'm gonna finish this." Any other student would've just quit, any other student would've just been down, depressed, like forget about it, but I picked myself up… I worked really hard, and I think that was undeniable. I worked hard on my dissertation, and I completed it.

Negative emotions became motivators for completing the degree. The negative emotions drove them to work harder, complete assignments faster, and exit the system. These women were determined that they were going to exit their program with a degree. This finding speaks to one of the motivators of Black women's ability to endure the challenges of academia and receive advanced degrees. Despite being unfairly challenged, lacking appropriate faculty support, and being a racial minority outsider, these women were determined to complete the degree to prove that their environment had not destroyed them.

Establishing a community. The final subtheme is establishing a community. When participants were asked about ways they coped with being an outsider, they described connecting with various groups of individuals. Participants described connecting with other racial minority students, cohort members, or minority faculty members to commiserate and talk about their experiences within their programs as well as confronting the issues they were experiencing (e.g., microaggressions). Participants described these community supports as critical to their progression through their graduate program. They described these communities as a source of support and a way to normalize their trauma. Two categories emerged from the open codes related to establishing a community: (1) connecting with cohort members, and (2) connecting with other Black professionals.

Connecting with cohort members. Participants described having positive relationships with their cohort members. The connection with their cohort members was described not only as a social supportive, but also an opportunity to grow and challenge one another.

Chelsea reported that within the cohort, they created a space to self-reflect and addressed their biases.

> We [cohort members] pushed each other to kind of think about and have to look within ourselves, like what are the biases and stereotypes that we hold and how is it to be challenged on those things in a very like intimate setting with people who you really feel connected to.

When Tasha described her cohort, there was a change in the tone of her conversation, she appeared happier and gave a lot of credit to their relationship as helping her move through the program.

> My cohort was very supportive. They were my main protective factor...my cohort was so close…we were very close. They were very supportive…we joked a lot. We hung out; they came and supported us in extracurricular activities.

Connecting with other Black professionals. In addition to providing support, women described that having a community of support allowed someone to empathize with and relate to their traumatic experiences within their department. This community was specifically identified as other racial minority students and professors. This community was established officially through professional organizations such as minority fellowships or student organizations on campus (e.g., Black graduate students) and unofficially by meeting other minority students and faculty members on campus. Participants reported that talking with other minority students and faculty members was beneficial because it let them know that they were not alone. They realized that other racial minority students had similar experiences within their graduate programs.

Lindsay explained that talking with other Black students within the program helped her realize that the other Black students had similar experiences. There was nothing wrong with her; rather, the infrastructure of the program did not support individuals of color.

> Hearing that it wasn't just me helped to normalize it as a system issue...I probably would have internalized it as some sort of incompetency or something with me; but having had, hearing, and engaging conversation with people who are experiencing the same thing and who are more often than not experiencing the same concerns of the same people, I think has really helped me.

Lisa described her community of support through the minority fellowship program within the professional organization. The program allowed students of color within clinically focused programs across the U.S. to convene, receive mentoring, and discuss potential research opportunities. This fellowship program provided her with the community support she lacked within her program.

> Another supportive mechanism was when I got this scholarship for minorities ...we could kind of commiserate with each other and offer each other guidance to get through our studies.

Jennifer and other Black women within her department informally created opportunities for themselves to socialize outside of the university within an environment that allowed them to be authentic. They could commiserate about their experiences without repercussions or judgment. Talking among other Black women created a community of trust and validation.

> So creating a social group and a social network, we [other Black women in department] started having meetings at …just talk about being able to just vent...talk about the things that we were experiencing with the different professors... at first it didn't make me feel crazy, but it definitely it gave me a sense of comfort. A sense of community, like minded people who understood my plight, what I was going through.

Because these women were quite isolated within their programs, creating a community of Black professionals reinforced their identity as scholars. They met other Black women who were experiencing similar stressors and surviving. These communities also served the purpose of allowing them to be in a space where they didn't have to adjust their behavior or diminish an aspect of themselves (i.e., invisibility) for the sake of being accepted. Additionally, they were reminded of sources of support that otherwise were not available within their programs.

Eco-map

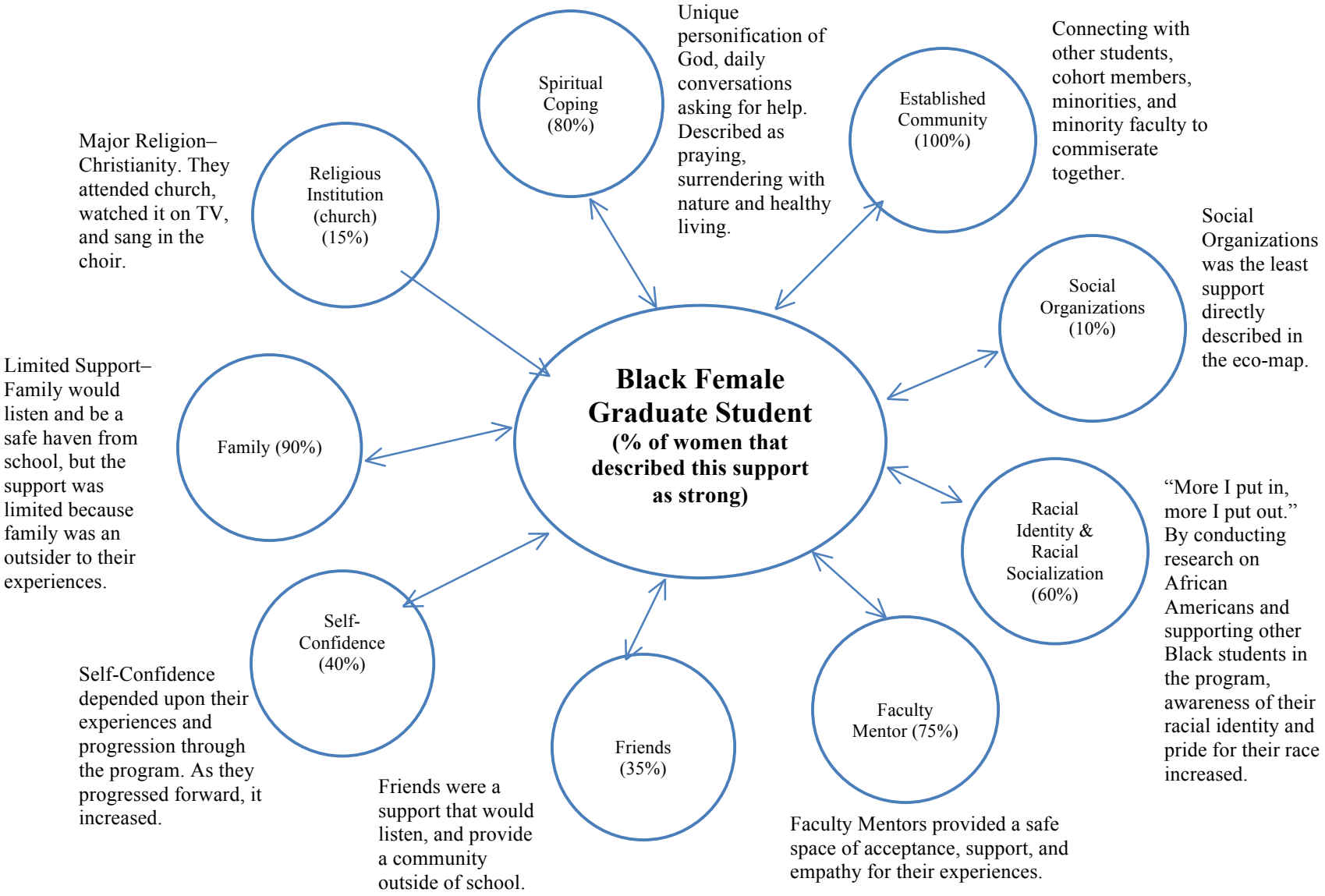
The eco-mapping has been used to identify the relationship between individuals and sources of support (Rempel, Neufeld, & Kushner, 2007). Within this study, eco-maps were used to allow for visual representation of the supports utilized among African American women during their graduate school career. The eco-maps visually depicted the support systems within participants' lives. It provided information about which supports appear to be better utilized and the least utilized supports. Participants were emailed a copy of the eco-map and were asked if they wanted to add or delete any of the supports listed on the eco-map. Figure 2 is a visual representation of the eco-map findings. The large center circle represents the participants. Around the participants are the identified supports, along with explanations of how they

described them, and the percentage of women who utilized those supports. The eco-map also identified the nature of the relationship between the support and the participant. All of the supports listed were identified as reciprocal relationships except for religion. Participants described that support as unidirectional.

Figure 2

Eco-map of Supports Within Black Female Graduate Students' Lives

N=20



Research has identified several supportive factors among African Americans within discriminatory environments such as religion or spirituality, family, and social organizations, racial identity, racial socialization, and self-confidence (Henfield et al., 2011; Sellers et al., 2003, 2006; Settles et al., 2010; Sulé, 2009; Yap et al., 2011). In addition to these supportive factors, specifically within a graduate environment, participants acknowledged that friends, faculty mentors, and an established community played significant roles as supports within participants' lives.

Explanations about each support and how participants described their relationships with the supports will be provided. Quotes will be utilized to make sure that participants' voices are expressed throughout to show the meaning of these supports.

Spiritual coping. The majority (80%) of participants described this as a strong support. Participants described utilizing this support through a relationship with God. Participants described a unique personification of God through daily conversations, prayers, asking for help, and reading the bible. Spiritual coping was also described as surrendering with nature and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. The relationship was considered reciprocal because participants believed that as they were praying, it was also strengthening them.

Latoya reported prayer strengthened her because it was her way to communicate with God. Through her prayers, God gave her strength to endure through her environment.

> You say a prayer and it like goes somewhere in the sky, like it goes out, but the strength that I received from it because I felt, not only heard but like, strengthened, maybe even felt direction from God.

Stacy utilized prayer to encourage and guide her through her program.

> A lot of it was doing a lot of praying that I didn't kill somebody in that class… well, I'm not in jail… I think it gave more to me, obviously you know, but just the act of actually praying, yeah, I think just me giving back, in both directions.

Prayer and meditation were behaviors utilized to strengthen and direct the women through their experiences. Prayer was also utilized to cope with the difficulty of their environment. It provided them with peace and guidance.

Established community of support. All (100%) of participants described this as a strong support. Participants said this support meant connecting with cohort members or connecting with other students of color or faculty members of color. The community of support with other professionals of color commonly empathized with the participants' experiences because they were encountering the same traumatic experiences. This specific community also allowed opportunities to express sympathy and sorrow together. Connecting with cohort members was important because participants were able to support each other through coursework, exams, and sessions with clients. One participant said: "My cohort was great. We shared information, we had study sessions, we would do study guides together." Lisa described the value of being part of a community with other Black professionals:

> The few African-American students, faculty, and people that lived in that town, truly made efforts to intentionally form relationships with each other…that probably was the most effective support system...probably was the support of my peers in that being able to form friendships that were outside of my program, also provided a layer of safety in terms of not being afraid that things would get back to my faculty and things like that, being able to be open...that lived in that town, truly made efforts to intentionally form relationships with each other.

It was important that women established a community of support either with other students within the program, or professionals outside of their department. Specifically, socializing with other Black professionals provided an additional support that was not received from interactions by White colleagues. Many of the Black professionals shared common experiences within academia. There was a commonality of shared racialized experiences. Other Black professionals had experienced being an outsider and isolation within their program. When

the women spoke about such occurrences among other Black professionals, it was understood and shared.

Social organizations. Professional organized memberships such as Black Graduate Students (BGSs) or Black Graduate Student Associations (BGSAs) that participants could join and receive support from other students are categorized as social organizations. Many of the participants stated they had not been involved in social organizations. Only (15%) of participants described social organizations as a strong support. Among those who were socially involved in professional organizations, they described receiving a lot of support from the organization and it being valuable to their experience as a graduate student.

> I was very involved in our Black Graduate Student Association, and that was so helpful just to connect with other students of color who were going through similar experiences...when I became a Minority Fellow, and that was helpful to meet people in my field who were going through similar experiences in the program.

When involved within these social organizations, the women reported a positive experience. Although many of the women did not describe involvement within these social organizations, their established community served the same function as social organizations, to help them socialize and acclimate to their graduate program.

Racial identity and racial socialization. Participants were specifically asked if they used racial pride as a tool or if they had been socialized to understand they might face discriminatory experiences because of their race. Participants were asked if those constructs were considered a support for them through their experiences in graduate school. Many (60%) participants considered their racial identity and being socialized to understand their race was a strong support. They described being aware they were Black gave them purpose and made them feel proud of their status as a racial minority working on their doctorate. Participants also described that pride in their racial group increased, and their racial identity was strengthened as a

result of doing research on African Americans. For instance, one participant described, "It helps me but...I think it also helps those who are coming in…to see a Black woman navigating the system." Another participant described, **"**Anytime that I felt, why am I doing this, it would always coincide with an interview or a discussion with another Black student or a Black family...then it would be, okay, I'm back in it." These women's racial pride was connected to their contribution to share with other Black students and research within the field.

Faculty mentor. The majority (75%) of the women described having a positive relationship with a faculty member whom they considered their mentor. The women (25%) who did not receive a faculty mentor described not receiving a mentor because faculty were unavailable to mentor, had too many mentees, or did not share the same interests as the student. Of the women with a faculty mentor (n=15), 9 were identified as their assigned advisor upon entering the program: 5 were Black females, 3 were White females, and 1 was a White male. Among the 15 who had faculty mentors, 6 had identified faculty mentors who were outside of their program: 3 Black females, 1 White female, and 2 Latino males. Additionally, among those 15 who had identified faculty mentors, 4 women had multiple faculty mentors within the department who supported them: 3 White males, and 1 Black female.

Participants described how the faculty mentor guided them through their program; "…my advisor was very instrumental in like basically, my survival through grad school." Faculty provided a safe space of acceptance, support, and empathy for their experiences as racial minorities. Stacy noticed a positive shift occurred when the Black professor entered the program. She received a mentor and support within the department.

> The Black professor came on campus; she actually reached out to all the African American students...I found that a lot of changes happened as far as things being addressed in the classroom and things being challenged.

When the participants connected with a faculty member, this was a critical source of support, helping them move through the program. The faculty member could advocate for them in various systems. Furthermore, the faculty mentor shaped their development as Black female professionals.

Friends. Several participants (35%) described friends as a support who would listen and could keep them connected to their community outside of school. Participants also described friendships as social way for them to disconnect from their role as graduate students. They said that this relationship was reciprocal because they were contributing to their friendships equally as were their friends. Kiesha explained her friends were a social support for her as she transitioned to graduate school, "my friends, my boyfriend, even my past one (laughter) to an extent the first year was a protective factor or that social support was a huge protective factor." Developing friendships and maintaining friendships provided an additional level of social support.

Self-confidence. Several participants (40%) described their own self-confidence as a support. However, others less frequently described this as a support, reporting that their self-confidence fluctuated. Their self-confidence was described as a reciprocal relationship because it depended upon their experiences and progression through the program. When participants were moving along within the program by completing their required assignments, they felt more confident in their abilities as a graduate student. Natalie described reaching milestones within her department boosted her self-confidence, which increased her momentum to keep moving forward to the next task.

> I think that's reciprocal, too, because I think the more that I was able to overcome things or accomplish things, then it would increase my self-confidence and, in turn, that would help me do the next thing.

Self-confidence was a valuable support when they were moving forward and completing tasks.

Family. The majority (90%) of participants described their family as a strong support. Participants described their relationship with their family members as reciprocal because they believed they were nurturing their family relationships in the same way their family was supporting them. However, family support was thought to have limitations because family members were outsiders to their experiences within academia. Still, family members were a consistent safe haven of support, yet they didn't always understand the academic experiences of these women. One participant shared, "If I tried to talk to my family about it, they don't get it, they don't even know what a doctorate program is...so I can't even talk to them about it…it's like a double edge sword." Another said**,** "For school, my family supports me and gives me encouragement, and then [for] things that were happening in their lives, too, I was trying to be supportive for them."

Although family was considered an outsider to their experiences within academia, this was considered a strong support. Family was a constant advocate of education for these women. They did not always understand the intricate details of the participants' experiences, yet their support and availability offered a listening ear or provided an escape from school. Family was a constant and consistent support.

Religious institution. A few (15%) women described a religious institution as a strong support. Participants described this support as separate and distinct from their spirituality. This was the only support participants described as unidirectional. Religious institutions were described as unidirectional because it strengthened them, but they did not regularly attend or volunteer within the institution. The women who considered religious institutions as a support

identified as Christian. They would attend church, sing in a gospel choir, or watch church through the television. Participants described active involvement with the church was a way to "build a support system." Tasha's participation in the gospel choir at church was one of her support networks, "The Gospel Choir would have been like my church. Like we went to rehearsal, and when we sang, we always prayed and checked in with each other." Participation and attending religious institutions offered faith-based social supports that were not provided within other social networks.

Chapter Summary

Data from the individual interviews described the risks and protective factors of Black women within clinically focused graduate programs. Data from the eco-maps revealed the support systems that Black women utilized to help them progress through graduate programs. The findings identified the multiple risk and protective factors embedded within the graduate school experience for African American women. Many of the stressors within their academic environment were influenced by their position as racial minorities. The results revealed Black women have utilized multiple sources inside and outside of academia to help them manage the stressors of graduate school.

The women entered an academic environment where individuals of color were systemically excluded from opportunities of advancement and promotion. As racial minorities, they entered the program in an outsider position, encountered unfair disadvantages in comparison to their White colleagues, lacked the opportunity to work with racially and ethnically diverse faculty members, were designated as the minority representative of research and clinical practice, racially stereotyped, and subjected to racial microaggressions.

They managed these experiences through multiple sources of support. The severity of their experiences was so intense that multiple forms of support were necessary. Among the women who found a faculty member who was invested in their well-being and mentored them, they received an advocate through the academic environment. In addition to a faculty mentor, the women also connected with cohort members or other Black professionals who buffered the stressors of their environment.

Aside from the established relationships with members of the academic community, the women also relied on the support of their family. Family consistently provided a listening ear of support although they were often unaware of their experiences within academia. Religious faith was also a support to help them progress and have peace with their experiences. Finally, the women coped with their stressors through learned behaviors. They learned there were repercussions to questioning the norms and structures within their programs, so the women became silent in order to move forward. They also learned that taking time away by visiting friends and family outside of the university setting helped them cope and re-energized them. The influence of the risk factors fueled the women to press forward and not allow their circumstances to deter them from achieving their goal of obtaining their PhD. In conclusion, these results identify the stressors present within the academic environment of Black women within clinically focused graduate programs, their support systems, and how they are utilizing those supports.

The following chapter links the results to current theory and scholarship within this area of study. A deeper analysis of the major themes and findings are revealed. The discussion explores how the women managed their stressors and ways academic institutions can enhance the recruitment and retention of racial minorities. Implications for clinical practice, university

departments, and institutions are described. Finally, the position of the researcher is explored and future directions are also presented.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Existing literature shows African American women lagging behind White males and females in the attainment of doctoral degrees (NSF, 2011a; 2011b). Additionally, the literature shows African American women within academic settings are faced with multiple layers of risks factors such as sexual harassment, racism, discrimination, and isolation (Maton et al., 2011; Buchanan et al., 2009; Settles et al., 2006; Vakalahi & Starks, 2010). Less is known how African American women cope with the intersection of their race and gender as well as the ways they protect themselves from the risks within their environment.

The purpose of this study was to explore how African American women manage their self-care and stress within clinically focused PhD programs. Twenty individual interviews were conducted with women in clinically focused graduate programs. Each female participant self-identified as African American or Black and was either working on the final requirements for degree obtainment or had graduated from a doctoral program within the last two years. Using a constructivist grounded theory approach, the data was analyzed and a theory regarding their experiences was co-constructed.

This chapter integrates the findings from this study with current literature. This chapter is organized according to the risk and protective factors identified within each ecological level. Each finding is discussed in detail, along with current literature. The limitations and implications of this research study address clinical programs, academic departments, and university policies. The chapter concludes with a reexamination of the researcher's position and original conceptualization of this study.

Macrosystem: Position in the Program

Within academic environments, the Black women within this study were challenged by racial discrimination that persisted through multiple systems and had severe influences. These challenges were the result of the larger structural issue of institutionalized racism pervasive within educational systems (Feagin, 2006). For instance, within this study, the women reported a lack of support from their department. Jasmine experienced the struggle of not having faculty support during her first two years of graduate school: "Contact for support services didn't happen until the second year of the program. I think as a minority student, that it's important to have someone there who you can relate to or talk about different things that are happening." For two years, she managed the academic system without the guidance and support of a faculty member. According to critical race theory (CRT), racism determines one's social status and self-identity within the U.S. (Brown, 2008; Burton, Bonilla-Silva, Ray, Buckelew, & Freeman, 2010). Based upon tenets of CRT, these women were subjugated to the institutional racism within higher education. They were not in a position to change the system; rather, there were structures in place that would not support their advancement. Although Jasmine was being advised on course curriculum, she neither received support to manage her position as a racial minority nor was she protected from discrimination.

Within the study, the women reported race became a salient characteristic that visibly separated their experiences and interactions from those of their peers. Kenya described the difficulty of ignoring her racial position. Within social settings, there was an evident reminder her racial group was not included within those academic spaces. "I did feel like an outsider because I'd be the only African-American at a party of like 50 people." As students of color, when the participants entered academia, their position had been pre-determined. Findings of the

current study show that these women entered as outsiders. Racism was a function of their environment. As a result of being the only person of color within their program, they experienced isolation (Sulé, 2009). Structural racism was evident in that when the women learned more about the history of their respective field of study, there were no images recognizing the contribution of Black scholars. For instance, Jennifer described her experience walking through a building, "…they have these big posters hanging up of all these White psychologists who've done these great things who contributed to the field. And when I come into the university and the institution, I don't see anybody who looks like me." This reflected the severity of exclusion participants felt within the academic programs. The academic institution systemically did not promote the advancement and scholarship of individuals of color. As a result of the infrastructure of racism, discriminatory behaviors were perpetuated throughout the program. The women witnessed unequivocal opportunities according to one's race. Participants reported that their White counterparts did not experience similar stressors such as an inability to identify with a faculty member's research, having difficulty finding a faculty of color to work with, or being the spokesperson for racial diversity within a classroom setting. These findings were consistent with literature suggesting that Black students' experiences in higher education consists of less mentoring, less involvement in scholarly research, and numerous experiences of racism and discrimination (Clark, Mercer, Zeigler-Hill, & Dufrene, 2012; Johnson-Bailey, Valentine, Cervero, & Bowles, 2009).

Literature has identified that the socialization of students into doctoral programs contributes to their success within their respective programs (Nettles & Miller, 2006). Research has found it is vital for graduate students to interact with other graduate students and faculty. The participants in the current study were capable of socializing with their peers, but they initially

had to surpass the barrier of their social status as an outsider. They entered as outsiders and navigated through the intersection of their race and gender to socialize with their peers.

According to Black feminist theory, the intersection of race and gender presents separate challenges for Black women (Collins, 2000). Participants who were in predominately female student programs, described being outsiders not because they were female, but because they were Black females. For instance, the women reported difficulty finding a faculty member with similar identities who could mentor them. Lindsay described the restrictions in her relationship with her faculty mentor.

> I can talk to [the faculty mentor] about how do I become a program advisor; I can't talk to [the faculty mentor] about how do I be a program advisor as a Black woman; how do I navigate as an administrator… around helping people see me as a leader as a Black woman?

Although the women were in a female-dominated field, they still had difficulty receiving support related to the intersection of their identities as professionals. There were limited options to guide their professional development.

Exosystem: Program Environment

Findings confirmed that program environment was a risk factor among the Black women's experiences. Specifically, faculty relations with one another influenced participants. According to human ecological theory, human development occurs within embedded systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). There is less scholarship that has addressed faculty environment and how it influences a student's experiences; however, current literature does reveal that faculty, specifically female faculty members. working in positive, nonsexist environments report job satisfaction (Settles, Cortina, Malley, & Stewart, 2006). Additionally, some literature suggests that the process of tenure and promotion varies for each university and that the process can be quite challenging (Nettles & Miller, 2006), causing additional stress to an already demanding

position as a professor. It should be noted that the participants in this study were not privy to reasons why the tension existed among faculty. Assumptions can be drawn from the literature that purport tension among faculty members that participants' reported may have been a result of additional factors in the lives of faculty such as work demands or personal family life. Regardless of their cause, these tensions within the faculty environment affected the availability and guidance faculty provided to students.

Studies have shown that Black female faculty members experience hostile work conditions, imbalanced workloads, as well as absence of guidance and mentoring during the tenure process (Holmes et al., 2007; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2004; Walker et al., 2001). Such experiences may have been a reflection of the constraints of the faculty environment that indirectly influenced participants. Of the participants (n=7) who were in programs consisting of two to four faculty members, the intensity from the shifts and stressors of the faculty environment were particularly felt. Having fewer faculty members also limited the availability and mentoring faculty provided to students. The shifts and transitions among the faculty system changed the structure of dissertation committees and, for some, it meant that the designated "diversity spokesperson" was leaving. In other cases, it increased the racial diversity among the faculty members, which meant an opportunity to work with a faculty member of a racial minority status. Such an opportunity was a positive shift for participants. Given confirmation within the literature that faculty–student relationships are an integral part of graduate programs (Blair & Harworth, 2004), this finding exemplifies an aspect of human ecological theory that shows student development is embedded within multiple systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Mesosystem: Interactions with Faculty

Relational interactions. Findings confirmed that faculty–student relationships were essential for success. Blair & Haworth (2004) found that faculty–student relationships have a huge influence on students' experiences. For the participants in this study, faculty–student collaborations were standard practice within these programs. Within this study, participants described working with faculty in various dimensions: research assistantships, teaching assistantships, and clinical supervision. The results showed participants had both positive and negative experiences with faculty members. Embedded within those negative interactions with faculty were isolation, racism, abuse of power, and control. Since all of the women were students, they had less power to navigate around these negative interactions without jeopardizing their status in the program. This finding is consistent with literature that reveals interactions between African Americans and faculty remains a challenge (Nettles & Miller, 2006). This study revealed in more detail that students perceived the challenges in the faculty–student relationship were due to faculty. In particular, the faculty members within this study were in positions of influence over the students' experiences. The intersection of race and gender was harmful to faculty–student interactions, which is consistent with research that shows Black women are challenged by racism, discrimination, and hierarchal power relationships with faculty members (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2004; Sulé, 2009).

Although the students attending HBCUs did not describe experiencing racism from faculty–student interactions, the structural hierarchy was present within the student–faculty interactions. Furthermore participants identified their gender position challenged by male privilege among the faculty.

Embedded within the positive interactions with faculty were two distinct findings. Options for a racially diverse mentor were limited, yet having a faculty mentor was critical to supporting women through their program. Consistent with literature, mentoring is indicative of successful completion of a PhD and professional development (Blair & Haworth, 2004; Holmes et al., 2007). However, Nettles & Miller, (2006) assessed the impact of gender and race alignment in mentoring and was unable to identify evidence to suggest same-race or same-sex student–faculty relationships predict a strong positive student–faculty relationship. This research also revealed the small number and representation of racial minorities and women within higher education. Findings in the current study revealed that many of these women did not have the option for same-race student–faculty mentors within their program. The larger issue presented reflects the structural racism within academia. Although these women were able to have successful mentoring relationships with non-Black faculty members, their options were limited. Additionally, this finding reflects the resilience of these women to adjust and adapt within their environment (Keyes, 2004). Some women (26%) went outside of their program to connect with a faculty mentor, while other women (73%) were able to connect with a faculty within their department and developed a mentoring relationship.

Positive interactions with faculty centered on faculty mentors who were culturally aware and empathetic toward the women's experiences with race. Additionally, faculty mentors who were nonjudgmental and accepting were perceived in a positive light. These results support literature that reveals the importance of African American students having a faculty mentor who is sensitive to the additional barriers that African Americans face such as racism and discrimination (Holmes et al., 2007; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2004; Walker, Wright, & Hanley, 2001). This finding reflects the value associated with breaking down the effects of

racism. Faculty mentors were aware of the effects of racism in research, and toward the participants' professional development, as such, they advocated on behalf of these women. A study by Holmes et al. (2007) indicated that such a mentor, specifically for Black women, buffers against the challenges associated within an environment influenced by race.

The findings demonstrated that 25% of women did not have a faculty mentor. These women described longing for a faculty mentor relationship, and the lack of a mentor actually fueled their completion of the program. This finding is unique because it reflects the resilience of these participants to proceed despite the risks within their environment. These women motivated themselves to complete their degree despite lacking vital faculty support. In terms of stress management and self-care through graduate school, such behavior is maladaptive and short-term. Not having a faculty mentor has been shown to limit socialization within the program and students' ability to navigation through the department (Holmes et al., 2007; Nettles & Miller, 2006; Sulé, 2009). Although some of these women (25%) finished their programs without a mentor, the majority (75%) of the women had a faculty mentor who was instrumental to their completion. This finding further adds to the literature on the importance of faculty mentoring.

Structural interactions. Findings revealed limited diversity among faculty and a lack of commitment to social justice. Many of the participants (n=10) entered the program under the assumption that the program was geared toward social justice and diversity. Participants selected such graduate programs because the programs advertised social diversity and commitment to social justice within the student–faculty interviews and through verbal descriptions of the program. Participants instead experienced a program that "was very traditional, and very White." There were huge inconsistencies between how the program advertised itself and the daily interactions between students and faculty. The women witnessed faculty members "using slurs to

describe Black people" and often found themselves as the designated minority representatives within the classroom and clinical setting. Programs reflected a lack of cultural awareness and understanding of racial privilege among students and faculty. Despite being programs that promoted cultural sensitivity, structures were not in place to protect students of color from discriminatory experiences by students and faculty. These findings support literature that has found that minority students within clinically focused programs often feel responsible for representing their race (Maton et al., 2011; Weiling & Rastogi, 2003).

Participants described an equal mix of male and female faculty, but few faculty of color. Aligning with Black feminist theory, these programs were ignoring, in practice, the intersection of race and gender among faculty members and students. These results conveyed the importance of breaking down structural forms of racism. These programs, which consisted of faculty members who were predominately White male and female, should have demonstrated greater diversity as it pertains to line of work and cultural backgrounds. An emphasis on greater diversity should have been a focus for these programs given their advertised commitment to social justice. Diverse representation among the faculty would increase opportunities for students to collaborate with faculty from diverse backgrounds regarding topics that promoted cultural diversity.

Microsystem: Influences From Risk Factors

Findings revealed that the risk factors within each ecological system negatively influenced Black women's experiences within their program. These findings support the notion of human ecological theory that systems are interconnected, and human development is embedded within multiple systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The risk factors within each system negatively influenced the women's progression through graduate school.

The microaggressions reported by participants confirmed how subtle experiences of racism persisted within academic environments. These findings also show how deeply embedded the effects of racism are within U.S. culture. The danger of microaggressions is that they are subtle, at times unintentional, and difficult to pinpoint as exactly racism (Sue et al., 2007). Tasha described the covertness of microaggressions: "Indirect, it wasn't in your face...it was more covert and you're kind of like, did they do that because I was Black, like you never really knew exactly." The effects of microaggressions were debilitating toward the participants of this study. Because microaggressions are subtle, they silence those targeted by them. As a result, such behaviors and comments are unchallenged or questioned. Findings are consistent with the literature that shows that Black women internalized such experiences and it contributed to them questioning their place within the program (Schwartz et al., 2003; Settles, 2006; Sulé, 2009).

With regard to the literature on identity, research has found that one's racial identity buffers racism and influences mental health (Sellers et al., 2003, 2006; Settles et al., 2010; Yap et al., 2011). These programs lacked diversity among faculty and students, as well as a demonstrable commitment to social justice. According to the participants, this was interpreted as the program's lack of care for issues around race. As a result, these experiences were internalized and affected their mental health and self-confidence.

Although these women were academic scholars, being within an environment full of risk factors weakened their perception of their academic skills. This finding supports the importance of group acceptance and collectivism within African American culture (Settles et al., 2010). Although it was important that participants were able to draw upon their internal strength, the presence of external support was important to their development, particularly given the stressful nature of the environment. In this study, Black women not only drew upon internal support

resources, but they also drew upon support from their communities, which included features such as being a listening ear, acceptance, spiritual guidance, familiarity of experiences being targeted by racism and racial privilege, and opportunities to socialize. These findings are consistent with research that shows Black people receive support externally from their community (Settles et al., 2010; Sulé, 2009). Brittani described support within the Black community as different than support networks of mainstream culture: **"**We [Black people] don't realize our strength is different; as a race, our strength comes from a different source and, historically, it's always come from a different source."

The women showed a lot of resilience within their environments by collaborating on projects with faculty members, speaking out in class when they disagreed with the literature's representation of diversity, and socializing with cohort members. These behaviors helped them adapt to their environment, but they didn't mitigate the reality that they felt like outsiders within their programs. With the help of their support system and their internal strength, they were able to overcome structural and professional obstacles.

Microsystem: Protective Factors—Coping Mechanisms

The results confirm that the identified protective factors were coping mechanisms for the participants as they progressed through the programs. According to risk and resilient theory, participants were within environments that included a multitude of stressors (Keyes, 2004). These stressors were considered risk factors because the intersection of race and gender for these Black women elevated their chance for a negative outcome (Keyes, 2004).

These women displayed enormous levels of resilience. As theory describes, resilience demonstrates positive adjustment and adaptation within the face of risks (Masten, 1994; Keyes, 2004). Further, resilient individuals are able to overcome challenges and are strengthened by

adversities (Keyes, 2004). Women in the study displayed a resilient and hopeful demeanor despite the negative influence of the risk factors described (e.g., depression). Their use of protective factors helped them cope and adjust to the risk factors. In addition to the faculty mentor, these protective factors were quite valuable in buffering the effects of their environment.

Taking time away. Research has shown, African Americans cope with racism and discrimination by seeking social support, having an affiliation with a religious institution, and establishing a connection with one's spirituality (Utsey, Ponterotto, & Reynolds, 2000; Utsey, Bolden, Lanier, & Williams, 2007). Utsey et al. (2000) found gender differences in coping with different racial encounters. African American women reported higher levels of avoidance coping behaviors during individual racial encounters as opposed to institutional racial encounters. This suggests the level of control and astonishment that occurs when directly encountered with racism. Recent research has shown African Americans utilize avoidant coping such as ignoring the behavior in the face of racially stressful events (Hoggard et al., 2012). The findings from this study support the literature that avoidant coping behaviors are utilized in the face of discriminatory experiences. The participants described a form of avoidant coping behavior by taking time away. Participants described leaving and removing themselves physically from the system was valuable. Within this context, this form of coping helped the women because they left the campus and visited people and places that provided them with strength and encouragement. This form of coping connected them to their support system.

Becoming invisible. Becoming invisible would be considered a maladaptive form of coping, but it helped the participants reach their goals. This form of coping described in the literature as strategic coping (Stevenson, Davis, Carter, & Elliott, 2003), specifically for Black males, they must "tiptoe" around the stereotypical projections that White individuals hold toward

them such as being angry, aggressive, and lazy. Their identity is defined by them acting against those stereotypical projections. Their "tiptoe" behavior is an identity that White individuals feel safe around (Stevenson et al., 2003). This form of coping is silencing of their multidimensional identity. Within this study, the women described invisibility as beneficial for them to graduate. Although it was a negative coping mechanism and it silenced their identities, it was a means to an end. They learned there were repercussions to being visible within their environment. For instance, Michelle reported, "I know when to keep my mouth shut, that's really what it is. You have to learn when to speak and when to keep your mouth shut." The participants realized that voicing concerns within the system was harmful to their experience. They utilized this form of problem solving as a coping to deal with the risk factors within their system. Research has identified problem-solving coping, specifically changing something about you (e.g., appearance, speech) in the face of racially stressful events is a less common form of coping among African American college students. Instead, research identifies, more common use of avoidance and confrontive coping behaviors in racially stressful events as helpful (Hoggard et al., 2012). Participants did engage in avoidant coping behavior; however, they managed daily racially stressful events by becoming invisible. This was a form of self-preservation, and it also spoke to the lack of power they had within the programs. Also, they did not have enough faculty support to continue to confront the racial discrimination. The burden of adaptation to this environment fell upon the women. These findings confirm the literature that identifies the multiple layers of stressors Black women experience within academia and the difficulty navigating the academic system (Henderson et al., 2010; Jean-Marie et al., 2009; Schwartz et al., 2003; Sulé, 2009; Wallace et al., 2012; Wilson, 2012).

Despite internalizing the experiences of not being accepted (Settles et al., 2010) as Black women, it was still their responsibility to navigate through the risk factors and self-care. The risk factors were not diminished within their programs; the women adapted to their environment in order to persevere. Lindsay described her silencing behavior as self-preservation: "There's only so much voice you can give to something because then it becomes self-preservation. I need to graduate…the system has norms that they're not willing to change." The women knew they could not change the system, so they focused on completing their work and graduating.

Franklin (1999) described invisibility syndrome among African American men in relation to the effects of racism and discrimination on their self-identity. Daily encounters with racism and discrimination impacts the self-efficacy of African American men as invisible. The women described dealing with daily encounters of microaggressions and discriminatory experiences that were hurtful and also affected their self-identity; however, the women were not within positions of influence that would have afforded them the ability to maintain visibility and contest those injustices. Although being invisible silenced their identity, it was necessary for them to proceed forward. The literature describes this struggle the women embraced of altering and silencing their identity in order to be accepted within their programs (Parham, 1999). This strategic invisibility has implications for their careers. Specifically, transitioning into a faculty position where visibility is required would be difficult if one learned that invisibility helped them cope.

This finding highlights larger issues within the university. Within an academic institution, it's disturbing for a finding to reveal that conformity and invisibility are coping mechanisms for individuals of color. This sends a message of non-acceptance toward diversity, and can contribute to the low retention of individuals of color within academic institutions. Further, its important to consider the long-term consequences associated with asking someone to build a

career within an environment that supports invisibility and silencing of their identity in order to be accepted and progress within the institution. Additionally, this can reduce the likelihood of an individual staying within academia. This finding speaks to the pervasive injustices that are supported by institutions.

Being motivated to completion. This support described by women was a direct response to their experiences within the system. While it protected them by helping them to reach completion of the degree, it limited their process of development and experiences while obtaining the degree. Kenya described that if she hadn't been in a rush to finish, she may have received more from the program. "I may have taken more from the program and been able to flourish more." This type of coping was a means to an end. Again, this was considered a coping mechanism because it helped them to finish the degree, which is the ultimate goal of graduate education. In the risk and resilience perspective (Keyes, 2004), these women would be described as resilient because they positively adapted to their environment. Yet there are costs associated with coping by simply moving quickly through the program. They missed opportunities for scholarly development such as participating in professional presentations, collaboration on research projects, and teaching experiences that enhance marketability as a new graduate.

Established a community. Establishing a community was a huge relief for women who felt isolated and as an outsider within the program. The women established a community by connecting with their cohort and with other Black professionals. Consistent with the literature, the community of support helped socialized the women throughout graduate school (Henfield et al., 2011; Museus, 2008). Furthermore, this research confirmed the importance of connecting with other individuals, specifically other Black students who had shared experiences because it normalized their experiences (Museus, 2008).

This finding has two components. The first component suggests a community of support helps students advance through the program by socializing them with their peers. The literature has shown that socializing through graduate school with peers is important to academic success (Nettles & Miller, 2006). The second component suggests the importance of socializing with other racial minority professions. Coming from a position as an outsider, socializing with other Black professionals confirmed the notion that there were other Black professionals who had similar experiences. Socializing with other Blacks was beneficial because some of the other Black professionals were able to empathize and relate to the participants' struggles. The participants realized through collective storytelling of experiences from other Black professionals that their experiences were neither isolated incidents nor did participants have to internalize the label of being an outsider within their program. Engaging with other Black students buffered the internalized feelings of "craziness" women felt, and created a community of individuals who understood each other's experiences.

Summary

In summary, the findings of this study revealed structural racism permeated throughout the multiple ecological systems in academia. Within the faculty environment, there was visible tension among the faculty in the form of high rates of transient faculty and lack of collaboration among the faculty. The students experienced difficulty maintaining faculty–student relationships as a result of the faculty members' visible tension and lack of boundaries.

Relationships with faculty were vital stressors and protective factors within the system. Majority of the women had faculty support; however, they still had negative interactions with faculty members that resulted in them being uncomfortably monitored or treated differently than their White counterparts. Their positive interactions with their faculty mentor helped buffer the

effects of the negative interactions; however, some women did not receive faculty mentors until two or three years had passed within the program. These women had to initiate support either among cohort members or they established a community outside of their department with other Black professionals.

The women adapted to the effects of the risk factors within their programs because they were not in positions to change them. This adaptation meant parts of their identity were silenced (e.g., stop questioning injustices) so they could move forward within the system. Although it is detrimental to one's professional identity, it helped them reach their goal of graduation. The women experienced depression and questioned their purpose within their program. Some of these mental health issues were relieved as they progressed forward and mastered requirements (e.g., passing their comprehensive exams) within the programs. In addition to mastering tasks, the women also utilized other forms of coping that helped support them. They described going to visit friends and family to receive the nourishment and support lacking within the graduate programs. Additionally, the participants were very determined to obtain their PhD. The negative experiences motivated them to move faster through their program. The stressors defined by these women were a result of the intersection of their race and gender. They entered an institution plagued by racism and utilized multiple support sources to help them get through. These women displayed resilience, and they were determined to finish at all costs.

Eco-map Findings

The eco-map was utilized to determine the relationship between individuals and sources of support (Rempel et al., 2007). The eco-map provided a visual depiction of which supports appear to be better utilized and those that are the least utilized. The eco-map was an additional way to support literature's findings about the use of supportive networks within African

American women's lives. The eco-maps identified how Black women utilized their supports and what they obtained from the supports. For instance, they described family as a strong support system. Family provided a safe haven from school, they would listen to their experiences within their programs, and they were consistently available. The eco-map visualized the complex levels of supports the women needed to help them get through.

Spiritual and religious coping. Consistent with literature, spiritual networks and religious practices are a source of strength and protection against hardships (Bierman, 2006; Howard-Hamilton, Hinton, & Ingram, 2009; Utsey et al., 2007). The women described spiritual coping as a support that not only helped them get through the stress of graduate school, but spiritual coping was described as a solid support that was always there even when they felt like all odds were against them. Given the literature's separation between religion and spirituality (Howard-Hamilton, Hinton, & Ingram, 2009), the women were asked about spirituality and religion as two distinct supports. Results showed the women relied heavily on spirituality and less on attending a religious institution. The majority of the women described themselves as Christian, yet engaged in spiritual practices as a source of support rather than attending church. For these women, they described various reasons for not attending religious institutions, either they didn't have time to attend and be actively involved, they didn't find one they liked within their community, or they simply didn't want to attend church or any institution—attending faith-based churches was not as important to them as praying or surrendering with nature. These findings are consistent with the literature identifying the role of spirituality as a multidimensional confirming purpose, providing direction, providing protection, and offering peace through difficult times (Howard-Hamilton et al., 2009).

Social organizations and establishing a community. The findings show that this support was the least used among the women. The participants reported various reasons for lack of involvement within social organizations such as lack of time, lack of connection with other Black students within the organization, and lack of desire to connect with this specific support because they had formed a community through other interests and outlets. Although many of the women described less involvement with formalized social organizations, all of the participants described establishing a community of support that served the same purpose as a formalized support. According to the literature, social organizations, specifically with other Black professionals, helps to normalize shared experiences especially at predominately White institutions (Henfield, Owens, & Witherspoon, 2011; Museus, 2008). Therefore, the results are consistent with research showing the value of having a community of support with other Black students, specifically for the women alone or one of a few minorities within a program. Being in an environment plagued by institutional racism places Black women at risk for internalizing racially discriminatory experiences along with negatively affecting mental health (Sellers et al., 2003; Sellers et al., 2006; Settles et al., 2010; Yap, Settles, & Pratt-Hyatt, 2011). Collaborating and engaging with other Black professionals who experienced similar challenges reminded them of the risk factors within the institution, and they empathized with each other's oppressive experiences.

Racial socialization and racial identity. Racial identity became more important to the participants as they progressed in their programs. The women described their racial identity as heightened upon entering graduate school, as well as being socialized to understand the challenges associated with their race. This finding is consistent with the literature that identifies experiences of discrimination and interactions with other African Americans as predictors of

racial identity (Thompson Sanders, 1999). The participants' experiences as outsiders contributed to the recognition and awareness that their race became a salient part of their experience as a graduate student. The women had not expected their racial identity to be a salient part of their graduate school experience. Through the disadvantaged position as an outsider, their racial salience increased. The experience of progressing through multiple levels of stressors, isolation, and lacking sufficient support contributed to the women feeling a sense of strength and pride in their abilities to advance through the program as Black women. Such findings reflected a strong sense of self and racial salience necessary to protect them from the effects of racism (Settles, 2006).

Participants related that their group pride and affiliation with their own racial group increased through conducting research on African Americans and data collection (e.g., interviewing Black women). In addition, their commitment to and responsibility toward their race increased as a result of being outsiders within the graduate programs. This was a support because the women were committed to helping other Black students who entered the program, and they benefited from supporting other racial minorities.

Some women also described that they had been sensitized in their previous experiences being a racial minority within a predominately White institution. They had been in educational institutions as the only racial minority. Such previous experiences did not remove the pain associated with their position as an outsider or of experiencing differential treatment than their White peers within their graduate programs.

Involvement in research experiences about African American populations or clinical experiences with African American clients validated and strengthened their racial identities within their programs. These experiences validated their worth as scholars. Their racial identity,

developed through their research and clinical practices, buffered the effects of some negative discriminatory experiences. Such findings overlap with current literature that shows having pride and acceptance in one's racial group buffers the effects of racism (Sellers et al., 2003, 2006; Settles et al., 2010; Yap et al., 2011).

Some of the participants described an inability to conduct research on African Americans because professors within the department were not studying this population. Women participated in research practices in order to comply with the requirements of their program; however, they received opportunities to conduct research on African Americans as a result of a new faculty of color entering the program or being supported by a faculty to take ownership over their research interests during the dissertation process. Although some women did not receive experience researching African American populations until their final phase of their program, that experience was valuable to building and enhancing their racial identity. Without this research opportunity, speculations can be made regarding the costs associated with one's racial identity and the lack of buffer toward discriminatory experiences. If Black women are within graduate programs without opportunities to conduct research on African American populations, it may negatively influence their racial identity and validation of their position within the graduate program.

Faculty mentor. A majority (75%) of the women in this study described having a faculty mentor and supported the literature regarding the importance of faculty mentors for students (Blair & Haworth, 2004; Holmes, Land, & Hinton-Hudson, 2007; Nettles & Miller, 2006). Specifically, for African Americans, the faculty mentor guided them through their program and empathized with their experiences as racial minority. The faculty member also mentored them on being a professional woman of color. These were considered vital sources of protection and

guidance for the participants. Specifically for African Americans, a faculty mentor is very important to building self-esteem and to professional development within doctoral programs (Holmes, Land, & Hinton-Hudson, 2007). Since the participants did not always have an opportunity to have a faculty mentor of the same race and gender, it was important that the faculty mentor acknowledged their role as a racial minority. The participants without a faculty mentor described a strong desire to have a mentor relationship with a faculty member within their department. The lack of a faculty mentor contributed to them being unsupported and isolated within the program.

Friends. Currently, there is a dearth of literature on the supportive friendships during graduate school. Friends were described as separate from family, yet a community support. Participants described friends as valuable to supporting them through their experiences. It was important that women were able to disconnect from their professional identity and socialize with individuals outside of their academic environment.

Self-confidence. Forty percent of all women within the study described their own self-confidence as a support. In some research, Black women's identity at this stage in their professional career has been described as resilient and quite remarkable (Schwartz et al., 2003; Sulé, 2009;). Women with advanced levels of high education have histories of perseverance, overcoming challenges, and achieving academic success (Sulé, 2009). The findings within this study revealed Black women whose self-confidence had been challenged and influenced by the stressors within their environment. Unlike the Sulé (2009) study, some of the participants within this study based their self-confidence on mastery over tasks. In the Sulé, (2009) study, Black women described multiple images of other Black women as leaders and successful. Those images helped define their positive identity and self-efficacy. The women within this study

identified their self-confidence as constantly growing and strongly influenced by the level of marginalization they experienced within the program. The women questioned their purpose within the graduate program and internalized those experiences as a reflection of them. This finding suggests a connection between reaching milestones and self-confidence. As the women progressed through their program, their self-confidence increased.

Family. As expected from the literature, strong family support (Hanson, 2007; Schwartz et al., 2003; Sulé, 2009) played an important role in coping. However, the findings also showed that the family was considered as an outsider to the women's experiences within academia. In their vantage points as outsiders, the family was not aware or did not understand all of the women's experiences and stressors related to the educational context. The women described family support as consistently available yet having critical limitations.

In conclusion, the eco-map was very useful in identifying which supports were predominately used by African American women within this study. The eco-maps revealed greater insight into how African American women managed the stressors they encountered within their environment. These supports were essential to their success. The eco-map also provided a visual of the importance of community within the women's lives. The risks were quite severe within the programs; however, these women had multiple support networks that assisted their adjustment and adaptation. From the eco-map findings, over half of the women described the following supports as strongly utilized: spiritual coping, a community of support, racial identity, faculty mentor, and family. Future research could explore the support networks of women who have completed and those who have not finished to determine the significance of their supports in completing graduate programs. Based upon these findings, conclusions can be

drawn regarding the importance of these supports within Black women's experiences through graduate school.

Original Conceptualization

Overall, the findings support the original conceptualization of this research project that African American women within clinically focused graduate programs would be influenced by risk and protective factors within multiple systems. However, there were some findings that were not within the original conceptualization. The original conceptualization of this study identified racism and sexism as risk factors within the macrosystem. In the study it was found that women did not identify sexism as a stressor in their programs. They described their programs as predominately female and did not describe discrimination based upon their gender. Race was, however, a prominent stressor due to the structural racism inherent within their institutions. The intersection of their race and gender presented them with additional challenges in comparison to the White women within the programs.

Another new finding that arose from this study was the impact of transient faculty on the women's experiences. The findings suggest that the shifting of faculty leaving and entering programs was a stressor. It influenced faculty–student relationships and research opportunities. The results showed transient faculty members as risk factors within the exosystem. The exact reasons why faculty were transient was unknown to the women; however, links can be made to previous literature identifying similar multiple layers of stressors for faculty within academia and the intersection of their race and gender (Holmes et al., 2007; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2004; Walker, Wright, & Hanley, 2001). Faculty members who exited the graduate program ranged from female faculty of color to White male faculty members. Participants did not identify a specific pattern associated with the faculty who exited their program.

Originally within the mesosystem, Black graduate student organizations were conceptualized as a protective factor. The findings suggest socializing with other Black professionals within the department, at conferences, and across the university was an important part of development. Many of the participants identified informal supports networks rather than formal Black professional organizations. The informal support networks served the same purpose as the formal organizations, yet they were informal and at times the result of fellowship support (e.g., network through minority fellowship program). Formal social organizations remained a protective factor; however, the results confirmed a broader description of social organizations should include informal networks of support.

The original conceptualization did not take into account how women's mental health would be affected by the risk factors within the system. The women often reported that mental health, specifically depression, was commonly linked to their experiences within the program environment. The findings suggest the seriousness of these risk factors within academia and illustrate the importance of increasing supports for Black women within higher education. In addition to the influence of the risk factors related to mental health, the findings of this study revealed additional coping mechanisms not identified within the original framework. Research has identified avoidance coping and silencing behaviors utilized by African American women (Utsey, Ponterotto, & Reynolds, 2000; Hoggard, Byrd, & Sellers, 2012). It was suggested the women would utilize multiple support systems to help them cope with the risk factors of their environment.

The original conceptualization considered the severity of multiple stressors within their environment; however, it did not consider the depths of their influence and how the women would cope with those daily stressors. For instance, the women in the study reported maladaptive

coping strategies such as becoming invisible. The women had to distort their identity and hide the pain of their experiences in order to be accepted by faculty and peers. Nonconformity along with diverse identities and perspectives were ostracized. Participants described being invisible as a learned behavior acquired after confronting the injustices within the program and not being supported or protected from the ramifications of their actions. This behavior was silencing and stripped away their identity, but it helped them move forward in graduate school. The concern regarding this learned coping behavior is the long-term effects on the individual. If an individual continually maintains silence and conforms to the standards of the institution, they lose their identity and lose their voice.

Implications

Clinical programs. The implications of this research reveal the importance of promoting social justice within graduate programs. Programs may have a mission that identifies social justice as a part of the research, clinical, and curricular goals, but at the same time neglect the influence of positionality within their student body. Many of the participants described experiencing discrimination, microaggressions, feeling unprotected and unsupported within the classroom, among other faculty, or with other students. Within these programs, it is important that the professors and students have opportunities to reflect on the biases and privileges they have as researchers and practitioners. This type of self-reflection should occur among faculty members and also among students. As minority students enter clinically focused programs, it is important that they are not experiencing isolation and discrimination as a result of prejudices held toward them.

The research highlights the importance of maintaining boundaries between students and faculty members. The women described witnessing and at times being targeted by the tension

between faculty members as uncomfortable. Professional boundaries should be maintained between students and faculty such that students are not privy to the tensions occurring among faculty. Additionally, students are not responsible for the tensions within the faculty environment and should not have to suffer as a result of their occurrence. Considering human development occurs as a result of the interdependence among systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), faculty members should be mindful of the level of influence their system may have on students' experiences, especially within smaller programs with two or three faculty members.

The implications of this research identify the need for increasing research on diverse populations within clinically focused programs. Many of the participants described a lack of opportunities to work with faculty members conducting research on minority populations. This also speaks to recruitment efforts to increase diverse student applicants and ways to incorporate social justice and greater equity in the selection and financial support process within these programs. As professors are engaging in research that includes diverse populations, this is another indicator of a program's reflection and commitment to social justice. Within clinical programs, there needs to be increased opportunities for research that reflect diversity and self-reflection as well as commitment to social services. Many of the women reported the philosophy of the graduate program was promoting social justice and diversity, yet the program lacked an infrastructure to uphold social justice values as well as faculty members who questioned and stood against the marginalization of racial minority students. Within doctoral programs, it is important that the research reflects the philosophy and training of clinical practice. Increasing research on diverse populations could be initiated by bringing in other scholars whose work resonates with diversity issues.

Within many clinically focused programs, racially ethnic students remain the minority. Within these programs, many of this study's participants described experiences of being an outsider because of their racial status as a minority. The women related that establishing a community of support with cohort members and other Black professionals protected them from the stressors within the programs. These results suggest the need to increase opportunities within the department for students to socialize and connect with other students of color within the department. Such opportunities would encourage students to collaborate on research papers, engage in social activities off campus, and increase opportunities for students of color within the department to socialize and meet each other. These opportunities would reflect departmental efforts to engage minority students isolated within their programs. The research findings validate the importance of graduate departments increasing their efforts to support students of color within their programs—for instance, as previously described, bringing scholars whose work is reflective of the populations represented among the student population. Such efforts promote diversity and build community within the department.

Institutions and departments. The implications of this research support the current literature's findings on the importance of faculty mentors for African American students (Holmes, Land, & Hinton-Hudson, 2007). Furthermore, this work confirms the value of faculty mentors who are aware of issues of race within academia and empathetic to the experiences of being a racial minority (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2004). The research findings suggest the importance of faculty receiving diversity training on mentoring students cross-culturally. Such would entail faculty members self-reflecting on their position of influence toward students' experiences and the importance for providing mentoring to increase student well-being and productivity within the department. Within the training, it is important that faculty members self-

reflect and are aware of the privilege and biases they have toward other cultural groups. Change occurs by remaining within uncomfortable spaces and not using your privilege to exit. Trainings would allow faculty to acknowledge their bias or lack of awareness that they have about working with racial minority students.

In addition to the need for diversity training, the results of this study revealed limited options for working with faculty of diverse backgrounds. Increase the hiring of faculty from diverse backgrounds would begin to address this issue. Although this solution doesn't break down the institutional racism and discrimination within academia, increasing diverse representation among faculty is a starting point. In addition to increasing faculty members from diverse backgrounds, it is important that those faculty members are receiving support. This study was focused on Black women's graduate student experiences; however, the literature reveals Black female faculty members have similar multilayered experiences within academia (Hinton, 2010, Vakalahi & Starks, 2010, Wilson, 2012). There is a lack of support to help them maintain and advance their careers in academia (Hinton, 2010, Vakalahi & Starks, 2010, Wilson, 2012), resulting in fewer representations within departments.

At the institutional level, in order to maintain faculty from different backgrounds, the university has to incorporate greater support measures. These supports would include mentoring relationships. Mentoring is important to Black female graduate students, yet it is often not recognized or rewarded as part of a faculty member's tenure and promotion (Hinton, 2010; Wilson, 2012). Institutions must place value on mentoring and communities of support within departments. A shift in the value of mentoring at the institutional level would encourage departments to emphasize mentoring relationships among junior and senior faculty, as well as faculty to students.

Not only should institutions increase the value of mentoring relationships, but they should also increase supportive networks to aid the adjustment of students of color into predominately White institutions. Such measures could include increasing mental health resources that are culturally sensitive, increasing minority research opportunities through scholarships and fellowships, and, finally, increasing funding to minority social organizations that have buffered the effects of racism for Black students at predominately White institutions (Museus, 2008).

Limitations

Greater representation of clinically focused graduate programs. There were limitations in this study. First, this study was intended to represent a population of underrepresented Black women within clinically focused graduate programs; however, there was not full representation of all clinically focused programs. While the women represented a continuum of programs of clinical science and research practitioner focus across the U.S., increased efforts of data collection would include larger representation of clinically focused graduate programs. More specifically, increased efforts would include more research-focused clinical science and counseling psychology programs.

The results reflect the experiences of Black women within a homogenous population, yet, speculations about the findings can be made to Black women within other graduate programs. Each graduate program has unique stressors; most findings overlapped with experiences other Black women had in graduate programs where they are the only or among few African Americans. Although women within graduate programs with dominant minority populations (e.g., historically black colleges and universities) may not be challenged by race in the same manner as the women within this study, these results could extend to their experiences managing

power dynamics with faculty members and their use of coping mechanisms. Future research could expand this work by including more women from diverse graduate programs and historically Black universities.

Student perspective. This study focused on Black women's experiences managing stress and how they self-care. It was important women were interviewed at the final stage of their program or had recently graduated because they had either reached the goal of completion or were not consistently experiencing the effects of the risk factors within their environment. For instance, many of the participants had completed coursework and were working on their dissertation. They reported not seeing cohort members or interacting with faculty often at this stage of the program. During the interviews, the women revisited past traumatic experiences; however, they described those experiences with a level of objectivity because they were either finishing final requirements or had completed the program. This type of reflection was important compared to having an equal representation of participants at all stages of the program. The participants' experiences at the first year of their program differed from their final year, and they articulated those differences objectively.

A limitation of the student's perspective was the lack of multiple perspectives to describe the academic environment. It would have been interesting to include faculty members' experiences within those graduate programs to gather a holistic representation of the academic environment of these programs.

Age of participants. Another limitation of this study was the age and status of participants. The majority of the participants (60%) were between the ages of 26 and 38 years old. Many of these women were traditional students without children. They were full-time graduate students devoting most of their time to school. Future studies should include more non-

traditional students with children to diversify the population and take into account challenges and supports associated with raising children or adaptation to being a full-time student.

Women who completed doctoral programs. Finally, this work focused on the experiences of women that have completed their graduate programs and their coping skills. Future work should interview women who did not complete their doctoral programs to find out what prevented them from finishing. This specific population could identify additional risk factors within or outside of the academic system that prevented their progression. Additionally, the women who have not completed their doctoral studies could confirm the generalizability and strength of the identified coping mechanisms and protective factors women described within this study.

Position of the Researcher

At the onset of this project, I acknowledged that my role as an African American female doctoral student currently enrolled within a couples and family therapy program could bring bias and social similarities to this research project. In order to capture my bias, I wrote reflective memos to collect my thoughts and feelings throughout the process of interviewing and analyzing the data. At the onset of interviewing, I was nervous and concerned that I was not going to maintain a level of distance from the data because my experiences were very similar to the participants. After my first interview, I described in my memo:

> It was hard for me to maintain an interviewer type of role and not engage in conversation with her and start sharing my story. I try to remain conscious of the fact that I don't want to influence their responses or to put words in their mouth. So this is a little difficult for me in the sense that I am experiencing similar things from them.

After the third interview, a shift occurred, and I embraced my role as a researcher and felt responsible for the stories they were sharing. After my third interview, I wrote in my memo, "In the interview, I started to feel a responsibility to share their story considering these women have

opened their experiences with me." I removed my focus of trying to validate my personal experiences; instead, I listened to their stories and focused on the importance of sharing them. As the data collection progressed, I co-constructed the meaning of their experiences through the interviews, memoing, and analyzing data.

Once I had completed the interviews and analyzed the data, I reflected on the process and found that my story had been told through these interviews, "The study has been very validating to my experience. Although I have not had the exact same experience as the participants, hearing their stories has been very validating to some of my experiences." The memos reflected my position within this project and my process of development as a researcher studying a personal topic. When I stepped back and focused on the participants' experiences, as a result, my process was validated, and my story had also been told. This study has been eye opening, and the findings have revealed information I hadn't considered when I first conceptualized this project.

My position as a Black female doctoral student was very helpful because the women trusted that I would honor confidentiality, and they were very excited to share their stories with me. My insider perspective was useful in collecting and analyzing data. I empathized with their experiences and exposed the truths of their environments.

Throughout the analysis, I was concerned about exposing the risk factors within these institutions, thus revealing the identities of the participants. After several consultations with other experts within the field, I recognized the importance of sharing the participants' stories in a way that speaks to the experiences shared by other Black women in graduate programs. Conveying this message leads to change throughout institutions.

Future Directions

Future directions of this research should begin by expanding the representation among Black women in multiple fields to provide generalizability of the findings. Future research could identify risk and protective factors that could support or enhance current findings. Such findings would be useful toward implications of university policies on recruitment and maintenance of racial minorities.

Second, future research should focus on the role of faculty mentoring within graduate programs and include qualitative interviews with faculty members across fields of study. Faculty members could weigh in on their perspectives and experiences mentoring students.

Finally, future research should examine in greater depth the mental health of participants. The participants shared that the risk factors within their environment challenged their mental health. Future work should explore the changes in women's mental health upon entering graduate programs and its association to specific stressors.

Conclusions

This study revealed the multiple layers of risk and protective factors found within clinically focused programs. Qualitative interviews were collected on the experiences of African American women within clinically focused graduate programs. From the interviews, data was coded to identify significant themes that would construct a theory demonstrating how risk and protective factors within each ecological system influenced African American women's experiences within clinically focused graduate programs. This study found that the risks were negatively influencing women's self-confidence and mental health. The women displayed resiliency and engaged in coping mechanisms that helped them progress through the stressors of their environments. Additionally, the women had multiple supports that buffered the effects of

their environment. Findings suggest that academic institutions still function from the existence of institutional racism. Institutions must continue to take extra precautions such as increase hiring of faculty of color, increase programs that focus on cultural diversity and opportunities for diverse communities to convene, increase diversity training opportunities among faculty, and increase mental health supports that are culturally sensitive to eradicate the influences of racism throughout universities and promote diversity.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Recruitment Flier

APPENDIX B

Interview & Eco-map Guide

Thank you for participating in this research study. The purpose of this study is to explore how African American women self-care and manage stress within clinically focused graduate programs. I am really interested in your experience as an African American woman in a clinical graduate program. I would really like to know the full range of your experiences, what was good, what was not so good, what helped, who helped, and how you obtained support or did not obtain support. It is important to have you participate as well as share your experiences.

The interview should take about 1-1.5 hours to complete. The interview will be audio recorded, however all information will remain confidential. If at any moment you would like to stop the interview you may do so.

Before we begin, I will verbally read the consent and I will need to record a verbal consent if you are willing to participate. Do you have any questions before we begin?

If no questions, Read the Consent Form and record their verbal consent.

<u>Demographic Questions</u>

1. What is your current age? Current status within a graduate program (e.g., ABD through 2-years post graduate)? Type of program (e.g., clinical psychology, counseling); Location of the program (e.g., Midwest, East Coast).
2. Demographics of your cohort: Number of Black students? Other races/ethnicities? Number of students within cohort? Number of females? Males? Transgender?

<u>Macrosystem</u>

1. Could you describe any stressors and protective factors within your program?
    - *Possible probe*: *Are there various contexts (e.g., with faculty member, classroom, clinic) in which you encountered more stress or were more protected than others?*
    - *Possible probe: Were there any stressors or protective factors related to your racial identity as Black/African American? Or as a female?*

<u>Exosystem</u>

1. How would you describe the faculty environment within your program of study?
    - *Possible probe: Did faculty members collaborate together? Was there tension among faculty members?*
2. Is there diversity among faculty members? If so, describe the demographic breakdown?
3. Have you been involved in any collaboration projects with faculty members? If so, compare and contrast experiences working with different faculty members.

Mesosystem

1. Describe your relationship with faculty members within your program? Did you have a mentor or advisor or both?
    - *Possible probe: How did you develop a relationship with your mentor? Are they a faculty member within your program? Department? Outside department member? Professional community member?*
    - *Possible Probe: If not, did you want a mentor? If so, what would have helped you obtain a mentor?*

Microsystem

1. Describe the overall environment within your program of study?
2. Describe your experiences with other students within your program?
    a. *Possible probe: How did you manage/cope with those experiences? Did you ever experience being an outsider within your program? If so, how did you cope with that experience?*
    b. *Possible probe: What are examples of specific things you did to cope? Exercise? Eating habits? Sleep patterns? Drinking? Smoking? Sex behaviors? Drug use?*

Eco-map Guide

The purpose of the eco-map is to gather a visualization of the support networks that you utilize. You should have received a word document in your email. I would like for us to complete this together. There are several research-identified supports systems listed on the document. Take a moment to look at the document, and I would like for you to describe any additional support systems not listed.

Protective Factors

1. How did you establish a community of support outside your program of study?
2. Please describe how these support systems provided support to you as a graduate student.
3. Using the document, indicate the strength of the listed support systems within your experiences as a graduate school; more lines indicate greater strength of the support.

Now would you draw an arrow indicating the flow of energy between you and the support system?

APPENDIX C

Eco-map

APPENDIX D

Consent Form

Research Study: The interface of risks and protective factors among African American women in clinically focused graduate programs.

Purpose of the Study: Thank you for your interest in this study. The purpose of this study is to understand how African American women self-care and manage stress within clinically focused graduate programs. We want to learn what are important coping mechanisms to help African American women gain success completing graduate school. Your participation in this study will take approximately one and a half hour of your time.

How to Participate: Individual interviews will be conducted on your coping strategies and challenges experienced as a graduate student. You will participate in one-on-one individual interview. The interview will be audio recorded from beginning to end. You will be asked questions about your experience as a graduate student, challenges you experienced, and supportive networks. You may refuse to participate or withdraw your participation from the study at any time without penalty.

Risks/Discomforts and Benefits: There is the potential for minimal risk involved with participating in this study. You may experience psychological discomfort talking about issues that present as a challenge to you and your well-being (e.g., depression). You are able to take a break at any point during the interview or you may refuse to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable. If you do not want to be audio recorded from beginning to end, the interview will be stopped and will not move forward.

There are also some potential benefits. Your participation in this study may contribute to the larger community having a better understanding of stress management and how African American women cope with their experiences within graduate school.

Confidentiality: Your confidentiality will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. All interviews will be audio taped and later transcribed (typed word for word) by the researcher or transcriptionist. As audiotapes are transcribed (typed word for word), any identifying information (e.g., names of people) will be de-identified (e.g., 101). The data for this project will be identified with a code number. A list linking your name to the code number will be kept in a password-protected file. The tapes and transcriptions will be kept in password-protected files; access to the information will be limited to the researcher, the research team members and the Michigan State University Institutional Review Board (IRB). Michigan State University may review your research records. All research data for this study will be kept in password-protected files for a minimum of 3 years after the conclusion of the project. Transcripts of the interviews may be reproduced in whole or in part for use in presentations or written products related to the study. Neither your name nor other identifying information will be used in the presentations or written presentations.

Your rights to participate, say no, or withdraw: Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decline participation at any point during the study by simply telling the interviewer you no longer wish to participate. You may decline to answer specific questions at any time during the interview.

Compensation: Upon completion of the research study, two participants will be selected at random to win a gift card. Each winner chosen at random will receive a $50 gift card.

Rights and Complaints: If you have any questions or concerns about this research study, or if you believe you have been harmed because of this research study, please contact the researcher:

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If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu or regular mail at Olds Hall, 408 West Circle Drive #207, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824.

By placing a check in the appropriate boxes, you are indicating that you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. Also, that your questions have been answered and you are 18 years of age or older.

❑ By completing this interview, you are voluntarily agreeing to participate in this research study.

By indicating yes or no, you are agreeing or not agreeing to be audiotaped.
Please Respond: Yes No

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