COUNTER STORIES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES WHO ATTAINED A DOCTORAL DEGREE AT A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTION

A Dissertation by

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DEDICATION

As I sit in here today, writing my dedication page of my doctoral dissertation, I reflect on a life filled with many trials and tribulations. I know that if it was not for my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, none of this would be fathomable. He has surrounded my life with just enough positive people who believed in me when I never believed in myself. There will never be enough prayers to thank Him for the blessings he bestows upon me. Levi and Elizabeth Callis, my parents, I can’t imagine the courage it took to adopt, love and nurture a child unborn unto you. Through it all, I love you both! I dedicate this doctoral degree to my biological mother, Lois Jean Sorrell, who died birthing me unto this world. Her kindred spirit remains a cornerstone of my persistence throughout my doctoral candidacy and completion.

While others may have a single rock as his or her foundation, I have two. Those two are my children, Larry D. Callis Jr. and Lauryn Janae Callis. From birth, you both have added so much significance and meaning to my life. Through it all, it was those simple words from you both of “I love you dad” which quieted the storms, eased the tension, and brought a gleaming smile to my heart.

Aunt Sharron, I am gracious for the lifelong motherly love you have shown me since birth. The prayers, kind words of encouragement, and emails of inspiration were always sent in a timely manner whenever adversity would strike. Semyon Sims, my bro-cousin, you have been my best friend and whenever I needed you, you were always there without hesitation. You both truly are heavenly sent!
I am invisible. Misunderstood, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves fragments of their imagination- indeed, everything and anything except me.

Ralph Ellison, 1952
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First, I want to give humble gratitude to the seven African American male doctorates who entrusted me with the very sensitive and confidential sharing of their lived experiences. Together, we learned how the uniqueness of being an African American male doctoral student and how the impact of racism and negative stereotyping may influence identity and educational outcomes.

I would like to thank my chairperson and professor, Dr. Jean Patterson, for believing in me and supporting me throughout my doctoral candidacy. You are a great professor and mentor who really cares about your students. Your patience and relentless drive to transform students into future scholars, professors, and change agents deserves the highest accolade. I also want to thank those on my research committee, Claude Weathersby, Ronald Matson, Rhonda Lewis, and Chinyere Okafor for your service commitment, expertise, and feedback during this process.
ABSTRACT

This study examined the counter stories of African American Males, ages 36-61, who successfully earned a doctoral degree at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI). Critical inquiry was used to examine the worldviews of African American Male (AAM) doctoral students and their doctoral experience through the theoretical lenses of Critical Race Theory, Stereotype Threat, and Racial Identity. Data collection involved semi-structured interviews that gathered data through critical inquiries about these experiences from a post-degree perspective. African American Male doctoral degree attainment is a vital function of student success within a privileged educational paradigm. Results of the study demonstrated that AAM doctoral degree achievement is complex by his perceptions of racism, racial identity, and the issues of diversity at Predominantly White Institutions.
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CHAPTER 1

Research Problem

Educational achievement and degree attainment in American society have well-established links to life outcomes, such as enhanced life satisfaction and well-being (Chavous, Bernat, Schmeelk-Cone, Caldwell, Kohn-Wood, & Zimmerman, 2003). For many African American males (AAMs), however, the road to success in attaining a degree at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) is filled with various obstacles, including racism and negative stereotypes. Even more challenging for AAMs is attaining a doctoral degree, which is considered the pinnacle of educational achievement. This research explored successes and identified barriers to doctoral degree attainment for African American males (AAMs) who attended Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs).

The United States total population stands roughly at 304 million people. There are approximately 39 million African Americans in the U.S., which represents 12.9% of the population, with 19 million AAMs (6.3%) and 20 million African American females (6.6%) (U.S. National Center for Educational Statistics, 2010). The U.S. National Center for Educational Statistics reports a total of 64,000 doctoral degrees were awarded in 2008, of which, 16,000 went to White males and 20,000 to White females. Of the 3,906 African Americans (AA) who earned doctoral degrees, 2594 (66%) were females and only 1312 (34%) were males. In spite of AAs reaching this all time plateau, only 4.2% of all doctorates in 2008 were awarded to AAMs in contrast to 8% of all doctorates awarded to his AA female counterparts (U.S. National Center for Educational Statistics, 2010).

AAMs face challenges unique to him at the doctoral level in higher education by virtue of his social identity as AA, one that is influenced by racism and negative stereotyping. Racism and
negative stereotyping toward AAMs has been an endemic struggle throughout the history of the United States of America. Racism is defined as a powerful entity birthed by personal opinions of hatred and superiority and enforced as normal societal behavior. These behaviors are structured, taught, perpetuated, and enforced by the dominant group (Barndt, 1991). Racism is a prevalent part of American culture, deeply embedded through historical consciousness and ideological practices, which in turn has directly shaped the U.S. legal system and the ways people think about the law, racial categories, and privilege (Chavous, et al., 2003; Parker & Lynn, 2002).

The historical legacy of segregation has disallowed many AA communities upward mobility toward economic and political advancement. —Racial segregation, the fabric of racism, is an oppressive and disempowering force that renders groups of individuals politically and economically inept” (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995, p. 449). Crenshaw (1995) illustrates that racial segregation is the result of private and public actors, members of the dominant group; those with power and influence over subordinate groups, that operate together to create racially indentified space. Crenshaw defines racially identified space as physical space primarily associated with and occupied by a particular racial group. This space is a result of the combined efforts of public policy derived from private actors whose premises are based upon individual choices of racial superiority. Upon entry into a PWI, due to the lack of diversity, many AAMs have felt disengaged and disenfranchised within the university setting.

However, there are AAMs who attained their doctoral degrees from PWIs and have overcome many obstacles and managed to successfully attain their degrees. For example, Zanolini-Morrison (2010) conducted a study to capture the stories of students of color at a PWI: the feelings, thoughts, and behaviors to reveal the essence of that experience for those students and the meaning they attached to it. In the study, Zanolini-Morrison interviewed twenty students
of color, eight of whom were AAM. Zanolini Morrison’s research addressed the following questions and themes: (a) How do students of color describe their decision to attend a PWI? (b) How do students of color at a PWI describe their entry experience? And (c) How does attending a PWI change the lives of these students of color? AAMs in the study felt heavily frustrated about many of the situations they faced as students of color at a PWI, such as lack of respect for diversity and knowledge about AA culture. In spite of these frustrations, almost all of the candidates Morrison interviewed expressed their life changed in positive terms. Many AA students took proactive approaches to educate others about diversity. Social change occurred within them, as individuals, as they endured ignorance and prejudice. As a result, they developed tolerance, determination, and the ability to remanufacture their negative experiences into positive energy. This positive energy created a greater sense of independence, social mobility, and a greater appreciation for diversity. Attending a PWI resulted in them receiving a good education. A good education improves the lives of anyone who has earned one. The characteristics of a good education may include academic and social growth and the formation of individual creativity, along with the development of a large network of friends, family, and allies. In short, positive growth and development emerged as a clear and strong theme from students’ perceptions as students of color at a PWI (Zanolini-Morrison, 2010). Success also may come at the expense of those who do assimilate into the mainstream culture of a PWI in an attempt to avoid alienation. These individuals are often seen by members of their own race as having “sold out,” “acting White,” or abandoning their own cultural heritage in order to attain success (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986).
Theoretical Framework

I conjoined the usage of critical race theory (CRT), stereotype threat (ST), and racial identity as theoretical lenses to explore the experiences of AAM doctorates in connection with societal and institutional structures in order to analyze racism and inequities of the underrepresented (Cross & Vandiver, 2001; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Steele & Aronson, 1995). CRT scholars contend that barriers to access and opportunities exist among people of color because race is a significant factor in determining inequity in a U.S. society based on property rights (Bell, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 1993; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). For this study, I employed the theories of Critical Race Theory (CRT), Stereotype Threat (ST), and racial identity to examine the experiences of AAMs who attained doctoral degrees from PWIs. The tenets of each theory and how they apply to this study are described in the following sections.

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) is the broad theoretical framework used to inform this study. CRT originated from the realm of law and legal scholarship during the 1970s in reply to the failure of traditional civil rights litigation to produce meaningful racial reform and systemic change. Founders of the critical race theory movement included legal scholars and esquires such as Derrick Bell, Charles Lawrence, Lani Guinier, Richard Delgado, Mari Matsuda, Patricia Williams, and Kimberle W. Crenshaw (Bell, 1995). These legal scholars of color transcended CRT into a political scholarly movement by arguing: (a) racism is a social norm that has covertly shaped the political and legal infrastructure of American society that ensures racial superiority over marginalized ethnic groups; (b) CRT is a conceptual framework that utilizes narrative and storytelling from people of color as its premise to challenge issues of race; and (c) CRT pursues
a frontal assault against current legal and governmental practices to develop a society that is equitable and just (Bell, 1995). Their agenda has included affirmative action, school districting factored on race, freedom of speech, and disproportionate sentencing of racial minorities in the criminal justice system. The movement transcended from the courtrooms and has extended into the disciplines of education; ethnic studies, sociology, and women's studies (Taylor, 1998).

In 1995, CRT was introduced into the field of education by Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate to allow researchers to exercise CRT as a social justice tool for analyzing race and racism within historical and contemporary educational contexts (Yosso, Parker, Solórzano, & Lynn, 2004). Delgado (1993) stated that utilizing stories and counter stories was intended to create an improved understanding of race and racism. The expansion of CRT into education included a theoretically grounded approach that foregrounds race and racism in all aspects of the research process. However, it also challenged the separate discourses on race, gender, and class by (a) showing how these three elements interconnect to transform the experiences of students of color; (b) challenging the conventional research paradigms, texts, and theories used to explain the experiences of students of color; (c) offering a transformative solution to racial, gender, and class subordination; and (d) focusing on ethnicity, gender, and class experiences of students of color. Furthermore, it views these understandings as sources of strength and uses the interdisciplinary knowledge base of ethnic studies, women’s studies, sociology, history, humanities, and the law to improve the experience of students of color (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). CRT operates as a framework for identifying, analyzing, and transforming the structural and cultural aspects of education that maintain subordinate and dominate racial positions in and out of the classroom (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Solórzano and Yosso posited:
CRT advances a strategy to foreground and account for the role of race and racism in education and works toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of opposing or eliminating other forms of subordination based on gender, class, sexual orientation, language, and national origin. (p. 25)

Delgado (1989) asserted that most oppressive behaviors do not seem like oppression to the perpetrator. Instead, the dominant group justifies its actions by presenting reality constructs in a manner that justifies its privilege and reinforces these repressive actions.

Counter-stories by people of color can counter the reality constructs of the oppressor as well as illustrate a more vivid indicator of how oppression functions within society. Several forms of counter-storytelling are traditional in the African American, Chicano, Asian American, and American Indian communities: personal stories/narratives, other people’s stories/narratives, and composite stories/narratives (Delgado, Bernal & Villalpando, 2002). Taylor (1998) suggested CRT’s main strength is its usage of storytelling as a literary means to educate the effects of racism. Delgado (1993) stated that utilizing stories and counter stories is intended to create an improved understanding of race and racism. Counter storytelling proved relevant to this study, as I captured the narratives of seven AAMs who attained doctoral degrees from various PWIs across the United States.

**Stereotype Threat**

In addition to the psychological onset of racism, there exists an additional barrier assigned to the AAM deemed the stereotype threat. Steele and Aronson (1995) brought the term stereotype threat to the forefront of psychological research as a way to explain the poor performance of AA students taking the Graduate Record Examination (GRE). The theory of Stereotype Threat (ST) contends that although an AAM does not have to subscribe to negative
stereotypes; he may believe others believe these stereotypes about him, which may cause him to doubt his academic ability, social existence, and racial identity (Steele & Aronson, 1995). These effects may produce intense pressure to over achieve and not succumb to the threat of underachievement. When members of a group can be negatively stereotyped in a social situation, they carry an extra burden: their performance, good or bad, might be interpreted in terms of the prevailing racial stereotype (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Therefore, ST refers to a situation in which a member of a group fears that his or her performance will validate an existing negative performance stereotype, amassing undue stress and anxiety and a decrease in academic performance (Rydell, Shiffrin, Boucher, Van Loo, & Rydell, 2010). AAs may suffer performance differences due to socioeconomic disadvantages, segregation, and discrimination. Stereotype threats are transmitted throughout culture in a variety of ways, including mass media, environment, peers, and family. Regardless of class or socioeconomic status, ST can cause underperformance in AAMs (Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003). For AAMs who are involved in an educational setting, ST presents an additional obstacle of social and psychological alertness induced by negative racial stereotypes that can hinder AAM academic achievement while attending a PWI (Taylor & Antony, 2000).

The effects of a negative stereotype are not limited to the verbal and nonverbal methods that may permeate the effects. There is also standardized testing that contributes to the threats. Steele and Aronson’s original study, conducted in 1991, involved two groups of AA sophomores at Stanford University. One group was informed prior to taking the GRE that their scores would be indicative of their intelligence, while a different group of AAs were informed that the exam was simply a non-evaluative exercise in problem solving (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Participants who thought the exam was an instrument that measured their intelligence answered fewer
questions correctly than those who took the exam as a problem-solving indicator. These findings supported the basic tenets of Steele and Aronson’s (1995) stereotype threat. Regardless of class or socioeconomic status, AAMs are susceptible to ST (Perry, et al., 2003). For AAMs in an educational setting, ST can present an insurmountable amount of social and psychological hyper-alertness induced by negative racial stereotypes that can hinder academic achievement (Taylor & Antony, 2000).

**Racial Identity**

The racial identity segment of the framework was used in conjunction with stereotype threat to explain how race can influence the developmental process of AAMs who earned doctoral degrees at PWIs. Racial self-esteem refers to how an AAM may feel about himself as an individual, or as a member of the AAM population (Porter & Washington, 1979). The specific theory of racial identity used, is the Cross Model of Negro to Black Conversion Experience, or Nigrescence (1978). Cross defined nigrescence as the process of becoming Black. In his view, Blackness took on a new identity upon the advent of the socio-political civil rights movements of the 1960’s and 1970’s, and occurs in three identity clusters (Vandiver, Fhagen-Smith, Cokley, Cross, & Worrell, 2001).

The first identity cluster called pre-encounter, has three subcategories, pre-encounter assimilation, pre-encounter miseducation, and pre-encounter black self-hatred (Cross & Vandiver, 2001). Pre-encounter assimilation describes the AAM whose racial identification is organized around a sense of being more of an American and an individual. He places little or no significance on racial solidarity, and has willfully disengaged from the AA community and culture. Pre-encounter miseducation depicts an AAM who subscribes to the negative imageries, stereotypes, prejudices, and historical miseducation about AAs. Consequently, he sees little or no
desire to engage in any involvement in the AA community. The final phase, pre-encounter black self-hatred, suggests the culmination of his experience may produce profound negative feelings and severe self-loathing due to being identified as an AAM (Cross & Vandiver, 2001).

The second racial identity cluster is concerned with immersion-emersion identity types. In the first stage of immersion-emersion, the AAM is almost consumed with anti-White sentiments. He is deeply entrenched into AA culture and separates himself from anything dealing with White society. In immersion-emersion, it is suggested that the individual becomes almost obsessed with AA pride filled with ethnocentric values (Cross & Vandiver, 2001).

The last racial identity cluster, internalization, is comprised of three identity types: internalized nationalist, internalized biculturalist, and internalized multiculturalist. An internalized nationalist stresses an Afrocentric perspective about himself, other African Americans, and the world. Typically, these individuals are fully engaged in the AA community without any anti-White sentiment. An internalized biculturalist is an African American who fully ascribes to being both AA and American without reluctance of exuding varied ideals. Finally, an internalized multiculturalist represents the AAM whose identity fuses between two or more social categories or frames of reference, and is interested in resolving issues that address multiple oppressions and is confident and comfortable in multiple groups (Cross & Vandiver, 2001). Racial identity is vital in understanding AAM doctoral candidates and graduates from PWIs. A potential outcome of understanding racism and self identity amongst AAMs may produce further indicators to increase retention and representation of AAM doctorates at PWIs, which was paramount to this study.
Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The researcher collected and analyzed data on the perceptions of seven AAMs who attained their doctoral degree at a PWI. The data included contextual issues and challenges of AAM experiences while obtaining a doctoral degree at a PWI. This body of work is significant to all stakeholders within the university system who provide teaching, mentoring, and scholarship to support or enhance doctoral candidacy and degree completion. Further, from a theoretical perspective, this research expands the discussion about AAM identity, and how it may impact success in academia through the use of CRT, stereotype threat, and racial identity.

The goal of this qualitative study was to provide data for future investigators who examine issues about increasing the success of AAMs preparing for doctoral candidacy. This study posed the following research questions about the perceptions of AAM academics who attained a doctoral degree at a PWI:

1. What are the perspectives of AAMs who graduated from a PWI of racism and racial identity on their doctoral success?

2. What are the perspectives of AAMs who graduated from a PWI on how stereotype threats did or did not affect their doctoral success?

3. How might the success and achievement of AAMs who graduated from a PWI assist other AAMs who may experience racism achieve their doctoral degree?

In examining the lived experiences of AAMs who pursued and earned doctoral degrees from PWIs, this research explored factors that contributed to their recruitment, retention, degree attainment, and ultimately upward career mobility and success while also identifying the factors that may have contributed to negative self imagery, barriers to success, and ultimately attrition. Also, the exploration of the participants‘ unique lived experiences into a body of literature will
better prepare other AAMs and PWIs for the challenges that could possibly lie ahead. In explaining the experiences of AAMs who attended PWIs, this study aims to provide information to increase an understanding of how the roles of identity, racism, negative stereotyping, social and cultural capital, and persistence strategies impact the his journey towards academic excellence through the acquisition of his doctoral degree from PWIs.
CHAPTER 2

Review of the Literature

African American Male (AAM) experiences greatly differ from members of any other ethnic group. Although many ethnic groups have experienced discrimination and oppression in the United States, the form of oppression that AAMs have faced is unique. This literature review synthesized the research on stereotype threat and its influence on AAM racial identity. The review also included research on stereotype threat and AAM racial identity, historical contexts of the AAM stereotype through mass media, the campus climate in which AAMs are involved, and concludes with strategies that might facilitate successful completion of a doctoral degree completion from a PWI.

Research on Stereotype Threat and AAM Racial Identity

Self-concept and racial identity are social products, determined by the attitudes and behavior of others toward individual(s) (Porter & Washington, 1979). Because many AAMs have been the victims of prejudice, it has been assumed that low self-esteem may result from his subordinate status. The research tradition on black self-image has continuity with literature on the personality patterns of other ethnic groups. Within the past decade, however, many of the standard theoretical assumptions in this body of research have been questioned. Stereotype threat is one theory that challenges these assumptions.

Stereotype threat negatively affects minorities through hyperawareness of their race/ethnicity when placed in a position where their performance could be judged as confirming or disconfirming a negative stereotype. Stereotype threat (ST) states that minority students underperform due to the societal pressures and stigmas placed upon them by negative stereotypes (Steele & Aronson, 1995). The ST theory contends that AAMs do not have to subscribe to
stereotypes; he may believe others subscribe to these negative stereotypes about him, which may produce causal effects to doubt his self and racial identity. Stereotype threat can be thought of as situational discomfort AAMs may feel when they are at risk of behaving in a way that may fulfill a negative stereotype about their ethnicity.

Education scholars have used the theory of stereotype threat to produce a considerable amount of research. Stereotype threat research has suggested that members of a stereotyped group can have decreased academic performance by increasing mental ideations of failure (Steele & Aronson, 1995). One study (Fleming, 1984) revealed that AAM college students distinguished themselves as socially insignificant and devalued. Fleming introduced the term *competitive rejection* to describe the ways in which AAMs, upon entry to college, perceived themselves as insignificant in comparison with other students regardless of race and gender. Fleming posited that AAMs are unable to maintain controlled feelings of detachment at a PWI due to their stigmatized social identity.

As critical theorists and culturally sensitive researchers, how do we examine how racial attitudes impact performance in a realm where the presence of stereotypes are either high or low? In their study, Aronson, Davis, & Salinas (2006) examined how AA racial identity attitudes acted upon intellectual performance in potential stereotype threatening environments by creating low and high stereotype threat situations. In a later study, Aronson, et al. (2006) hypothesized that individuals who have *internalized* racial identity attitudes would predict higher scores on the GRE items where the stereotype threat was lowest. The study’s full participants were a total of 98 AA undergraduates from two large American PWIs, located in the southwestern and western coasts, who were enrolled in ethnic studies and psychology courses. Their study utilized Cross and Vandiver's (2001) Pre-counter, Immersion-Emersion, and Internalization identity clusters.
Low threatening situations were described as commonplace environments where social threats are ambiguous and high threatening situations were those where social threats are blatant (Aronson, et al., 2006). In the low threat condition, Pre-encounter and Immersion-Emersion status attitudes were associated with decreased performance on the task (Davis, et al., 2006). The results of the study suggested that individuals with a high predisposition toward Pre-encounter status attitudes were most vulnerable to the effects of stereotype threat because they believed many of the negative stereotypes suggested about AAs. For the opposite reason, individuals strongly endorsing Immersion-Emersion status attitudes were also at risk due to individuals' disbelief in the negative stereotype about AAs. In addition, these individuals‘ faced a much higher risk of threat vulnerability due to their strong ethnocentric values and attachment to being AA. Unlike the original Steele and Aronson (1995) study, this used sample items from the GRE, the test items in the Aronson, et al (2006) study were race specific such as; “I believe that White people look and express themselves better than Blacks,” “I feel an overwhelming attachment to Black people,” and “A person’s race usually is not important to me.” Upon answering these questions through a Likert scale method, the evidence revealed strong parallels to the Cross and Vandiver (2001) identity clusters. The Cross and Vandiver (1978; 2001) typology stated Internalization identities (strong AAM identity) are free from negative stereotype vulnerability and should serve as protection because he neither endorses nor attempts to disprove the negative stereotypes. In stark contrast, the Aronson, et al (2006) study concluded that AAMs who possess Internalization attitudes did not predict academic performance in a high stereotype-threatening environment.

Newer, more innovative methods are needed to research acculturation and achievement scores. In a study conducted at a Midwestern PWI, Green, Bischoff, Coleman, Sperry, and
Robinson-Zañartu (2007) sought a more intuitive nontraditional method to explain the relationships between acculturation and achievement scores of African American college students. Their study was designed to examine the achievement gap using unique methods of understanding AAM academic achievement. The idea of acculturation was used to explore ways AAMs may mediate their identity within a PWI for successful degree completion. Acculturation is the process whereby an AAM may participate in the cultural traditions, values, beliefs, and practices of the dominant culture (PWI), while remaining immersed in his own culture, and participate in both cultures (internalized biculturalist) (Green, et al., 2007; Vandiver, et al., 2001). Similar to the Davis (1994) study, participants were asked questions regarding their views on (a) religious beliefs and practices, (b) preference for things African American, (c) interracial attitudes, (d) family practices, (e) health beliefs and practices, (f) cultural stereotypes, (g) racial segregation, and (h) family values (Green, et al., 2007). Furthermore, analysis of answers to the questionnaire revealed that African Americans used stereotype-related words to complete word fragments with missing letters (e.g., ___ ce [race]; L A ___ [lazy]) when the test was perceived as a measure of one's intellectual ability rather than a problem-solving task (Green, et al., 2007), while their White counterparts created fewer stereotype-laden words.

Much of the research on acculturation and test performance has focused on intelligence test performance; however, few studies exist in the area of acculturation and achievement test performance. When interviewed, AA students reported less interest in activities, music, and personality dimensions that were stereotypical of their racial group under the stereotype threat condition. This condition may be presented as cultural mistrust. Cultural mistrust refers to African Americans’ mistrust of White Americans and traditional institutions of White American society, such as education, interpersonal relations, business and work, and politics and law.
Cultural mistrust may have a more significant affect on behavior than stereotype threat (Steele, 1999). This kind of mistrust can be defined as a derivative or direct result of Cross and Vandiver’s (2001) immersion and emersion identity cluster. In sum, cultural mistrust and stereotype threat appeared to have played a significant role in the participants’ responses, as they related to identity and achievement outcomes.

**Obama Effect**

Past research on stereotype threat and role model effects has suggested the existence of an “Obama effect” on AA standardized test performance, whereby the election of the United State’s first AA President, Barack Obama, could positively affect performance among AA students (Aronson, Jannone, McGlone, & Johnson-Campbell, 2009). Could the mere presence of President Obama’s success potentially alleviate stereotype threat and improve performance? A sample of 80 undergraduate students from three American universities took a rigorous verbal test with questions derived from the Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT) and 24 verbal, reasoning, and comprehension items from the Graduate Record Exam (GRE) (Aronson, et al., 2009). Within each testing session, participants were randomly assigned to receive one of three versions of the test booklet (Obama condition, McCain condition, and American Politician [control group]), which contained a cover sheet, the experimental manipulation, the test instructions, and the test. The survey was designed to prompt participants to think about either Barack Obama (Obama condition), John McCain (McCain condition), or neither of the two (control condition) (Aronson, et al., 2009). In the Obama condition, three small color photos of Obama were printed on the top of the sheet, which was a replica of a Time magazine cover, a second showed him posing at the Capitol building, and a third displayed him smiling while giving a public address. In the McCain condition, photos of McCain were presented in similar
fashion on the top of the pages of the test. Under the photos, a series of quotes was presented, taken from transcripts of political speeches, press conferences, and interviews. Quotes were explicitly chosen to be ideologically indistinct, so that party identification could not be detected. These quotes were taken from the Obama campaign in the Obama condition, McCain in the McCain condition, and a generic American politician in the control condition (Aronson, et al., 2009). Participants were instructed to generate positive things about his or her choice to elect Obama or McCain into the White House. In the control condition, participants were asked to generate two positive things about being politically informed. Aronson, et al (2009) designed this study to induce the participants to focus on their political qualities alone.

The results of the experiment predicted racial salience of an AAM president is inadequate to eliminate the stereotype threat experienced by students. Moreover, stereotype threat is deeply embedded not only in perceptions of one’s social group, but in social experiences and self-identity as well (Aronson, Fried, & Good, 2002; Davis, et al., 2006; Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002). Therefore, the election of an African American male president is not enough to overcome stereotype threat among AAMs.

**Historical Context of the AAM Stereotype through Mass Media**

The historical onset of oppression through societal stereotypes and racial segregation has produced a profound effect upon AAMs ability to successfully complete a doctoral degree at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) of higher education. For the purpose of this study, stereotyping is defined as the practice of assigning predetermined categorizations of an entire group of people on the basis of race, gender, religion, ethnicity or sexual orientation without due knowledge of those people (Kanahara, 2006). As discussed, racial stereotypes were used to justify legal segregation and subjugation of African Americans.
Legal segregation had been systemic throughout the Jim Crow South. Mays (2001) characterized three purposes for legal or de jure segregation: (a) segregation places a legal badge of inferiority that deems persons morally, mentally, and socially unfit through systemic denial of equal treatment in areas of American life; (b) segregation is designed for those persons to accept his or her inferior status as a means of normalcy, and (c) segregation has caused psychological damage of epic proportions on today’s AAMs. Racial segregation has been exercised in books, laws, courts, schools, churches, employment, housing, and banking. The effects or racial stigmas through mass media and science have produced profound effects of fear or threat of inferiority of which many AAMs may never overcome (Mays, 2001). Because they are members of a visible minority group on campus, AAMs at PWIs must often be aware of potential negative stereotypes and impressions held by Whites, the dominant racial group (Brown, 2010; Cross & Vandiver, 2001; Steele, et al., 2002).

Two highly acclaimed instruments of such were D.W. Griffith’s 1915 silent film, Birth of a Nation and more recently Herrnstein and Murray’s controversial book The Bell Curve, which argued that intelligence and race were genetically linked. Ethnocentric monoculturalism (EM) is defined as an individualistic, group, institutional, and cultural expression of the superiority of one’s cultural heritage (Sue, 2004). Sue (2003) posited that EM creates a strong belief in the superiority of one group’s cultural heritage, history, values, language, beliefs, religion, traditions, arts, and crafts. EM can be discerned in everything from classical fairy tales to popular film. Throughout U.S. history, the practice of EM has used the vehicle of mass media to vilify AAMs with negative stereotypes that desecrate his intellectual capabilities and social existence through the purveyance of historical films and narratives.
Birth of a Nation (Birth) is described as a cinematic symbol for edifying negative stereotypes of AAMs. Birth was enthusiastically endorsed by President Woodrow Wilson in 1914, was viewed by millions of Americans, and ignited negative stereotypes of epic proportions. The film depicted the AAM as a hypersexual animal-like rapist of White women and AAMs as intellectually incompetent beings who were only controlled by the emergence of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) (Rogin, 1985). The Civil War of 1865 ravaged the United States and divided it into two separate worlds. Filmmaker D.W. Griffith credited the KKK for “reuniting America in its proper place” (p. 151). Their White dress attire symbolically paid homage to the ghosts of the Confederate dead (Parsons, 2005). Birth’s depiction of a nation filled with freed Negroes instilled fear and hostility toward AAs and led to the rebirth of the modern KKK (Rogin, 1985). The Klan (a paramilitary group) was founded by General Nathan Bedford Forrest in Nashville, TN on April 11, 1867. Gen. Forrest was instrumental in the enactment of the Institution of Chivalry, Humanity, Mercy, and Patriotism, a radical code of ethics that called for the protection of southern Whites, especially White women, by inflicting threat and terror towards AA (e.g. cross-burnings, hangings, murders, and bombings) in efforts to preserve the antebellum (pre-Civil War) culture and way of life in America (Newton, 2010).

Negative stereotypes were therefore based in what is known as the plantation illusion. This illusion illustrated the Reconstruction Era (post civil war) as an age in which slavery should remain the absolute means to afford prominence among White America, a life of wealth at the expense of AAMs existing as loyal, faithful, happy slaves (Carter, 1960). The major premise of the South’s declination was Union soldiers’ corruption of freed slaves, who were considered untrustworthy, evil, ungrateful beings (Carter, 1960). The plantation illusion is further represented by dual phenomena, both of which are attempted rapes of blonde White women, one
by a Northern Negro, and the other by the mulatto, Silas Lynch (Rogin, 1985). The mulatto is portrayed as a direct result of low class White women mating with male Negroes. Historical data, in contrast, contended the mulatto was the offspring of Negro woman by the White slave master. Birth of a Nation manifested many of these sexual fears that represented the southern or rape myth typology of AAMs (Sommerville, 1995). The rape myth constructed a guilt laden example by making the mulatto the evil force in the picture; edified all who viewed this film to view mulattoes as bestial and unable to control their Negro urges while maintaining societal privileges of their Whiteness. Birth portrayed Reconstruction legislation legalizing miscegenation, marriage of Negroes and Whites, with Negroes portrayed in the film carrying signs reading "Equal rights, equal marriage" (Griffith, 1915). In stark contrast to this myth, Sommerville (1995) pointed to many accounts of White women being left alone on southern plantations with slaves for months, and even years without reports of rape or sexual assault. Nonetheless, sexual anxiety about Black men led to the belief of White fears of the AAM, as a rapist, grew out of the slave experience and persists in today’s society (Rogin, 1985).

Formally educating AAMs was viewed as dangerous activity by so-called academics in the post-Reconstruction South. Sommerville cited an article published in 1900 by University of Georgia professor and Baptist clergyman, John Roach Straton, who posed the question, "Will education solve the race problem?" (Sommerville, 1995, p. 487). Straton’s article correlated the educational advancement of Negros with the increase in crime rates. He argued that education made Blacks sexually dangerous and provided the underpinnings for political action and segregation of Black southerners in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Straton stated, "Interracial rape was not simply the assault on a White woman by a Black man; it was
forced sex between a Black man and a White woman because most Southerners assumed that a White woman would never yield voluntarily to a Black man” (Sommerville, 1995, p. 518).

Contemporary scholars have argued this historical legacy of mass media assault on AAMs remains today. The medium has changed, but the message remains the same. Black feminist scholar hooks (2004) shared her view of mass media and its role in perpetuating internalization of racial inferiority:

Most Black thinkers acknowledge that internalized self hatred is more pronounced now than it was when the economic circumstances of Black people were far worse, when there was no social integration. Too late, progressive Black people and our allies in struggle learned that legalized racial integration would not change White supremacist perspectives. Since anti-racist individuals did not control mass media, the media became the primary tool that would be used and is still used to convince Black viewers and everyone else of Black inferiority. (p. 78)

Black inferiority through cinematic images may be argued as satirist entertainment simply to generate revenue or public fascination with the AAM. How does one argue the fortification of this inferiority in the name of scientific research? Herrnstein and Murray’s (1994) best-selling book *The Bell Curve* was a contemporary reassertion of scientific racism. Scientific racism employed scientific principles and expertise to support inequality of race, religion, gender, class, sexualities, and physical or mental capacity (Gormley, 2009). *The Bell Curve* asserted that intelligence is a genetic predisposition, fixed, and distributed unequally across ethnic groups, as represented by a single measure of cognitive ability (general intelligence). General intelligence was believed to be predictive of life success, and was not substantially affected by education, health care, or
other governmental programs (Darling-Hammond, 1995). As a result, Herrnstein and Murray (1994) asserted that government programs and interventions were ineffective and a waste of tax dollars. *The Bell Curve* has been decried as a “voluminous study about the assumed inherited intelligence differential between persons of African and European descent” (Hall, 2001, p. 108). Many scholars chose to ignore much of the last several decades' progress in understanding human intelligence and performance, as well as the vast amount of educational research that has documented the historic and continued inequalities in educational opportunities for poor children and children of color (Darling-Hammond, 1995). The evidence accrued that social inequalities can be attributed to performance gaps among groups and the data has illustrated the dramatic effects of good teaching and decent schooling on the educational performance and later life success of all children, especially those whose families have been historically disadvantaged (Darling-Hammond, 1995).

Some scholars claimed that due to genetic inferiority, government programs were ineffective, because one cannot change a genetic predisposition. Herrnstein and Murray (1994) claimed that IQ tests measure intelligence and those of AA ethnicity averaged ten to fifteen points lower than White Americans strictly due to their genetic inferiority. The Scarr (1978) study, conducted in Philadelphia, PA, administered an IQ test to 350 AAs. In addition, the subjects agreed to give blood samples, which measured each person’s African and European ancestry. The results revealed that AAs with European ancestry did no better or worse on the exam than AAs with more African ancestry, which illustrated genetic differences, did not predetermine intelligence. One can only wonder why, in spite of evidence to the contrary, researchers like Murray and Herrnstein have continued to pursue this research agenda.
Legitimizing Myths

*Birth of a Nation* and *The Bell Curve* resulted from a social paradigm of legitimizing myths (LMs), which is the process where individuals or groups may or may not endorse and support a system of group-based social hierarchy. LMs consist of attitudes, values, beliefs, stereotypes, and ideologies that provide moral and intellectual justification for social practices within a social system (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Sidanius & Pratto posited, “The purpose of LMs in a social system is to maintain, increase, or decrease social inequality among groups” (p. 104). LM is premised on four factors: **consensuality**, **embeddedness**, **certainty**, and **meditational strength**. **Consensuality** referred to the degree in which social imageries and ideologies are shared within a social system. **Embeddedness** suggested these myths are strongly ingrained with and supportive of ideological, religious, or other components of culture (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). For example, the color black is often associated with evil, sin, filth, depravity, and fear (i.e. black magic, blackballing, the philosophical parallel of black as ignorance, black plague) (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999, p. 47). **Certainty** referred to the moral, religious, or scientific support of such myths (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Finally, **meditational strength** posited a direct relationship exists between the desire to establish and maintain social hierarchies and of social policies that strengthen, weaken, or maintain system structure. A given belief, attitude, opinion, or expression can be classified as a LM if it has a meditational relationship between the desire for social dominance and support for the group’s policies (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). *Birth of a Nation* and *Bell Curve* represent cinematic and literary constructs of racism that have validated the hegemony and legitimizing myths of AAM inferiority.
Role and Campus Climate of a PWI

In the attempt to offer quality education, some scholars argued different philosophies and pedagogies were needed to balance between academics and community interests. However, the interests and needs of AAMs attending PWIs were rarely considered and little effort was made to understand their unique experiences.

PWIs have always played a significant role in post secondary education, as they sought to promote social responsibility, political awareness, and economic stability (Riposa, 2003). Race, class, and gender diversity expanded and inner city residents began to gain more access to higher education opportunities made available through PWIs during the 1960s. For AAMs involved in an educational setting, ST presents an additional obstacle of social and psychological alertness induced by negative racial stereotypes that can hinder academic achievement (Taylor & Antony, 2000). While Cross and Vandiver’s (2001) research revealed that minorities undergo identity development in stages, for purposes of this literature review, I apply Thomas and Alderfer’s (1989) research on AA career development to demonstrate the stages AAMs may face while attending a PWI. Those stages include: entry, adjusting, planned growth, and success. Entry represents the beginning of an AAM’s relationship with the university. He may assume his acceptance into a doctoral program without due knowledge of course requirements, or class and professor expectations (Thomas & Alderfer, 1989). Adjusting is established by two sub-categories; dissatisfaction and frustration. In the dissatisfaction stage, he becomes aware of the lack of mobility at a PWI and unequal treatment between Blacks and Whites on campus. In the frustration stage he develops low self-esteem and distrust of Whites, which may exude an attitude of anti-White militancy. In the third stage, planned growth, the individual learns to channel his frustrations and emotions into a more positive fashion. Consequently, he learns how
to adapt to the university and develop partnerships with Whites that will enable his success. In the fourth and final stage, success, he learns from all his experiences in previous stages and redefines his sense of self. This consciousness is very similar to that of Cross and Vandiver’s (2001) *internalized multiculturalist*, where an AAM continues to refine interpersonal skills and other communicative functions that are eclectic and pertinent towards degree completion (Thomas & Alderfer, 1989). This model can be very useful in understanding AAMs pursuit of doctoral degrees at PWIs and the need to focus on recruiting, mentoring, and retaining AAM doctoral students at a PWI, which is paramount to the current study.

Data has shown that AAMs often feel isolated, marginalized, and invisible in U.S. society. This could be the reason large numbers drop out of high school and never seek higher education at colleges and universities (Nealy, 2009). There are numerous negative views about AAMs such as racism, stereotyping, and other beliefs that add to the problem. Colleges with a low population of AAM students tend to make great efforts to ignore the fact that their AAM students have low academic performance (Nealy, 2009). They believe that talking about it will only add to the problem. Some colleges believe that letting the public know their AAM students have low academic performance will discourage other AAMs from attending their school. Douglass S. Massey, a professor of Sociology at Princeton, said the low performance of AAM students is an embarrassment for most schools and they do not know how to approach it (Nealy, 2009). Others believe that creating programs to reach out to AAMs will be synonymous to stereotyping them and further reinforce the notion that AAMs are low performers. Nealy (2009) believes the term “Black male” should be dismissed altogether and race should be taken out of the equation, and issues such as poverty and oppression should be the main focus.
The argument is the environments of AAMs have affected their outlook on seeking higher education. Steele (1995) suggested the psychological burden of stereotype threat might account for the racial achievement gap. AAMs who attended predominantly AA public schools were less likely to have positive influencers who sought higher education, compared to those in predominantly White public schools, who had a more positive outlook on higher education. Research has shown that AAMs raised in environments with more diverse populations, like in the state of Vermont, tend to graduate at rates almost equal to White students (Nealy, 2009). In states where the population of AAMs is larger and education expectations are lower, like the state of Louisiana; AAMs tend to graduate at lower rates.

This research along with stereotype threat and racism is a compilation of a psychological stressor that AAMs have to contend along with the pressures of success in a society that may deem them unsuccessful. AAMs carry the psychological distress of two negative social identities as they move through society, one as a member of the AA race and the other as a Black male (i.e., Black misandry or anti–Black male attitudes and oppression) (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007). John H. Jackson, the president of Scott Foundation for Public Education, put forth the belief that segregation is the main cause of AAMs’ low academic performance (Schmidt, 2008). Smith, Allen, & Danley (2007) identified racial battle fatigue as a framework for examining social psychological stress responses (e.g., frustration; anger; exhaustion; physical avoidance; psychological or emotional withdrawal; escapism; acceptance of racist attributions; resistance; verbally, nonverbally, or physically fighting back; and coping strategies) associated with being an AAM attending a PWI.

In addition, AAMs have come to be known as one of the most disengaged populations on college and university campuses. Cuyjet (1997) found that AAMs devoted less time to studying,
note taking, writing and revising papers, and class participation as compared to AA females who were more engaged in campus activities, served on more campus committees, and held more leadership positions at their institutions. AAM students, like many other students of color at PWIs, are expected to experience psychological stress and have issues with college adjustment (Steele & Aronson, 1995; Taylor & Antony, 2000). AAMs’ sense of belonging at PWIs can fall due to the constant reinforcement of racist stereotypes that stigmatize them as dumb jocks, criminals, affirmative action beneficiaries of admission, and underprepared “at-risk” students who were raised in low-income families and urban ghettos (Cuyjet, 1997; Smith, et al., 2007; Solorzano, et al., 2000). Moreover, there is an erroneous assumption that successful AAMs were socially disconnected from their same-race male peers and thus accused of “acting White” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986).

**Promising Practices at PWIs**

What are PWIs doing to help their AAM students? Some have created outreach programs that focus on getting AAMs to college and retaining them. Derrick Greenwade, an AAM doctoral student at Ohio State University, recalled his mentorship process lacking leadership and direction (Nealy, 2009). Colleges have tried to improve their mentoring programs for AAMs for the purpose of support, guidance, and retention. Derrick Greenwade, PhD is now a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor and stated he was happy about the changes his university made to keep AAMs in school. In 2002, Ohio State University (OSU) created programs that resulted in increases in their second year retention rate of AAM students. In 2005, Ohio State University opened the Todd Anthony Bell National Resource Center, which deals with the academic, leadership, and growth of specialized programs that have had positive effects on AAM students.
Numerous AAMs raised in predominantly Black families in impoverished neighborhoods have successfully sought higher education, specifically in doctoral degree programs. Mr. Harper, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania, spent three years studying over 200 academically successful AAM undergraduates at 42 public and private schools (Schmidt, 2008). He reported that more than half of them came from low-income and working class families. Schmidt stated more AAMs have chosen to seek higher education, but they still lag behind their White male counterparts as well as AA females. The gap between White males and AAMs is decreasing due to outreach programs created by some colleges, which have created a more positive environment for those seeking a higher education. African-American males have been continually making strides to overcome the barriers that have discouraged higher education; however other groups such as Asians have continued to rise at staggering rates (Nealy, 2009).

Furthermore, AAM doctoral students require extensive and deliberate socialization into university politics. An individual‘s first experiences as a new and developing doctoral student influences their future success as a graduate student (Cole & Arriola, 2007). This is accomplished through academic preparation, practical experiences in the field, and intentional networking with tenured professors in the field willing to help develop competence. These experiences together influence the socialization process of a member into a profession. Cole and Arriola posited that acculturation during graduate school included both academic and social integration. They defined acculturation as the process of maintaining the cultural heritage and identity of one‘s own ethnicity while learning and navigating relations within the culture of the majority group.
Faculty Mentorship

AAM doctoral students’ progress towards degree completion is a journey filled with many barriers and obstacles. The research about AAM degree attainment has revealed low rates of completion (Felder, 2010). A substantial cause of these low rates can be linked to low representation of faculty of color (Gasman, Gerstl-Pepin, Anderson-Thomkins, Rasheed, & Hathaway, 2004). This is prominent in the culture and politics of a PWI. Low representation of faculty of color adjoined with historical legacies of exclusion within PWIs can breed systems of alienating educational environments for the AAM (Gasman, et al., 2004). In these educational environments the stakes for increasing social capital becomes higher with smaller numbers of AAMs being acculturated in the nation’s best PWIs. AAM doctoral development, the transformation whereby AAM graduate students evolve into emerging scholars, is a process where all faculty members can have tremendous influence to enhance the likelihood of success (Felder, 2010; Green, et al., 2007).

During graduate studies, an AAM may have difficulty locating the right faculty adviser; one who can mentor his professional development and shape his disciplinary identity during graduate student socialization experiences (Gasman, et al., 2004). Faculty mentoring has been characterized as, “activities and interactions that may be related to work, skill acquisition, and social or emotional aspects of the mentor or the protégé” (Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001, p. 551). This relationship has been addressed as a critical function in the doctoral experience and can be viewed as one of the few formal mechanisms in this process (Nettles & Millett, 2006). The nature of faculty mentorship is one of the strongest factors determining AAM doctoral success. Depending on a student’s experience with a faculty member, embracing the idea of doctoral study alone can be challenging in itself. The adjustment to graduate school can be
difficult. According to Bowen and Rudensein (1992), attrition during the first year of graduate school accounts for nearly one-third of all doctoral student attrition. The first year of doctoral study presents many challenges and is one of the greatest barriers to completion. Mentoring by an adviser can also affect how a doctoral student is socially adjusted to the doctoral process. The adjustment process during one’s adaptation or acculturation is critical to the learning process (Cole & Arriola, 2007; Green, et al., 2007; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1993). In discussing mentoring as an important aspect of the faculty-student relationship, Cole and Arriola (2007) asserted a significant difference between mentored and non-mentored newcomers emerged. Doctoral students with mentors were able to learn more about organizational issues and practices compared to non-mentored doctoral students (Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1993). One could conclude that faculty mentoring increases the likelihood of AAM doctoral student success.
CHAPTER 3

Research Design and Methodology

Critical race methodology was used to capture and examine the counter stories and narratives of lived experiences of AAMs who earned doctorates from PWIs. Because much of society’s majoritarian worldviews of the AAM are influenced by negative stereotypes, using critical race methodology allowed narratives of counter storytelling to expose, analyze, and challenge legitimized myths of racism (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Critical race methodology contextualized lived experiences in the past, present, and future with innovative methods to unsilence the voices of people of color who have been traditionally silenced (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Culturally sensitive research approaches for African Americans facilitated cultural knowledge of both the researched and the researcher (Tillman, 2002). Participants shared their stories as a way to reveal a deeper meaning of their lived experiences (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Additional topics in this chapter included the data collection strategies; how participants were selected, and data analysis and interpretation.

Research Design

Qualitative research methods were the best approach to gather information for this study. Qualitative research functions under the key supposition that individuals’ reality within their social world constructs meaning (Merriam, 2002). It is a form of social inquiry that focuses on the way people interpret and make sense of experiences in the world in which they live. In essence, qualitative research is vested in understanding an individual’s interpretation of the world and their lived experiences within it (Merriam, 2002). Qualitative research also involves a scholarly interpretation of naturalistic reflexive inquiry in studying phenomenon and the meanings people attached to them. According to Creswell (2007)
Qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individual or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and the data analysis that is inductive and establishes patterns or themes. (p. 37)

In sum, qualitative research allows for the inclusion and compilation of data through case studies, personal experiences, life stories, interviews, observations, historical, document analysis, and interactions between investigator and participant (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The final written report generates a complex description of the problem as it extends scholarship or calls for action and social change (Creswell, 2007). In using a qualitative approach to this study, AAM doctorates were afforded the opportunity to express meanings in their own words allowing themes to emerge and be developed for analysis. All in all, the underlying assumption of qualitative research is primarily concerned with meanings and fieldwork of the researchers who mediate the informational discovery process with descriptive and inductive reasoning (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

**Critical Race Methodology**

CRT was employed as a means to contextualize and analyze the various experiences of seven AAM doctorates. Critical race theories advocate that minority shared experiences provide people of color with a unique voice to inform through their narratives (Crenshaw, et al., 1995; Delgado, 1989; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Because of the legacy of racism, educational attainment is challenging for AA students who attend PWIs (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). DeCuir and Dixson (2004) stated, “Given the insidious and often subtle way we examine the
educational experiences of AA students, CRT was a useful tool in which to explore such phenomena in which race and racism operate” (p. 26). DeCuir and Dixson strongly encouraged viewing race as the nucleus and demanded researchers critique practices and policies that are both overtly and passively racist, when examining the educational experiences of AA students.

The best methodology for the research was CRT. CRT was employed because of its foci on race while other methods may prove to conceal other aspects of differences that may serve to marginalize and oppress people of color (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Furthermore, the knowledge and experiences of AAMs are often blanketed under the categories of minorities, people of color, and so forth, which creates a highly suggestive need to consider research frameworks that can assist researchers to more fully capture AA experiences of triumphs and tragedies (Tillman, 2002).

Meanings gave the essential experiences and the processes through interpretations that define the experience. The qualitative research design for this study relied heavily on an interpretive approach, in which meanings were constructed through interactions with others (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). It is in the interaction with these combined influences where an individual constructs meaning and describes the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or phenomenon (Creswell, 2007).

Research heavily depends on the characteristics of the persons involved and their ethnic, mental, social, cultural, and historical make up and/or condition. Smith (1983) stated that complete objectivity and neutrality are impossible to achieve. In addition, the values of the researchers and participants are a vital component of the research, resulting in reflexivity. Creswell (2007) defined reflexivity as the means by which the researcher is conscious of biases, values, and experiences that he or she brings to a qualitative research study. Researchers should
describe, analyze, and discuss fundamentals of subjectivity. Subjectivity is described as experiences or scientific knowledge; (a) from different scientific and disciplinary contexts; (b) during different stages of the research process; (c) according to different types of knowledge as outcomes of the researchers' efforts they can be used a valued mechanism to enhance research (Bruer, Mruck, & Roth, 2002).

**Counter-storytelling**

CRT gives research a vivid richness of the lived experiences of those who are researched. An essential component of CRT is counter-storytelling (Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1995). Counter storytelling has been a vital feature of educational research employing CRT as a framework (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Delgado and Stefancic defined counter storytelling as a method of telling a story that aims to debunk legitimized myths held by majoritarian views which are deemed shallow. Delgado (1989) asserted there are three reasons for naming one's own reality: (a) reality is a social construction, (b) counter stories of people of color are mechanisms for psychic self preservation, and (c) the communication and narration of these stories help to eliminate ethnocentrism, that is, the belief one culture is superior to all others.

There are two facets of counter-storytelling: theoretical sensitivity and cultural sensitivity (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). The concept of theoretical sensitivity refers to the special insight and capacity of the researcher to interpret and give meaning to data (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Cultural sensitivity refers to the capacity of individuals as members of socio-historical communities to accurately comprehend the meaning of participants (Bernal, Bonilla, & Bellido, 1995). As an AAM researcher, the knowledge and meanings of the data were easily applied to the study because of the cultural interconnectedness between the participants and me. These
concepts were exercised, without duress, in order to provide sensitivity to meanings embedded in the narratives.

Furthermore, CRT scholars have contended that race neutrality has been a tool used to justify ignoring and dismantling race-based policies designed to address societal inequity (Parker & Lynn, 2002). As a result, Parker and Lynn argued that race neutral institutions foreground the fact that inequity, inopportunity, and oppression are simply historical; that is, issues associated with race are no longer relevant. Racism and bigotry, however, are not remedied by ignoring their existence in contemporary society (Parker & Lynn, 2002).

In this analysis, CRT methodology was employed to discuss the central issues of racial identity and negative stereotyping as derived from experiences of the participating AAM doctorates in this study. In order to fully utilize CRT in education, researchers must remain steadfastly critical of race, and how it evolves (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Critical race theorists have implied that race and stereotype threat should be the center of focus and charge researchers to critique university practices and policies that are both overtly and passively racist (Bell, 1995; Crenshaw, et al., 1995; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Steele & Aronson, 1995). CRT theorists have been cautioned to consider how their scholarship aids in the project of social justice and social change (Bell, 1995). CRT scholars in education have made important contributions to the field utilizing the counter-story and examining the permanence of racism (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004).

Traditional forms of research tend to conform to traditional voices which ignore the tenets of CRT. In sum, Carter (2003) argued for deploying CRT because; (a) it encourages researchers to challenge traditional narratives of majoritarian voice, (b) it is a valuable platform to name and interpret realities that have been misunderstood using other methodologies and (c)
CRT has an intrinsic applicability to change societal conception of truth and justice as opposed to other methods that are not linked to societal change.

**Researcher Positionality**

As an AAM, this study was significant to me for its detailed description that expressed a social issue that personally affects me. As my aforementioned literature review contended, my social experiences are unique by way of my own AAM identity and stigmatization through mass media as a social anomaly. Crotty (1998) claimed that critical theorists should work for social justice by constant challenging and questioning societal values and practices. The data collected in qualitative research is thick, rich, and deep, which often overrides the preconceived attitudes of the researcher. I have experienced passive, active, and aversive forms of racism in negative stereotype threatening situations in myriad environments throughout my 37 years of existence.

First, I was born in a small Texas town where de facto segregation thrived only in residential segments of town while the schools were fully integrated with ethnicities of all walks of life. The norms allowed us to become great friends, teammates, and family but only in the utopian realm of school boundaries. Interracial dating and intermingling in White neighborhoods were a common taboo. Throughout these times, I experienced many identities as mentioned by Cross’s (2001) Nigrescence model; pre-encounter, immersion-emersion, and internalized-multipiculturalist. Just like the students in the Zanolini-Morrison study (2010) I began to channel all my experiences of self hatred, anti-White sentiment, and appreciation of diversity into the striving interculturalist I am today. I believe being intercultural is a key to living a meaningful life in the current and future world. Being intercultural is about knowing how human diversity affects one’s identity, development, work competence, and life itself. Diversity encompasses both local and
global citizens (Maeker, Maeker, & Podratz, 2010). As a student athlete at a PWI, I formed a vast network of friends, allies, and colleagues from many different backgrounds and cultures.

My reflexivity and subjectivity were relevant to the call for culturally sensitive research that recognizes both race and ethnicity as core positions central to the research process. Tillman (2002) posed a theoretical framework for culturally sensitive research approaches for AAs premised on cultural congruence in research methods, phenomenology, anti-theoretical dominance, data interpretations, and informed theory and practice. Tillman’s framework can improve optional theories and methods of culturally informed research, theory, and practice. When research about African Americans is approached from a culturally sensitive perspective, the varied aspects of our culture and our varied historical and contemporary experiences are acknowledged (Tillman, 2002). Many scholars may criticize the legitimacy of my research because I am an AAM pursuing a doctoral degree from a PWI. Again, Creswell (2007) defined reflexivity as the means in which the researcher is conscious of biases, values, and experiences that he or she brings to a qualitative research study. Tillman (2002) asserted it is important for the researcher who has the cultural knowledge (subjectivity) to accurately interpret and validate the experiences of African Americans within the context of the phenomenon under study. My reflexivity and subjectivity was not a limitation but a vital asset that added strength to my study. “The ability to fully understand and interpret the story is linked between the researcher and the researched” (Carter, 2003, p. 31).

Participant Identification and Consent Procedures

The seven research participants were identified with the assistance of faculty and colleagues. Once identified, a Request for Participation form (Appendix A) was sent requesting their assistance, stating the information needed, and how it would be used. An Informed Consent
form (see Appendix B) was administered orally and written and was employed to gain final approval and to confirm their acceptance of participation in the study as prescribed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). All relevant guidelines were adhered to for protection of human subjects as defined by the IRB. Prior to participant contact, the study was approved for implementation with human subjects by the University Institutional Review Board.

**Data Collection, Analysis, and Interpretation**

Open-ended interview questions (both semi-structured and informal in depth) were the primary methods of data collection. I used a digital recorder to obtain and ensure interview data transcript accuracy. I explained to each participant the objectives of the investigation, which were verified from a thorough review of the literature. Interviews were conducted in 60 to 90 minute time frames. I kept a reflexive journal to document my descriptions, thoughts, and interpretations of the interviews.

I conducted in-depth interviews with seven AAMs who earned their doctorates from PWIs between 1995 and 2010. Purposeful sampling is a non-random method of sampling where the researcher selects information-rich cases for in-depth study. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research (Patton, 1990). All participants hailed across numerous educational fields and disciplines throughout the United States. Because most study participants were not local, the researcher conducted one-on-one recorded interviews with each participant via in-person and/or Skype videoconference. The usage of seven participants fell within the parameters of the recommended sample size of an in-depth qualitative study (Creswell, 2007).

In an effort to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon of AAM persistence strategies at a predominantly White institution, I developed a set of questions to guide the
interview process (see Appendix C for interview questions). The study revealed their struggles with racism, identity, and the persistence needed to overcome the various obstacles they encountered in order to complete their doctoral degrees.

One of the major hallmarks of conducting qualitative research is that data are analyzed continually, throughout the study, from conceptualization through the entire data collection phase and into the interpretation and writing phases (Creswell, 2007). The data were analyzed using components of critical narrative inquiry. Webster and Mertova (2007) declared the strength of this method allows the usage of both personal and social storytelling, which resulted in the compilations of my seven subjects stories in the framing of their doctoral experiences. True construction takes place when the narrator can delve into social phenomena and explore critical cultural contexts, thus creating critical narrative inquiry (Webster & Mertova, 2007). I assert the joint applications of CRT, stereotype threat, and racial identity were well equipped to address the cultural dynamics of critical life events while exploring the holistics of lived experiences in qualitative research.

Once data from the interviews were collected, all data was unitized and entered into a database created with Microsoft Office Excel 2007. I systematically conducted critical data analysis of narratives by coding for themes within the categories of my research questions—issues of racism, identity, and doctoral success from each participant’s perspective. As a result, I constructed a critical story from each participant’s interview in the form of a narrative that is designed to engage readers in critical reflection of the stories from personal, critical, and multicultural dispositions. Findings were interpreted by extracting themes and categories from the data pertinent to the concept of the perception of the AAM doctoral experience. From these
constant comparisons of categories and themes, I developed findings and conclusions related
directly to the research questions (Merriam, 1998).

Research Quality

After the interviews, I transcribed the audio recording into a Microsoft Word document
verbatim and e-mailed each individual transcript interview to the appropriate participant for their
review, verification, and validation, which is a form of member checking. In qualitative research,
member checking is a critical component for establishing research credibility, and has been
identified by as the single most important method of increasing the credibility of qualitative
research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checking was done throughout interviews to ensure
accuracy and clarification by providing feedback to each participant. This dialogue allowed
participants to refine, rephrase, and interpret the information and afforded them the opportunity
to discuss findings in an informal post-interview session. These sessions allowed them to
comment on themes and express emerging patterns that contributed to the results.

Triangulations of multiple methods of data collection as those mentioned above were
used to support the dependability of the study. In addition, the researcher described, in detail,
data collection methods, reasons for identification of themes and patterns of themes, and the
derivation of the decisions made during the study. Regarding external validity, the researcher
provided rich descriptions to enable the reader to make a judgment as to whether his/her situation
is similar enough to make transfersences of the findings. All data was kept in a database for audit
purposes.

In addition, trustworthiness can be understood as a vital component of critical narrative
analysis as science and creative endeavor (Moss, 2004). Moss identified provisions of
trustworthiness as acts of integrity that researchers take to ensure they seek truth by
contextualizing their studies and disclosing all relevant procedures used in the study. Moss (2004) stated:

I further define provisions of trustworthiness in critical narrative research by the researcher's commitment to include all points of view as contrasted to the common points of view that emerge, protecting participant's well-being while putting their voices in the forefront as a model of authentic participation in educational research. Finally, trustworthiness in critical narrative research surpasses the presence of a mere study and includes the publication of the critical stories and taking responsibility for the resultant social action that may result by design or consequence from the study. (p. 371)
CHAPTER 4

Findings: Counter-stories of AAMs

This chapter presents the results of interviews with seven African American males who attained doctorates and their lived experiences as doctoral students at their respective PWI. The focus of this chapter is to: (a) narrate each participant’s story; (b) present the themes that emerged from the interviews; and (c) provide a synthesis of the meanings and fundamental nature of their lived experiences in regard to experiences of racism and the paradigm of racial identity. The most significant component for the entire participant cohort was the achievement of social and cultural capital. Cultural capital refers to non-financial social assets; they may be educational or intellectual, which might promote social mobility beyond economic means while social capital is the moral resource in which to the extent that members of different social groups can maintain respect for differences and learn to cooperate; it involves trust, mutuality, and reciprocity that forms social relationships regardless of race, gender, or any other difference (Bourdieu, 2008; Eitle & Eitle, 2002; Seippel, 2006).

As a reflexive and subjective AAM researcher, confidentiality is paramount to such research in uncovering the experiences of the participants. Therefore, I used fictitious names, schools, localities and brief descriptors for each participant to protect each from any possible fallout that may arise from divulging such sensitive data. Member checking was employed and each participant reviewed and approved his story.

The seven participants, ages 36 to 61 enabled my research to have a due amount of AAM richness that extends across nationwide boundaries. Each participant represented varied academic disciplines and lived experiences. They were all educated and currently reside in different parts of the United States.
Dr. Howard Stone

Dr. Howard Stone, age 37, earned his PhD in Political Science from a large Southeastern PWI in 2007 and currently serves as a professor of Political Science at another large Southern PWI. Dr. Stone sees himself as a dedicated and enthusiastic teacher who is able to offer a wide variety of classes in the discipline of political science. He described his subject matter expertise as spanning American Government, State and Local Government, American Presidency, and Political Methodology. In the classroom, Dr. Stone firmly believes it is vital to integrate and create new teaching techniques; to create a better overall learning experience for students and to develop a curriculum that meets the diverse needs of students. While class lectures are an integral part of learning, he also believes that in-class discussions contribute significantly to the learning process.

Dr. Stone's counter story is one of struggle and perseverance in the face of passive racism. As he overcame numerous barriers, Stone eventually attained his doctoral degree from a PWI. He is a brother to other siblings and is the first and only member of his family to receive a PhD. Raised by a single parent with a demanding career, allowed Stone early lessons of life and culture in America.

Early Years and Education

Dr. Stone was born in 1974 to a single mother and was one of several children. The demands of his mother's military career required frequent moves, and he attended various schools until the age of thirteen. Unlike the disruption that most children experience, who are relocated constantly, Dr. Stone saw tremendous value in such frequent moves. He shared:

My mother was in the military for 25 years. The good thing about that is I had an experience to be introduced to different cultures, different races and ethnicities of people.
and grow up in very diverse environments. I say all that to explain that I grew up in multiple places. Southern City is my home from thirteen, but the early experience of my mom being in the military really helped me to be able to adapt to new situations, new environments and new cultures.

Stone's early experiences living in different locations broadened his horizons and exposed him to people from many walks of life, and he learned to adapt easily to new situations.

Stone played sports throughout high school, but was not the stereotypical athletic jock; he found it easy to navigate from academics to the gridiron of the football field. Although he was a capable student, he did not aspire to be the best in the classroom. Stone explained, “I was always a good athlete, but people didn’t realize I made good grades. I graduated high school with a 3.0 but most of that culminated in the fact that I really didn’t even take academics seriously.” Stone admitted, “I could have actually made at least 3.5 GPA,” but while playing football, studying was not a priority. I would study right before the test and achieve A’s and B’s.” Instead of studying, he relied on his “photographic memory,” explaining, “I could just listen in class and I just did my test that way.” Stone graduated from a high school in Southern US where he was a standout football player and named “Who’s Who” among American High School Students in 1992.

Because of his athletic talent, Stone was awarded a full athletic scholarship to play football and earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology from a large PWI in the South, the University of X. The demands of NCAA Division I football and his refusal to retool his study habits proved costly during his undergraduate days as a college student athlete. He was able to get by initially because “My first two years at the University of X were simple. The courses were
somewhat repetitive in nature compared to high school.” His poor study habits caught up with him, however, going into the third year of college, as he put it,

Transitioning to my junior year was immensely difficult. I could no longer depend on my aesthetic skills to get me by. I didn’t know how to effectively study. I had no system.

Along with team travel, practice, and games I found myself in academic turmoil. Stone took the initiative to acquire the study habits and skills he needed to be successful as the academic demands became more rigorous. -I went to the library and viewed videos of how to effectively study. Those videos were critical to my development and success as a student athlete. I was able to graduate with a 3.0.” Stone matriculated in 1996 with a solid –B” average.

Stone was aware that his intellectual ability and aptitude for learning could not end at the undergraduate level. He applied to University of X in 1996 in pursuit of a master’s degree in criminology. During this time, Stone embraced hip-hop, a musical genre that promoted AA unity and empowerment. Much like Martin Luther King and Malcolm X verbally and actively opposed the injustices of inequality of AAs; hip-hop exposes the tragedies of urban ghettos by combining creative lyrical poetry with cutting edge beats and rhythms. Not only was hip-hop a musical form, it was a cultural phenomenon that created new fashions and hair styles for young AAMs.

Unlike many other young AAM hip-hop enthusiasts who just listened to the lyrics and enjoyed the music, Stone understood the voice of each song and felt a deep connection to the meanings displayed in them. His favorite artist was Tupac Shakur, a highly acclaimed yet militant artist whose fiery music was fueled by racial injustice, police brutality, and his trademark T.H.U.G. L.I.F.E, which stands for The Hate U Give Little Infants F—s Everyone. Although some may interpret T.H.U.G. L.I.F.E to mean criminal mischief, violence, and partying, it was Tupac’s way of explaining the hate infused in young AA men due to police
brutality, government corruption, abandonment by their fathers, and the violent culture of living in America’s urban ghettos. Shakur’s delivery of music inspired Stone, and became his teaching voice; one that resulted in an unconventional instructional style and a fearless passion to speak that sometimes challenged his professors. Tupac’s music challenged government infrastructures and gave Stone the impetus to pursue his Masters in Criminology and Criminal Justice at a large PWI in southeastern United States with a tremendous sense of purpose and meaning. Stone described the importance of Tupac’s music to AA culture and to him personally,

What much of America does not understand is that each culture or ethnicity needs that musical voice. Prior to the hip-hop era, America had John Lennon and Marvin Gaye, etc. We no longer had the political voices of Martin Luther King or Malcolm X. So our voice of hope was from the hip-hop movement. My leader of choice was Tupac. –Pac” was an artful, articulate, and hood-polished artist that spoke from the roots and voices of the Black Panthers of the 1960’s. His mother, Afeni Shakur, was a member of the Black Panthers. He was and will always be the most influential versatile rapper that ever lived. I believe there are Tupac Shakur course offerings at an Ivy League School. Like race, people who do not understand you fear you. Fear promotes hate. All Americans who did not understand hip-hop feared and hated it because they didn’t want to understand the movement. The hip-hop movement was an artistic version of carrying the torch of liberation for a new generation. I wanted to carry that torch in the form of being a scholarly voice that transcends hip-hop into the classroom. In order to fulfill my mission I needed to attend graduate school.

Tupac’s musical genius was a compilation of rhetoric from the Black Panthers movement of the 1960s and the urban ghetto mentality to which he was subjected. This particular
style of voice resonated with Stone, which he mirrored in his classroom teaching style and became the driving force behind his desire to complete his graduate degree in Criminology.

**Graduate Experience**

Stone successfully completed his MA in Criminology at the University of X in 1999. As he navigated through his coursework and gained expertise in his discipline, he embarked upon teaching college students with great fire and enthusiasm. He said, “Well initially it was one of those things where I was in graduate school and started teaching as a teaching assistant and upon knowing that I enjoyed the pedagogy of teaching with overflowed classrooms.” Stone gained a great amount of competence and confidence in and out of his master’s degree work. He was the recipient of praise from his department and students on his ability to increase credit hour production and recruit new students to the program. He believed his race, pedagogy, and dress were non-factors and did not impede his success.

Even though his nontraditional style was unorthodox for a graduate student lecturer, it lured in new degree candidates and filled classrooms because his popular style of hip-hop infused teaching produced an interest from non-majors. He realized his true calling and applied to the PhD program from the same institution where he earned his MA. As a PhD candidate his style and ideologies were met with great resistance from department professors.

Once Stone was accepted into the Criminology PhD program from the same PWI, University of X, his hip-hop style and culture was not widely accepted. The same emphatic style and teaching methods that received raves from students and faculty as a Masters student were met with great resistance that he claimed was a typical example of institutional racism. During the time of the early 21st century when race was ostensibly a non-issue, Stone stated flatly, “In
my PhD program, University of X, I actually experienced a number of individual racial
incidences.” The incidents Stone described all happened because “White male professors, in my
program, took aim to ensure my failure as a doctoral student with the weapon of racism.”
Stone’s style was nontraditional and was met with great resistance from his White male
professors. Stone felt these professors used discriminatory tactics in the form of passive racism
to ensure that he would not receive his PhD from that institution. His knowledge and intellectual
curiosity challenged professors in the classroom. His hip-hop fashion brought disfavor upon him.
As a result he recounted his experiences with racism while a PhD student at University of X.

Experience with Racism at University of X

Stone gave vivid accounts of what he described as institutional racism displayed in the
classroom and during comprehensive exams in this doctoral degree program. The first incident
occurred after he dared to challenge a White tenured professor.

One of my professors made the claim that he was a proletariat and, as we know in
Marxism, proletariat is someone who’s in the lower end of the socioeconomic class
system. Being from an impoverished community from the south, there was no way in the
world that I would affirm a White tenured professor who made over $100,000 and
teaches in one of the top five criminology programs in the country could consider himself
a proletariat. So I made a reference and said, —Why you consider yourself a proletariat? I
mean I’m from the south, my mom’s struggling in the military, I’ve seen all this crime,
all this violence, I will consider myself more of proletariat than you.” He felt very
offended. I was doing extremely well in the class; I had a letter grade of A throughout the
whole course. When it came time for my final grade, I received a B- for the course. At
that particular PWI I was attending, if one received a letter grade of B-, the course must
be repeated. When I requested to see my exam, there were two different color schemes of corrections on my exam. I consulted with one of the few Black female professors and explained the situation, showed her the copies of the exams, and we went to the Dean. To my dismay, the Dean didn’t really want to address the issue but changed my grade from a B- to a B. So in all actuality, the issue was never remedied. It resulted in placation of racism at that particular PWI.

Stone’s unrelenting intellect and refusal to kowtow to racism led him to dispute an inflammatory comment made by his professor. Stone recalled another experience of institutional racism while attending a PWI.

The second incident occurred when one of my professors at the same school had made inflammatory statements in class and which I respectfully disputed. Because of that statement, I was notified by the professor I would receive a B- in statistics on the sole basis that he felt I was not PhD material.

The third and final incident concerned his comprehensive exam. This incident caused Stone great confusion and frustration, which imminently led to him transferring to another doctoral program, at a PWI in his home state.

The coup de gras occurred when I was given a failing grade on the theory portion of my PhD general exam. As a graduate assistant, I taught criminological theory for two years at the university. How can one be employed to teach criminological theory for two years at the same institution, yet fail a theory portion by two points on my comprehensive exam? My major professor was non-tenured, which speaks to the core of a problem. If she was tenured, she might have been able to fight for those two points and I would have become ABD and completed my dissertation. But her recommendation was to retake the exam. I
refuted her solution because I was currently teaching theory and received excellent ratings from my students. The reality is those three professors that I’m naming now were these same individuals who are on that theory committee. Hence, it was five professors, the first two professors who I’ve mentioned, one gave me a fail and the other professor gave me a low pass. Two other professors gave me a high pass, but the point system had me missing by two points.

Stone eventually realized because he was perceived as militant and threatening due to his allegiance to a hip-hop infused pedagogy and for challenging the powerful professors in his doctoral program, he was penalized because of his race. He learned the hard way that doctoral programs can be fraught with racial politics. As he concluded,

So, there are times in your PhD program that you may encounter things and they don’t necessarily have to culminate right then, you can basically be pencil whipped and punished later on in the process. So if you’re a young African-American male or female you need to be very aware to that. So that was my experience at University of X.

To lend some validity to these incidents being racially motivated, Stone received an anonymous email from another AAM student from the same PWI and department in which he experienced very similar racial struggles.

Hello, Dr. Stone,

I met you a few years ago when you were a doctoral student at the school of criminology and criminal justice. I was a student, at the time, in one of the courses you taught. At the time, you and I talked about your experiences at University of X, trying to navigate your way through the racial pitfalls of being a Black student in the department of criminal
justice and criminology. I now find myself where you were then - I've finished my course work. A few weeks ago I took comp exams and my major professor, a non-tenured Black professor, named Dr. Prof, informed me last week that I failed both parts of the exam. He was on the theory committee, but not allowed to vote or comment when my exam came before review! He said that if he was allowed to vote he would've passed me. This is disturbing because the exams are supposed to be graded anonymously and I was placed at a disadvantage without a major professor to argue on my behalf. In addition, the reasoning provided to me for my failure was that my answers on both exams were not "in-depth" enough to show that I really understood the material. The answers were correct, mind you, but not in-depth enough. And this vague reasoning does not satisfy me. I am sending a certified request for a copy of the original comments on my exams. But, in doing so, I thought about you and your similar experiences. My experiences in the department have suffered as a result of isolation and a lack of mentorship. I have many stories to tell about things I've experienced. But I wanted to write you to get advice on how I should proceed from this point as well as insight into what led you to leave University of X after you completed all of your coursework.

Anonymous Doctoral Student

College of Criminology and Criminal Justice

Stone became so discouraged with his doctoral experience at PWI State University; he transferred to another university, stating, "I got so flustered that I transferred to a PWI in my home state where I successfully completed my PhD in Political Science."
Some AAMs are faced with the dilemma of making the decision to attend a PWI or an HBCU. Like several other participants, Stone chose to attend a PWI because it offered him a full scholarship with immediate opportunities to play football. He was courted by more PWIs than HBCUs, explaining, “PWIs tend to have more capital to entice young AAMs such as all-expense visits and larger campuses and are more appealing as opposed to the HBCU.” Stone received all three of his degrees from a PWI. He accepted an athletic scholarship to play football at a PWI where he earned his Bachelor’s degree.

Even though he expressed feeling an undergraduate degree from an HBCU would have better served him socially, Stone is pleased with being a recipient of his graduate degrees from a PWI. As a current professor of political science at a PWI, Stone recalled the negative stigma placed on HBCUs by his colleagues and witnessed attrition of graduates of HBCUs who pursued doctoral degrees at a PWI.

I would have rather attended a HBCU for undergrad but not for graduate school. Because now being a professor, I look back only now and I hear the comments that White professors made towards graduates of HBCUs. They say they can’t do the work; they weren’t properly trained. For example you may have an African-American who gets a master’s at HBCU but comes to a PWI for PhD program. You know, they automatically have those negative stigmas toward them, for example when I was at University of X, we had five AAMs admitted into the masters program from HBCUs and unfortunately all of them fell to attrition. Well in fact, you really have to know your environment. But I didn’t know those things back then; I only found those things to be true once I got my PhD and started working in the environment and just hear how our professors would talk in
meetings. Sometimes you don't know that until you actually sit at the table when here our people talk about certain things, so that's what it was.

Stone knew that he would be fully embraced by faculty and students had he had gone to an HBCU. His ultimate goal was to receive a PhD to fulfill his dream of teaching at the university level. It wasn’t until after he earned his PhD and overheard conversation from his colleagues that he realized a PWI was the best choice. His firsthand experiences and knowledge of five HBCU students who never finished their degree program at University of X lent some validity that HBCU students may be underprepared for the rigors of a doctoral program at a PWI. Although he was eventually successful in earning his doctorate, Stone was absent of the strategies, mentorship, and political knowledge needed to receive his PhD in Criminology from University of X. Consequently, Stone transferred to University of Y in his home state to embark upon completing a doctorate in the discipline of political science.

Lack of Coping Strategies

In reflecting upon his experiences, Stone did not identify specific strategies that he felt helped him be successful in attaining his doctoral degree at a PWI. After his frustrating experience at University of X, he was able to transfer and finish his degree at another institution. Stone was prepared for overt personal prejudice and discrimination, but did not understand at the time how institutional or systemic passive racism operated. Consequently, he did not have the personal or institutional resources to deal with the racially motivated incidents he experienced at University of X. Stone reflected,

I was young, so I was discombobulated to the extent where I didn’t really know what was going on, because I couldn’t really understand institutional racism at that time. I was just used to individual racism where you’ll be called a nigger or some would do something
very explicit towards you. However I didn’t understand passive racism and I did not understand institutional racism and I didn’t understand systemic racism. And so because I didn’t understand the layers of racism, of oppression, it was done to me. And I didn’t know how to fight it. I just didn’t know how to fight it and the funny thing here is there were two of the African-Americans before me who experienced the similar situations and both of them had a lawsuit against the school.

Throughout much of Stone’s life, the racism he experienced was covert. Since he had no experiences with passive racism, he was reluctant to recognize and cope with how his race was used against him in an academic setting. In fact, he felt his immediate family and friends were incapable of social support because none of them knew what it was like to be a doctoral student. Lack of social support, especially from loved ones, created an immense sense of isolation and loss for Stone. He sought the assistance of a Black student organization that provided a social system, but support from a Black professor was not forthcoming.

**Support Systems**

As a first generation doctoral student, Stone felt a sense of isolation and loss because he was unable to turn to family and friends when he needed to remedy the issues he encountered with university faculty in his doctoral program. “I think I felt alone only because when I looked at my friends and family none of them had ever experienced this because none of them ever worked on a doctorate degree,” he acknowledged. At the PWI where he started his doctoral program, Stone felt he had little support from anyone, which contributed to his decision to transfer elsewhere.

Stone did find social support through a Black graduate student organization at University of X, the PWI he attended before he transferred to University of Y where he eventually finished
his doctoral degree. The organization was a place where all Black graduate students came
together for three weeks the summer before starting their program and they met the Black
professors on campus. The professors would conduct orientation and social gatherings. There
was student connection before the semester started. All the relationships didn’t last, obviously,
but some of them were very paramount.” The Black Graduate Student Organization became his
“core group” where he “didn’t feel isolated” and “So as long as I was around them it was good.”
However, this group did not necessarily offer the academic or intellectual support Stone needed,
and he felt one Black professor in particular could have reached out to him, but failed to do so.

So I was explaining the situation to the Black Graduate Student Organization and they
could never really understand what was going on. So that’s why I felt alone, I mean on
campus there were some Black professors who had experienced this. The funny thing is
one of the Black professors who earned all his degrees from the University of X and he
was hired as a professor from which he earned his PhD. This is not a customary hiring
practice of elite universities. And I have a lot of animosity toward him because I felt like
– since he had been in the program, he experienced some of the similar things; he should
have assisted me through my struggles and aided in my transition. To my dismay, he
never gave a single suggestion or word of wisdom.

Stone was never given a formula to learn the ways of the professoriate during his doctoral
journey. He sought the assistance of AA faculty for support and ways in which to cope with his
negative experiences. His plea for help was answered with the cliché that he simply needed to
work hard.

At University of X, I was just flung by the seat of my pants. I didn’t have any strategies
to cope. I really didn’t know who to turn to. I deferred to two non-tenured African-
Americans who were in the program. Their only advice was to work hard. There are times that you can work hard and still become unsuccessful at your goals.

His goal of attaining a PhD at age 26 at University of X was thwarted by his refusal to be status quo, lack of support systems, and lack of political awareness of the professoriate. He was reluctant to adhere to the traditional culture of academia, which proved costly.

My goal was to obtain a PhD at the age of 26. A 26-year-old PhD wasn't going to go over well with faculty because I lacked humility yet yielded high confidence. I dressed how I wanted to dress. I said what I wanted to say. I didn't know how to play the political game and those proved to be a liability.

Stone later recognized the traits he brought to the doctoral program were unacceptable in that context, and admits to the underpinnings that failed his goal of being a 26 year old PhD. Yet, he remained steadfast in his dream of obtaining his PhD even if it meant transferring to University of Y and learning a different discipline. He eventually earned his PhD in Political Science at age 33 and identified some highlights of his success in spite of all the racial turmoil he overcame.

**Highlights of Success since Attaining the Doctoral Degree**

Stone identified his greatest success to date is being an exemplary mentor to all students. He has worked at some of the most prestigious research universities in the country. Stone has taught in multiple disciplines in the social sciences, including political science, criminology and criminal justice, sociology, and African-American history. He expressed pride in seeing his students be successful.
My greatest success was mentoring students, helping them achieve their goals. My even
greatest success actually was my teaching an LSAT prep course. In the course, a group of
six Hispanic students participated in the course and today four of them are lawyers.
His uniqueness and classroom dynamics, as a professor who fully embraced the hip-hop culture,
allowed him to become greatly appreciated and respected by his students. Stone believed the fact
that he was young and wore fashionable hip-hop clothing brands like FUBU helped him connect
with minority students.

Here I am, an African American professor on campus wearing the latest urban fashion yet
brandishing top notch pedagogy while cultivating minds with great eagerness and
yearning to learn. When you’re able to really teach and you stay in your own shell, so to
speak, you are unaware of the positive influence you have on one’s education.

Stone felt a great sense of accomplishment for completing his PhD. The degree has
afforded him a certain amount of power and prestige, and placed him in the position of being —a
decision maker to change other people’s lives. In addition, it opened so many doors from the
perceptions standpoint.” The mere fact that he is a young AAM fully steeped in pop culture
makes him appear as a rarity. On a broader scale, it infuriates his intelligence that AAM PhDs
are still anomalies.

You don’t walk around with the PhD stamp on your forehead or your doctor’s stamp on
your forehead. Yet, when people learn that you have a doctoral degree, they are
overwhelmingly proud that you are an AAM doctorate that it becomes insulting. This
innuendo concludes that AAMs are incapable of obtaining a PhD! But I had to learn over
time is that people sometimes ask you but they’re not really insulting you. Are you really
a doctor? But they never really met a Black doctor in person. It’s like when we were
growing up; the only Black doctor that we really knew was Bill Cosby. So they never really met an African American male PhD who was down to earth.

His doctoral achievement brought about great pride and success. This accomplishment was often overshadowed by shame and humiliation. He was a young AAM PhD in a society that either was in shock or great disbelief that he could be among the elite ranks of higher education as PhD of Political Science. Through it all, Dr. Stone gave some simple words of advice to future doctoral students and the PWIs that will recruit and retain them.

**Advice for the AAM Doctoral Student and PWI**

As we concluded our interview, Stone left some words of wisdom for future AAM doctoral students that embody preparedness. These strategies are borne from his own lack of political awareness as a young student and having learned these lessons the hard way.

Strategies that I would give to future students would be to:

A) Align yourself with positive people if you can. If there are tenured faculty on campus, seek them out too, especially African Americans.

B) You have to create an aura about yourself where you are viewed non-threatening. I don’t want to say you have to be an Uncle Tom, when you have to put on the Amos and Andy type aura but you have to appear not threatening.

C) You have to be humble. I’ve noticed that people who are very humble, non threatening, I don’t want to say kissing ass, but people who are very - how can I put this in a really professional way, people who in fact visit their professor in a way in which they show gratitude, because many professors have egos, let’s be honest about that. And because they have egos, they like to be catered to. So if the student is able to cater to a professor, they’re going to be up, they’re going to be graduated in that program very fast.
D) When you attend a PWI, you will encounter many challenges and I think the greatest thing of all has to be to understand your challenges prior to being there. So when you walk in, you’re not bombarded when you’re not being able to handle certain situations.

Not only does Stone have some advice for future students, he also shares his ideals for the PWI that admits AAMs into their respective doctoral programs. These include providing good mentors, and ensuring information about admissions and financial aid are made available.

One is mentorship; they need a mentor. They have to have a mentor that is passionate about student retention and success. Also, there needs to be a system in place where the African American male can receive information about financial aid and academic politics. They need great information about financial aid, admissions, and expectations from some type of mentorship program headed by an African American who actually has their PhD and not one that is the process of obtaining one.

Stone endured many hardships including lack of social and political capital to manage passive racism in higher education. His teaching voice echoes many AAM martyrs that came before him. Even though he did not accomplish his dream of being a 26-year-old PhD in Criminology, his mission was eventually accomplished by becoming a professor in higher education with a PhD in Political Science.

**Dr. Harold Johnstone**

Dr. Harold Johnstone, age 61, earned his PhD in Health Promotion with an emphasis in Sports Management in 2000 at age 50 from a Southeastern PWI. He is an Associate Professor at a large southeastern PWI in the College of Kinesiology. Johnstone grew up in the racially segregated Jim Crow south and came of age during the socio political civil rights movements of the 1960s. Johnstone takes tremendous pride in mentoring and preparing all his students for
success. He has only one prerequisite for his students, which is to carry on the spirit of success through mentorship. “The only thing that I ask is that you do the same thing for someone else, regardless if you’re Black, White, male or female, it doesn’t matter.”

**Early Years and Education**

Johnstone is the only participant who grew up in the Jim Crow south where “separate but equal” was a normal way of life for all. His entire K-16 education was in “Black only” schools. All of his teachers, classmates, and educational infrastructure were solely AA, as he attended segregated schools and lived a life of racial segregation. In his words,

Okay, I grew up in rural Mississippi, the Mississippi delta, back during the Civil Rights era. So I went to all Black elementary school, middle school, and high school and HBCU. So my entire exposure, in terms of education, was all Black until I started working on my Master’s. So I did work on my Master’s late in life, which was in 1990, and it was at a predominant White institution as well.

Johnstone’s upbringing was vital to his existence in the South. He was taught from birth “to know his place.” Johnstone never referenced a single complaint about the socialization that took place among all AAs where he lived. Although he was funneled to an HBCU by his high school principal for his undergraduate degree in Health, PE, and Recreation from Southeastern College, he opted to attend PWIs for his Master’s in Sports Management from SE State University and PhD in Health Promotion with an emphasis in Sports Management from SW State University because they offered full graduate scholarships. At that time, HBCUs did not have the funding to offer such scholarships to students.
HBCU and/ or PWI

Johnstone came of age during the years of legal segregation, and like many other southern AAs at the time; he was strongly encouraged by his high school principal to attend an HBCU for post secondary education where he majored in Health, PE, and Recreation. Johnstone shared, “During the 60s and 70s you didn’t have many choices but to attend an HBCU. So I chose to go to an HBCU because my high school principal went to school there.”

Johnstone posited that many HBCU’s lacked the revenue to finance full tuition scholarships for PhD candidates, which PWIs were able to offer. So Johnstone opted to attend a PWI for his graduate studies because the state where SW State University was located received federal funds to increase PhD enrollment. Legislators lobbied to set aside budget to recruit and retain more PhD candidates, which were packaged as full tuition scholarships. Therefore, Johnstone decided to pursue his PhD at SW State University rather than at an HBCU in his home state.

The reason I decided to go to SW State University was because they had money that state legislators had lobbied to set aside to try and recruit and retain more PhDs in that particular state. Legislators set aside some funds to help with that effort. And when I found out about it I had just finished my Master’s so I said, —well yeah, you’d be crazy not to go ahead and take advantage of this,” which is what I did. So that was the biggest reason I decided to go work on it. It’s not that I was looking to work on a PhD, but I had the opportunity to get it for free.

Johnstone admits that he would not have embarked upon a doctorate degree had he not had the financial assistance of his home state’s doctoral grants to further his education. Hence, he
decided to take a huge risk and resign from his position with an insurance firm and pursue his PhD. He explained his decision to pursue graduate studies during an economic downturn, hoping it would lead to other employment opportunities:

Well, I do think that to make sacrifices – I don't think it would have been possible for me to get the PhD at HBCU, simply because of funding. If I’d not gotten the money, I would not have been able to go. Because, one of the reasons that I went back to school to work on my PhD, and the masters, was because I was employed with an insurance company and decided to quit. And as it turned out, it was a difficult time for the economy and I was unemployed for a year and a half. So going back working on my PhD was a way for me to regroup and kind of position myself to be a little bit more marketable in some other areas. And I really don’t think that that opportunity would have been able, I would have been able to pursue a PhD had I not gotten the funding. And those kinds of funds were not available at, you know, historically Black institutions.

Johnstone would have preferred to pursue his PhD from an HBCU and would have done so had the funding been available. He acknowledged the comfort and support he felt from his previous experience attending an HBCU, even though most of his professors were not Black.

I think I would have attended an HBCU simply because there was a level of comfort there and I experienced that in my undergraduate years. I didn’t have to worry about whether or not somebody was going to treat me differently because I was Black. Because most of the people there, even though I had very few, I think I recall having one Black professor at HBCU, but they were at HBCU because they want to be, in most cases, they didn’t have to be. So even with that, I felt a little bit more of a comfort level being at HBCU, because I knew I had the support.
Johnstone was a nontraditional graduate student. He worked for many years and when he
became unemployed, his best alternative was to attend graduate school in 1990 to earn a
Masters at SE State University and then pursue a PhD degree from SW State University.

**Experience and Persistence Strategies with Racism**

Due to his upbringing, Johnstone was highly equipped and armored to endure racism in
the Jim Crow south. “In terms of some of the things I experienced, you experienced the typical
racist attitudes in Jim Crow south during the Civil Rights era and it wasn’t really that much of an
issue, because at that point, that is all I had ever known.” Although he experienced racism all of
his life, Johnstone did not recall any negative racial experience during pursuit of his doctoral
degree at SW State University. In fact, he revealed that the worst experience he faced was the
high stress and anxiety of his dissertation defense, which he believed all PhD students experience
regardless of race or gender. He admitted there were instances where he questioned if race was a
factor during his struggles as doctoral student, but later recanted and concluded the difficulties he
experienced were common to all doctoral students regardless of race or gender.

Well, you know, sometimes you can think that things are being directed to you because
you are Black, but quite honestly, after I got through the program, I realized that many of
the things that were directed toward me were because of things you have to go through as
a PhD student. I don’t remember anything in particular that I would consider that was
blatant, or overt, or whatever, in terms of racism. The only negative experience that I had
was, and I’m sure we’ll get towards the end, the only negative experience I had was
during the defense. But other than that, there were really no bad experiences.

After all the hard work and dedication, Johnstone was prepared for his final defense. He had
tremendous faith that his research committee soundly supported him and his research. To his
chagrin, a White male committee member accused him of plagiarism. His committee was composed of four White males and one AA female. He told what happened,

Well, the doctoral defense, leading up to it, you have some ideas of what these individuals want to do, what they expect. And all the people I had on my committee, I had their support, I thought. I had their support in terms of them looking at my documents as I passed them in for approval. And everybody, they did the typical things: change this, change that, and you know that went on for about a year maybe, changing your document. But eventually I had it to a point where it was ready. And I got to the defense and everything was going fine and one guy, in particular, a White male, accused me of plagiarism. And this was the same guy that had the – and I even kept a copy of his hand written notes, which he always put in red, saying, ‘You need to change this, this, this, and this.’ And the exact same thing he accused me of plagiarism on, is the exact piece that he changed and asked me to change and I did change it. So during the defense I got probably half way through my presentation, well pretty much done with the presentation, and it got to the question and answer period, is when he accused me of plagiarism. And several people in the room were really kinda shocked, so they asked me to leave the room. And I left the room, and I came back in about twenty minutes later and that’s when they told me, ‘Congratulations, you have successfully defended.’ And the vote was four to one. He voted to fail me. The reason I did get this information because I had purposely had one Black female on the committee, who was an outside person, and she told me exactly what happened in the course of that discussion, while I was out of the room. And she said that they jumped on this guy and said, ‘You have no earthly reason to accuse this guy of doing this when you have no documentation to support it at all.’
And they found out that I may have missed, may have quoted someone, but didn't put in the form – I think that maybe it was a sentence or two. But they said, "There's no reason for you to accuse this guy of plagiarism when all he's got to do is to go back in and add two quotation marks. Or to say that such and such a person said this.” And that's how they left it, but he still voted to fail me. And those, and that was the only change they asked me to make, was to make sure that this person was given credit for a statement.

And other than that, it was pretty, pretty successful.

Johnstone was reprieved of the plagiarism accusation by the other committee members and received a vote of 4 to 1 to pass. Although Johnstone did not acknowledge it, he possibly faced an experience of passive racism where a White male professor voted to fail him simply because he forgot to properly format a sentence by adding quotation marks. Yet, Johnstone grew up during an era where his parents performed due diligence in indoctrinating him to gain the social and cultural capital necessary to cope with racism.

**Strategies to Cope with Racism**

Johnstone attributed his ability to successfully navigate through social inequalities to his parents. The proceeds of this success enabled him to thrive as a student and professor. He explained his parents’ philosophy: I was never taught to hate, I was taught to try and understand why people hated me.” Johnstone revealed that it was common practice in the south for AA families to prepare their offspring the ways in which to survive during the Jim Crow era. The era of segregation during the 1950s and 1960s contrasted with the era of the 1990s. He felt his upbringing would not have been as intense with regard to race relations had he grown up during the early 1990s.
I think it was a lifetime of preparing your children for what they had to face in the Jim Crow era. That’s just the way it was. Now, had I been born in 1990, I think my parents would have said that I would be, and told me about the issues of the past, and some of the things that they experienced, and prepared me in that way. But during that era, that was the only thing that they could do was just to prepare you for life in Jim Crow south, and prepared you for how to survive in South. And one way you survived was to follow the established protocol of doing certain things: the colored and White water fountains, and waiting rooms, and things of that nature. Saying, “yes sir” and “yes ma’am” to people.

Johnston believed the acculturation he received during his adolescence gave him the underpinnings to successfully complete his doctoral degree. Acculturation is the process whereby he participated in the cultural traditions, values, beliefs, and practices of the dominant culture of White America or the PWI but remained immersed in his own culture, as an AAM.

Support Systems

Johnstone was equipped with the intestinal fortitude, as well as enough cultural and social capital gained from his parents to allow him to successfully navigate in White society, yet he also needed mentorship and support from SW State University. Having never attended a PWI before, he connected with an AA Master’s and Doctoral student coalition that assisted him with acquiring the navigational tools to increase his likelihood of success in and out of the classroom.

Okay, this is the one thing that helped me more than anything to get through this program was the fact that at SW State University, there was a group of Black students, both masters and PhD students, that had developed a program of sorts to, just to help students fit: to help students understand the process. And that thing had been in place before I got
there, and I became a member of the group. And I think that gave me the support that I needed to help me get through the program.

Johnstone encountered difficulty in his statistics course and was receiving an ―F.” Without the help of the coalition, he firmly believes he would have not been able to successfully pass the class and attain his degree. The coalition was not only knowledgeable of curriculum, student rights, and the academic hierarchy; they were determined not to let Johnstone drop out of the program.

Because I very, very distinctly remember a statistics class that I failed and I went to the group one day and we were just talking and I said, —Guys, this is gonna be my last semester.” I said, —I’m failing this statistics class and I know that I can’t pass this, get through this program without passing statistics.” And they said, —Why are you gonna drop out?” And I said, —Well, I just can’t, I just can’t grasp the stats.” They said, —Well, just, if you know you’re gonna get an F, just go to the professor and ask the professor to give you an incomplete and take it over.” I said, —Can you do that?” And they said, —Well, yeah.” So that’s what I did. And as it turns out, I went to the professor and asked if he would give me an incomplete and he said, —No.” And I went back to the group and I said, —This guy won’t budge. He won’t give me an incomplete.” And they said, —Well, go to the Dean or go to the Chair of the department.” So that’s what I did. And the Chair of the department said, —Well sure he can give you an incomplete and if you have any difficulty let us know and we’ll go from there.” So, I went back to the guy and asked for the incomplete. I said, —I had talked with the Chair and the Chair said it was okay.” So he gave me the incomplete, reluctantly. And it just so happens this guy was from Ghana and he was Black. But he was a mathematician and he taught it a little bit differently
than some of the other stats people. So I took the course over on a different professor and got an A. So I don’t think that if it had not been for that group of Black students that give you, that it was designed to help you with the support. If it had not been for them, I probably would never have finished the program.

Johnstone did not have a faculty mentor; he relied heavily on the student group for support and guidance. He gave praise and credit to the group for helping him to successfully complete his PhD at SW State University.

That group was my mentor. And it was a combination of people that were my age, all the way down to students that had gone directly from undergrad, to their Masters, and to PhD. So I was probably, me and one other guy were probably the oldest ones in the group. But I’ll tell you, it was, it was a valuable, valuable asset to have, for those groups to exist, because you need someone that you can bounce things off of.

Despite enduring the social and cultural hardships of the Jim Crow south, Johnstone remained steadfast in his goals. His parents’ guidance, support system, and work ethic were the foundation that empowered him to receive his PhD at age 50.

**Outcomes of Doctoral Success**

Johnstone expressed sheer delight and a great sense of accomplishment of being a 50-year old recipient of a PhD in Health Promotion with an emphasis in Sports Management. He did not characterize the student support group as merely a group of students; they were an extension of his family.

Well, I guess my greatest success was able to pull it off at 50 years old, because I really had some reservations about going back to work on a PhD at 50 years old. And I really did not – I felt very, very inadequate, especially in a class of students that were, that, you
know they could be my kids. But I think the greatest success was being able to make contact with that support group again. Then realize how important the support group was, even to me being one of the oldest members of the group. And then to see it go from point A, to point B, to point C, where eventually I could realize that, you know, “hey I can, I can do this.” And I think that’s when I realized to myself that it could be done.

Johnstone’s humility allowed him to view his degree simply as another academic accomplishment. He feels society, at large, has placed him on a higher platform, as he said, “Well, it really has opened up so many more opportunities.” Since obtaining his degree, he has been asked to be more involved on committees. Ultimately, the PhD is the epitome of how to begin and complete a goal, which produced a great amount of esteem and self worth. Although he did not feel different after completing the degree, others perceived him in a different light.

You know for some reason, I didn’t feel any differently after I completed it other than I was relieved it was over. But I think a lot of people look at you differently. They look to see that you have achieved at a higher level. And for some reason it puts you in another category, where they look at you a little bit differently and they also want to get you on committees, within different communities. So it just, it enhances you as an individual. Not that I think I’ve changed, but I think that I have learned how to start something and complete it. So I think all of my life’s experiences prepared me well for this process.

Still humbled, attaining his PhD was a great accomplishment that allowed Johnstone to be viewed with great respect and admiration from his community constituents. The PhD prepared him for how to strategically begin and complete a goal.
Advice for the AAM Student and PWI

Johnstone offered some advice to future and current AAM students who are pursuing their graduate degrees from a PWI. He identified a need for a comprehensive support system coupled with perseverance and sacrifice to ensure successful degree completion.

But you have to realize that you can’t do it alone, you have to have help. The support group is only part of it. But you have to have other people to help you, in terms of editing some of your writings and those kinds of things. But once I made all the necessary contacts, all the pieces were in place, and I had the support, it was just a matter of sticking to it and setting some timelines on to when I was gonna to get it done.

Not only does he offer advice for students, he encouraged the PWI to do more to assist the development of student support groups and create meaningful dialogue among faculty about the unique needs and challenges of AAM students on PWI campuses. Without support, Johnstone believes AA students will continue to feel alienated on these campuses. In addition, he also promoted having individual departments meet and discuss how they can be of more service to AA students to help ensure success and decrease attrition at PWIs.

Well, I do think that many of these schools are probably going to have to have a group of students like I experienced, where they are there to assist each other. And I do think that Black students do have a, are in a unique situation where they’re at a predominantly White institution. That they are kinda left to fend for themselves. And I think that if institutions really, really want this group of students to be successful, they can do something very simple, and that’s to encourage these kinds of gatherings. And it’s not so much the financial support that they need, but they need to encourage these kinds of groups to form, on their campuses, so these students can have a support group. And I
think they will automatically see the successes. But I also think that many of these
departments can talk among themselves, and just talk about, and be realistic about the
fact that Black students are in a unique predicament on predominantly White institutions.
And they need to understand that. Not that they want any extra help, or anything given to
them, but just to support – just to support.

Johnstone, a nontraditional doctoral student, credits sacrifice, humility, and his upbringing as
qualities that allowed him to attain his PhD in Health Promotion in 2000. Today, he continues to
model the legacy of mentorship, integrity, and work ethic to his students through his current
position as an Associate Professor at a large PWI in the southeastern United States.

Dr. Lawrence Gee

Dr. Lawrence Gee, age 45, earned his PhD in Educational Leadership with an emphasis
in Business in 2000 from a Southern PWI. He is currently employed as a consultant at a
leadership firm based in the South. His mission is to build relationships and processes that bring
out the best in people through innovative training for education and business professionals. He
passionately coordinates educational programs for schools to champion the notion of
"communities that thrive, grow and succeed are driven by the mutual commitment of AAM
doctorates, teachers, and students.” His approach is to teach, foster, and support specific skills,
behaviors, relationships, and processes that clear successful and meaningful pathways of success.

Early Years and Education

Gee attended a fairly diverse K-12 public school system in the Northeastern United
States. While attending school, he overcame a mild disability and the label of being an "at risk
child” throughout his K-12 education. Not only was he labeled, but other AA children in his
school were labeled “at risk” as well. Gee described how he experienced this negative stereotype at an early age.

Probably in school being identified as an “at risk” child and trying to figure out of my own free will what that really meant. What does it mean to be at risk and why do I have this label? So glancing around the classroom and noticing that the kids that were labeled as such all were brown skinned.

Gee moved to a new high school built as the result of annexation between two adjacent towns. Due to the overpopulation of two high schools, it was more cost effective to build one large high school rather than two slightly larger newer schools. During his high school years, he developed new relationships with relative ease through the avenue of athletics. He felt social class was the barrier to developing relationships and not race, as he was attending school with students from wealthier neighborhoods.

There was a period when our two high schools in our town got merged [which meant] building relationships with people that were from the other side of town. There were two high schools predominately mixed and then those two high schools were merged into one and everybody came to our school so we had a lot more people that lived on, at the time, which would have been the northwest side of town, which was a lot more affluent. So, I just remember that many of the relationships with guys that I had built either playing sports or otherwise came from the northwest side of town, so just that whole thing of trying to figure out where you fit in amongst the social ranks, and not misjudging people based on where they resided was the issue.

Gee spoke about the need to be “harder,” that is to display a sense of masculine toughness until an individual was proven trustworthy of authentic camaraderie or friendship.
This is a common cultural practice among AAMs as an impromptu test or reference check to see if one is “cool” enough to associate before letting down one’s guard. This is a stance that many AAMs take to avoid being viewed as weak or soft, therefore eluding the negative stereotype of being feminine. Gee explained the strategy he used to negotiate relationships during high school, but probably being harder so people do not take advantage of you. What I mean about taking advantage of you is so they do not misjudge you as being soft in any way. You come off hard until you figure out specifically where they are coming from.

Gee found academic and social success in school by working hard in the classroom and emulating the status quo “tough guy” which allowed him to thrive in his social arena and receive his high school diploma. His next decision was to attend a post secondary institution, which entailed applying to an HBCU or a PWI.

**HBCU and/or PWI**

Even though Gee graduated from a fairly diverse high school, he would have preferred to attend an HBCU to see what it was like to attend an institution that was predominately AA compared to a PWI. Gee thought that attending an HBCU might have produced a stronger sense of leadership and validated his identity of being an AAM. Yet, he carries no regret for having attended a PWI where he earned his Bachelor of Arts in International Business. He reflected upon the decision to attend a PWI over an HBCU,

Even coming through high school it was 51% - 49% ratio of Blacks and Whites so I have always been in mixed environments. I do not know anything other. The one thing I do wish is that I should have done my undergrad or my Master's at an HBCU so I could have that comparison. I think the collegiality as well as the relate-ability and the
reliability of people at an HBCU would have been different. I think that whole interaction [with other AAs] would have been strengthened for me.

Gee was raised to be proud of his AA heritage. Although he attended PWIs his whole postsecondary academic career, Gee would have preferred to have the experience of an HBCU as an undergraduate or graduate student. He felt that an HBCU would have strengthened his rapport building with other AAs in a collegial environment, therefore fortifying his social connections with other AAs. Unlike an HBCU, PWIs do not validate AA heritage and culture. He explained what an HBCU offered,

Meaning it would have validated that my upbringing in terms of leadership being more communal, where you are seeking input of others in order to bring about a more accurate solution for things, would have been a process that I think would have been validated inside of me at a much younger or earlier age. But I do not believe there was any adverse or difficult process coming through a PWI. Because my previous experience all had been at a PWI, I probably would choose an HBCU, just because to be a little more eclectic in terms of my interactions.

Gee pointed out that society tends to view the AA experience as homogenous in nature. Due to the fact that his educational worldviews were all encompassed by those fashioned at a PWI, his view of eclecticism would have been to experience an HBCU educational institution where he believed not only would his unique experiences be acknowledged, but also he had much to gain from the experiences of other AAs.

Sometimes we think because we are Black, that hanging out with Black folks is all the same, but I think there is something that is brought to the table collectively that you get a chance to see differently, just like going to a PWI, so I probably would choose an HBCU.
I think that experience would have been a little bit richer for me. I think it also would have created a different sort of network that, as a professional, I think is as strong as what I have now coming out of a PWI. But, I think the things I would have gotten involved in – I probably would have been more active politically on a University Campus at an HBCU than I was at a PWI.

Gee was reared in a diverse school system, yet adamantly would have preferred to attend an HBCU for at least part of his post-secondary education. He feels that he earned a great education from the PWIs he attended, yet also feels an HBCU would have provided a better social and political experience, therefore strengthening his ties to the AA community. It was his AA childhood teachings that came to fuel an inner struggle within him during a heated campus debate over the celebration of Martin Luther King Jr.

**Experience with Racism at a PWI**

During his undergraduate years in the late 1980s, Gee experienced some heated debate on whether the campus should recognize Martin Luther King's (MLK) birthday as a holiday. This event created a racial fault line and he questioned if the PWI was the proper institution for his learning. This experience created an identity rift within him, with one side grounded in peaceful Christian faith and the other a militant figure highly intolerant of racism. MLK and his agenda were legendary and instrumental for the improvement of AAs and he was an iconic figure to be highly respected and admired. Gee’s faith taught him peace and love while his racial identity taught him to be vigilant against those who were resistant to the cause and legacy of MLK.

But, I will say this, my Undergrad experience, they were looking at changing or making Martin Luther King a holiday and I remember being in my Undergraduate when that process went on. So, the University of X had marched. X State had marched. There
were several Universities around my area, Western X had marched and so on our campus. I remember there being a sit-in. I remember it clearly in my mind. There was a real internal tugging going on because I was heavily involved in church on one end and in my mind, I was very strong militant to a certain extent because of the disparities that were going on within school.

This identity rift followed him throughout his undergraduate career to his years in graduate school, which eventually resulted in a positive life lesson. Gee was determined not to allow racism in any form to impede his success. Otherwise, it may have resulted in the reciprocation of racism toward others. Dealing with racism can produce anti-White sentiments, therefore perpetuating the roots of hate or what he described as “grooves.”

So I think that experience leading into being a PhD student, I brought to the table in terms of going back to, I cannot allow these external factors to be a barrier or to intrude to create grooves. What I mean by grooves is that, is that have you ever been on a road that is yet to be paved that tires kind of fit into a groove in order to get you to a place? Those become old patterns. I did not want those old patterns to rehash themselves because this was not the same experience. However, the way people respond you end up going back to those old patterns.

Gee grew up during the 1980s and 1990s when many AAs were overtly intolerant of racism and inequality. He was adamant that he was not going to allow old patterns or reactionary methods used by AAs to confront racism to thwart his pathway to success. Old patterns could be defined as simply as speaking out or joining a campus demonstration. Gee felt these old patterns were likely to stigmatize him as militant and create undue stressors and barriers while attending a PWI.
Graduate Experience

Gee’s graduate experiences presented him with many hurdles that he overcame through his sheer desire to succeed by any genuine means possible. His transition from the NE to attend a southern PWI was a spiritual testament to his faith and intestinal fortitude. During the application process, Gee was told that he would not be accepted into the PhD program of Educational Leadership by a White male professor because his GRE scores were too low. His first response was to pray to God and allow his faith to guide him. As a result, an enormous internal strength emerged that gave him the confidence that he would not be denied the opportunity to be accepted as a PhD student.

I think what was different about my process has been this, I think the undergird for me is when I made the transition from the NE to the South, God spoke. Meaning that, I remember on my ride after doing my interviews, God told me that I had the job. That it was not going to be an issue for me, and to get to a point where it felt like the education was a natural step. I do not know if there was a real concern that it was not going to happen, but I know internally I could not believe that we would be at an institution of a higher learning, and I would have a Professor who was very old school, tell me that I was not going to get into this particular department. So, I think that is where the fighter's mentality kicks in. You know, you tell me that I cannot do something I am going to prove to you that I can. So I do not know if it was so much an emotion rather than old patterns rising up to disprove what current authority or the relevant authority at that time said could not happen. So, for me it was like getting back on a bicycle after a long period of time to ride a Tour de France. You know, you buckle down, you do what you have to do, you study, and you prepare to take the test so you can disprove the myth again.
Gee retook the GRE and was admitted into the doctoral program. As we talked, Gee smiled that he had debunked the myth of Black inferiority. He was not going to allow the passive discrimination he felt when a standardized test was used against him to deny him the opportunity to further his education.

**Challenges**

For the first approximately 6 months to a year of his doctoral program, Gee had no assistance or mentor in which to provide him the help needed to navigate through the institution. To add to his dilemma, he came from a business background and was venturing into an educational discipline. For many students who have mixed academic discipline backgrounds, venturing into a different program without any familiarity can pose great challenges as it did for Gee.

I think the biggest thing for me was I was very business minded so coming and working in an environment where everybody was educationally minded, that was a major challenge. At the time, there were not any African American Doctoral students or Master students in my department. Not that I needed someone around me that looked like me, but you know you always look for somebody that you can gravitate towards and have conversations about what is going on is this. You know, how I navigate through this process. So trying to find advocates in my department was a bit of a challenge. Rather than fall to attrition, Gee proactively sought out groups and professors who could help him be successful by forging untraditional bonds with predominantly White male social groups and fraternities. He also wanted to be the catalyst to break the racial barriers and stigmas that he believes many have toward AAMs in academia. As a result, he was accepted into an all White male fraternal group.
I think I put myself in those positions just to shock and break those barriers down. X University is kind of a unique University in terms of its traditions. There was a group on campus called “xxx” and it had been a predominately-White male organization. I remember going out to this organization. I was already in my thirties when I was doing my PhD, transitioning from twenty-nine to thirty, thirty-one. I remember going out and having to interact with these underclass White males that I thought were very immature. However, I wanted to be a part of this organization because I think one of the things that becomes important is knowing how to be a part of a club and not allowing race to be an issue for you to join something, and then proving the value of why you are there. Part of that process for me was also, if you have ever read a book — Why Should White Guys Have All The Fun,” Reginald Lewis was one of the – I cannot say he was the only, but at the time in the seventies, he was the only African American ever to get into Harvard without taking the LSAT.

Gee paid homage to the story of Reginald Lewis and illustrated how Lewis’ story prompted him to join groups where he was an outsider. He refused to allow his race to be a factor in his decision to join an all White male campus group. Gee took it upon himself to set a precedent to break a race barrier and to encourage his White male peers to overlook his race and view him on the sole basis of character and intellect. Gee spoke about Reginald Lewis’ influence on him:

So one of the things that he [Reginald Lewis] began talking about while he was in school, first at Virginia State then at Harvard, he made sure that he joined the club that he was not supposed to be a part of. He proved to them many times that he could be there because of his intellect, which many of them did not care for because you had a Black guy coming in the mid-70s that was a lot smarter than what his peers were. So I think
going through that process of reading the book and then being at X University and seeing some of the similarities, trying to walk in the same footsteps. But what that did for me is we talked about before those old patterns. The same types of behaviors ended up coming out because everything then gets proved from an external perspective rather than from a productivity, intellectual perspective.

After mirroring the Reginald Lewis story, Gee was accepted into the group, which permitted him to form bonds and lifelong connections to the University and its stakeholders. The membership, however, would not be sufficient in his degree attainment. He would need the assistance of mentors. These mentors, combined with his group mentorship, would benefit his academic success and social navigation while at his institution.

**Support Systems**

Gee had two mentors who persuaded him to pursue his PhD and one who specifically provided him with an impactful mentorship that allowed him to gain the social and cultural capital to succeed.

My gosh, for my Masters I guess it would have been my primary Professor in that class, Mr. Dooley, nothing of significance, but he was actually the guy that pushed me to get my PhD. He said that I definitely needed to make sure that I did not leave the University since I was already enrolled, to finish the process out. However, I had a significant teacher, Professor that was also part of my committee chair at X University; his name is Dr. Dave. Dave, my gosh at the time, he was in his fifties and growing up was very aware of the plights of the sixties. Dave was just different because he had owned his own business, done furniture, lived his whole life in the South. He brought something to the table that I think based on experience and having to work with a variety of people that
was much grounded and a great use of his experience as well as wisdom as a committee person. So Dave provided, if we can say flash-like technology.

Gee described the “flash technology” as someone who will not hold your hand” but will definitely put one in the best position for success. Gee’s Professor Dave was a likely source of information, and even though he was southern, never allowed race to become an issue with his students. Dave might be considered an ally, a member of the dominant group who supports those who are marginalized.

He would not tell you what to do but he definitely flashed a light in the direction that I needed to go and for him like many other people in my life that have stepped up and have been mentors in some capacity, race was never an issue. It was always about value, the worth, what you brought to the table. Never had seen that to be an issue, but with Dave at least, you could talk about those issues. He was very aware of the old Southern Good Old Boy mentality that was very prevalent at X University but never allowed that to be one of the mantras that he actually carried.

Dr. Gee was fortunate to find a mentor, a White male professor who defied the expectation that he be a “Southern Good Old Boy” like many of his colleagues. Dave was an ally, that is, a member of a dominant group who refuses to perpetuate any type of oppressive social dominance upon subordinates. It becomes their civic duty to indoctrinate the moral ethics of social justice to assist any student regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, religion, or sexual preference. Gee’s allies were instrumental in building a pathway toward doctoral success.

**Outcomes of Doctoral Success**

During his final doctoral defense, Gee felt a great amount of confidence and accomplishment. He believed he was the expert amongst experts. He was able to direct and
redirect his committee. He felt in command and was highly assured that his expertise and knowledge would result in a successful dissertation defense. When asked to talk about his greatest success, Gee shared,

Probably defending. One, because I was the expert. Even though my committee was very aware of what it was I was looking at, all of us were leadership and management gurus to a certain extent of their own field. Coming here and talking about my specific topic, I was the expert. Even the questions they threw at me were, to a certain extent you can tell them that is not the question you really want to ask. This is what you really want to ask. That for me was probably the height of me riding, just me being able to go through that experience and have a successful defense and outcome of that defense.

Once the PhD was completed, X University awards its graduates with a highly visible unique ring that signified school affiliation and degree earned. Earning the PhD ring, Gee felt he had been accepted into an elite club and was now a member of a very extensive network of academics. He recounted how he and another White male quickly bonded and began to connect solely due to the ring recognition.

Anywhere in the world, if I see anybody with that ring, one, I will know they went to X University, but it also joins us in terms of other traditions that we were all a part of. We always acknowledge somebody when you see them having that ring on. So there has been an advantage network-wise that I am not for sure how I would have been able to do that without really having some dialogues with people that have graduated from any place else. For instance, there was a guy on the plane as I was coming here this week, sat next to the window, he saw my ring, I saw his ring, and we knew we were both from the same institution. So it creates a conversation. But it is also a great networking tool.
Members of our institution take care of our own. We tend to hire one another and that has been a great benefit for me.

Being a graduate of a large PWI allowed Gee to have greater occupational marketability through affiliation with his alma mater. While reaping those benefits, Gee also offered advice for future candidates and is a big supporter for AAMs to pursue their doctorate.

**Advice for Current and Future Doctoral Candidates**

During the interview, Gee gave examples of ways in which to resolve problems that other candidates may face during trying times of the doctoral process. These solutions applied to all students, not just AAMs.

I think for me the most significant things, probably not just Black males but I would say anybody that is going through that process is trying to help people understand what can and cannot be done. I think for most people that process of getting your PhD is animus at times. People are not for sure that they have all of the information at their fingertips to be able to make wise decisions. So, for instance, I was at a client meeting this morning, both my client and the gentleman that was with us at that meeting, both of them are going through their PhD process, and she stopped writing. I am trying to figure out why and she says she is too busy.

Many students who are in a doctoral program are nontraditional and already have embarked upon a fulltime career. Gee offered this advice for this colleague,

So just giving her some solutions on what she can do to continue the process. Nobody says you have to sit down and write thirty, forty pages a day. If you can commit to writing one or two pages a day, at the end of the week you have fourteen or fifteen pages. So just helping people with tips on understanding how to build the process so this huge
undertaking is very simple, it is process orientated and it is built in a sequential manner. So, for me the thing that I would do is always offer people input. Always give them things that they could go about doing in order to help the process be a lot easier on them.

The pinnacle of completing a PhD heavily relies upon the dissertation phase and process. He challenges future students to not only write for the purpose of completing the dissertation process but to put their research to use. From candidacy to degree attainment, a dissertation should not just be a piece of shelved research, Gee stressed it must useful. As Gee pointed out,

Then for them to understand this, the biggest thing with the PhD is this, is that your piece of material that you actually write is only a sliver of a part of the analogy that is going to be added back to whatever it is you write about. So you have to make a decision. If you put all of your effort into creating this pristine document and it is never put to use, then you have wasted many man-hours building it. But if you want your dissertation work so you would be able to stand on to launch you into something, then that requires a different level of effort in order to produce a document. Because most of us, once we get out we want to be able to allow our PhD to launch us into something rather than our PhD be the thing that we launch into.

Gee believes mentorship is instrumental to the system of supports for AAM doctoral degree attainment. He suggested creating a funnel system for students to connect with credible mentors, like the one he had with Dave, to produce positive dividends that will permit students to focus more on their education and coursework rather than the racial battle fatigue that may arise from attending a PWI. Gee acknowledged the importance of passing on the knowledge that he gained and inviting AAMs into his network in order to disrupt the good old boy status quo.
I would direct him towards the mentor that I had. Somebody that I know I could trust. I would definitely put him in contact with the right people to network with. They might be able to guide him to the right people. I think the other thing is this, for me now working in both corporate as well as in education still, I think at some point you have to address not the external thing but the internal thing. What I mean by that is that what I have discovered is that those that continue to want to build this good ole boy network, the issues of heart is the thing that I can go after to have change. Because if it’s always an external thing then it is like a pissing contest. I am not up for that so I think that is why I keep coming back to having some sort of balance in that. Specifically for Black males, I would connect them with the network that I have and if those people are no longer there, making sure that I can find a network for them to be a part of.

The race or gender of the mentor was of no significance to Gee. He desired someone with extreme competence who possessed tools and strategies that were beneficial to him. He preferred a mentor that not only knew how to choose classes, but one who possessed a future vision for his or her students.

What was important for me is I did not want somebody that was just in education helping me with my PhD process. I did not care what color they were. I needed somebody that had a background that was panoptic instead of myopic. I needed him to bring a breadth of experiences to the table to get through this process because I was not planning to be an educator at all.

A person who possesses the ability to be panoptic is one who sees past mere classes, writing styles, or the dissertation itself. He or she is one that has a vision that extends past the dissertation phase and into the future possibilities of a doctoral student. A myopic mentor is
concerned only with the completion of the dissertation. Gee offered panoptic wisdom for the PWI who desires to recruit and retain AAM doctoral students.

**Advice for the PWI**

Gee was forthcoming in offering a solution to increase minority doctoral candidacy at PWIs. He believes PWIs need to increase cultural relevance in myriad ways through the arts, curriculum, and social settings if they wish to attract more minority students. The responsibility of increasing AAM culture should not solely rest on the shoulders of the surrounding community but it the responsibility of the institution to become more inviting for minority students by way of increasing its understanding of AA traditions and culture.

So for me, a PhD, I think the thing they have to figure out is what becomes relevant and important for that camp that is coming in. That is one of the biggest reasons why you see PWIs not getting many minority students to do their PhDs is because of the offerings at those schools have nothing to draw them there. So for instance, at my alma mater, most PhD students are either engaged or married so they are also thinking about their families. What does a community have to offer you in terms of your family? What is the cultural life? At X University, it was a primarily White-bastion community. They had no arts, no performing arts, no culture. It was a college town so I think one of those things is that most people are going to choose a much larger school to be a part that sits closer to some sort of an urban setting or metropolis. Those environments, they really pull students in because it gives them a variety of things to interact and build within their community. Therefore, community makes a huge difference on what attracts students to their schools especially at that level.
Cultural capital refers to non-financial social assets; they may be educational or intellectual, which might promote social mobility beyond economic means for AAMs who attend PWIs. For Gee, if a PWI is unwilling to provide such capital, then the environment needs to be retooled to appear accepting and comforting for an AAM to navigate therefore reducing the external factors that may magnify racial battle fatigue. Gee believes a sense of belonging or acceptance is a vital component that may attract more students of color to a PWI.

**Dr. Leonard Ericson**

Dr. Leonard Ericson, age 47, earned his PhD in Political Science from a Midwestern PWI. He is currently serving as the Director of Athletics at another Midwestern PWI. Before becoming Athletic Director, as the Executive Director for Government Relations, he was responsible for building relationships with elected and appointed stakeholders at the local, state, and federal levels to advance the university’s finances and to provide for its academic and research needs. Ericson is heavily involved in the community, including board membership with various non-profit service organizations. He earned an accolade from the Presidential Commission for the National Museum of African American History and Culture.

**Early Years and Education**

Ericson takes tremendous pleasure and pride in his upbringing by his parents in the rural Midwest. His parents felt the move to a small town would better serve his future and provide him with the cultural and social capital to be successful in America.

I grew up in a small rural community. My family moved there in 1961 away from the urban area to provide an opportunity for me to grow up in a rural community and it's a small town that had, at the end of my K through 12 career, 38 people in my graduating class, 200 people in my high school, 2000 people in my home town. A very small, rural
and our family was not the only minority, but we were the only African American minority family in the community by the time I graduated. There had been maybe one or two in and out families during that time period, but we were really the only African American family. My parents were ones that grew up teaching me and I grew up being taught that you treat everybody the same until they ‘rip their pants’ and that’s the term I grew up hearing. You treat everybody the same until they rip their pants because, once they rip their pants, no matter who they are, well, then we deal with them differently than not, but we don’t assume anything or anything else. We didn’t see color; I was taught that. Had a community that really embraced that!

Due to living in a small rural community where everyone attended the same grades and classes, Ericson developed lifelong friendships and social connections. His father had been a football star at the university and his family was highly respected amongst the community. His parents strategically moved to a rural community so Ericson could possibly avoid the racial strife that his father endured as student athlete and arm him with the social and cultural capital needed to succeed, to survive, and to thrive in White society. Ericson described what it was like as an AAM to be part of the inner circle of a small rural town,

The classes that I went through, the kids that I went through, we grew up together from K through 12. So, I had a very different experience then many minorities that may go into a similar situation like that because they came in from the outside and in a small community there was already that ‘Cliq’ so to speak. So, some things that manifested themselves as discrimination was just that: You came from outside the community, as opposed to it being: I grew up in that end. Like I said, I was there K through 12, an
unbelievable, great experience in a very supportive community for our family and very supportive community for me.

Ericson’s description of his hometown was that of a very tight knit community that was not very receptive to outsiders, defined as those who were non-residents of his community. This is typical of rural communities. Communities are very reluctant to embrace outsiders until they have earned their trust, respect, and acceptance. Because he was raised in a small, predominantly White rural community, Ericson’s experiences and perspectives differed quite a bit from other AAMs.

**Impact of Father as a Role Model**

The University and the community where Ericson was a student athlete earned him accolades as an All-American golfer both on and off the field. Ericson regarded his father as a pioneer for his alma mater and one who leaves a legacy of true character that many AAMs may model. Ericson’s father’s trials and triumphs are well documented and recounted by Ericson as his role model.

My father was a student athlete from 1944 to 1948, so it was previous to civil liberties, civil rights, all of those kinds of things. However, the things that he experienced were that there were places south of here, in your home state, where he could not go. He could not go there. One quick little story. Again, I’ll be very quick, is that he couldn’t go to Western Texas to play. I can’t remember whether they won or lost or not because it doesn’t really matter, but what the team did, the remaining all White team, grabbed the football at the end of the game to bring back to my father. And, that school withheld its money that it was supposed to share with my father’s team for playing that game until we returned that football. That football is at our house; we still have that football. Again, the
story that we talk about is the $2000.00 football. That was the amount of money that that institution said, —We’re not sending you your cut of the gate because we want that football back because we know why you’re taking that football.” And so, but again, that taints the experience that I have, is that, his team picked that ball up and brought it back to him knowing that he was here. Similar story about in high school even – so, again, our experience, our family’s experience, was that there were many people that were not of African American descent who weren’t civil rights leaders, they were not marchers, and they just did the right thing for this one individual – my father.

His father was so well revered at the university he was offered to pledge in an all White male fraternity. Although he was flattered, the senior Mr. Ericson declined. Accepting the invitation from his teammates had implications that many of his White peers were vastly unaware.

Some of his teammates invited him to be part of a fraternity in 1944, 1948; the DU House here, the Men of Webster. My father declined doing that, not because he wasn’t honored and privileged, but he knew that his friends, who were White members of that fraternity, did not understand what they were asking. He did not want to put them in that situation.

His father’s experiences assisted him in his transition to Midwest PWI in a metropolitan area.

After graduating from high school, Ericson was the recipient of an athletic scholarship to play golf, a sport dominated by White males.

**Undergraduate**

Ericson earned his Bachelors in Business Management from Midwestern State University while competing on the playing field as student athlete. He determined that his choice in attending this institution was because it was one of good quality and diversity. Although the university he attended was the most diverse in the state, he admits there was still more growth
potential for diversity that could be reached when he attended during the 1980s. He recounted that his student athlete status allowed him social capital that non-student athletes were not afforded.

Ericson revealed that he never experienced racism at the PWIs he attended during his years as an undergraduate, masters, or doctoral student. His greatest challenge was not fitting in or being accepted by other AA students because he did not know how to speak urban AA slang. In addition, he earned an athletic scholarship in a sport that many AA students at the time were reluctant to play or understand. Ericson has a colorblind mentality that focuses more on moral
character than racial salience. All in all, these tenets enabled him to successfully compete in a Division I sport dominated by White Americans.

Ericson mentioned that the athletic department where he played was tremendously supportive and he had more support than he needed. Although the athletic department was highly supportive, his AA peers were not. Ericson did not carry himself in a manner that others would define him as “Black” therefore he was rejected by many of his AA peers. As aforementioned, he played a sport coined “White” and most of his friends were White. He shared how his life experiences differed significantly from many of his AA peers.

So there was – the embracing was they not understanding my comfortableness, or me not being particularly, I’ll use the term, quote unquote, “Black enough” or “speaking Black enough,” and again, it was not in a negative. It was in an “I don’t understand,” because – or whenever that was – whenever one acted that way from their life experience, it was somebody trying to get over from their life experience. Someone that was trying to be something they weren’t, as opposed to, “I’m sorry. I don’t know any different because I grew up in a small country town and this is what we do.” This is how I – so, that was the, looking back, that was what the experience was. Except for, I have to be as honest as I can possibly be, is that, I probably felt more challenges relative to race from like race individuals than I did from predominantly White students.

Marked as not being “Black enough” by his AA peers, Ericson admitted this was the racial hand he was dealt in both his undergraduate and graduate years. In addition, Ericson attributes his abilities to successfully navigate, not only at the PWI, but also in the White world, to his parents. He credits them for ingraining the ideals of his cultural competence through their interactions
and values. These ideals were not just implemented by mere word of wisdom; he witnessed much of these interactions and used them as his social platform.

**Graduate School**

After receiving his BA in Business Management, Ericson obtained a job as a marketing rep at a highly reputable tech firm to sell computers to school districts in the Midwest. He was then recruited to work for his alma mater in university relations.

Well, when I was – I worked in the private sector. It’s a short story, but I may stretch it out to make it make sense. I worked at a tech firm as a Marketing Rep straight out of college. I sold computers to school districts. I left Midwestern State in 1987, was dipped in blue, hired by a Fortune 500 company to learn marketing and sales and did that for two and a half years and was successful and did all that. And, then I – three university presidents ago at my current employer Midwestern State, was the fact that I was asked to come and learn about the University.

While working for Midwestern State University, he pursued his Master’s degree in Public Administration. During that period, Ericson became well acquainted with the Executive Director of the Midwest Board of Regents. This gentleman inspired him to achieve newer heights by way of the PhD. He advised Ericson not to pursue a PhD in Higher Education but instead to pursue a more highly valued degree in Political Science from a prestigious institution.

So, I knew at the time that I wanted to get a master’s degree and I knew that it would be easier to get my master’s degree while working on campus than trying to work in the private sector, so I came to work and got my master’s degree in Public Administration while I was working on campus. Then, after I did that, the Executive Director of the Midwest Board of Regents, God rest his soul. He passed away of cancer almost 20 years
ago; 20-30 years ago now – was a great mentor to me and he said, “Now Leonard, if you like being at a university, you need – even though you do administrative work and you do all these things and you want to stay at a university, you need to get your Ph.D. Or, you need to get your terminal degree. You could get a Law degree, but if you’re going to be on a campus, you really need to get a PhD.” His secondary advice was, “You, as an administrator, you need to get it in a particular discipline.” Not just – and he wasn’t being disparaging and I appreciate him because his candor was that – you need to get it in a particular discipline not just in Higher Ed Administration because, guess what? And, I think he was making that advice for me, not only as a person, but also as a person of color. To say, “Don’t settle for just the Higher Ed Administration degree because you’re an administrator.” Take the effort to pick a discipline that is – and at the time my role on campus fit doing more of a political science, public policy so it made sense that way as well, but I want to emphasize that it was not to pick kind of the standard route, go to a discipline – whatever that is – again, particularly tied to something you cared about and do that because, in order to be on a campus, that’s something that is highly valued to work as an administrator on campus to have that terminal degree.

Upon the advice he was given, Ericson applied to the nation’s top ten public policy/public administration programs and was accepted into three. His last visit was to Syracuse University, where the chairperson gave high praise to University of Southern Midwest in his home state and highly recommended that he apply. Upon his departure, it appeared to Ericson that University of Southern Midwest would be the logical choice. He was married and did not want to uproot his family or be that far away from his parents since he could receive a highly qualified education and pay in-state tuition while remaining close to home.
I went down the list of institutions that I had been accepted or applied to and they were Cal Berkeley, University of Akron, they were all PWI’s: University of Akron, Harvard, Syracuse of course, Claremont. What I had done was, I had picked ten different schools to apply to, all the ones that were kind of in a tiered system of the very best in that area that I was selecting, which was public policy/public administration. The next best and then some that were high quality that would – but none of them were ones that were settling, but there were three tiers and I did that all at the same time. But, when I went to Syracuse, they said, “Oh boy, well, we’d love to have you” and this stuff and they went down a list and they go – the only school that they said – when they asked me where I had applied and I went down the list and they go, “University of Southern Midwest.” So, I’d gone out there to interview and I got back on the plane and I thought: The only one they had any comment about was the University of Southern Midwest. So, why would I travel clean across the country to go to Syracuse when I was married and had my wife and had to think about her career and all these things? Why would I travel clear across the country to go to an institution at Syracuse, which would have been a great institution.

In 2002, Ericson earned his PhD in Political Science from the University of Southern Midwest. Attending an HBCU was not on his agenda. He enjoyed the undergraduate and graduate experiences he had from attending a PWI.

**HBCU and/or PWI**

Having grown up in a predominantly White community, and his father having attended a PWI, Ericson had given no thought to attending an HBCU. After high school, he was awarded an athletic scholarship to Midwestern State University and his student athlete status opened doors that many non athletic AAMs were not privileged to enter. He had the assistance from student
athletic services, which provided an immense support system with the services of strict study hall mandates, free tutoring, grade monitoring, and a network of an extended family of alumni.

Ericson explained that his undergraduate education at a PWU was — a quality experience.” He went on to relate,

It was in a metropolitan community, so it was probably more diverse than many PWI’s in the Midwest. Probably not as diverse as it could be, but it was diverse nonetheless. It was not as diverse as you might have expected, but much more diverse than every one of the other PWI’s within the state that I went to school, by a long shot and still had a long way to go. At the same time, I also was in it because I came with a – I was a student athlete – so I was with a cadre of diverse folks as part of being a student athlete at that institution. So, that experience was blended by – but I was also involved on campus and did other things as a student athlete. So, you had this smaller family of the student athletes that you were very much involved with that was not necessarily a microcosm of the campus. Probably more diverse in general only because it’s a smaller group than the campus, but diverse nonetheless and, at that institution, I was probably again oblivious to any issues that might go on. Except for, I have to be as honest as I can possibly be, is that, I probably felt more challenges relative to race from like race individuals than I did from predominately White students.

Ericson was the product of a proud AA family who resided in rural America. He was not prepared to socially relate with other AA students from urban America. Nevertheless, he was highly competitive in his sport and achieved all-conference honors. Yet, he did not allow this social dilemma to derail his parents’ steadfast dreams of him becoming a successful young AAM.
Support Systems at the PWI

While attending Midwestern State University, as a student athlete, Ericson earned a tremendous amount of support in his bachelors and masters degrees. When he transitioned to University of Southern Midwest, he found a mentor in his major professor, Professor X, who was highly instrumental during his doctoral experience.

I had great support systems from Midwestern State University that helped me navigate through the processes of my Bachelors and Masters, but Professor X helped me get through to get my doctorate. What he did was, one, he gave me lots of experiential opportunities to write and teach and do all of the things that you need to do as a graduate student to learn the process – to learn the process of learning. He was also, again, very prolific himself, and he had been the chair of the department and he was not the chair now. So, he understood kind of the administrative side of the world and he was a great mesh for me because he wasn’t – he was more of a – he wasn’t a pointy-head, no offense in there, he was not kind of a pure academic. He was a person that saw the real world as valuable, particularly in policy and political science, as well as not. So, he was a perfect mesh for me because he embodied what I did, was this marrying of the academic world and the practical politics world. And so, the specific things he did was, again, what he did was, he made himself available to sit in his office to talk about writing, teaching, learning, researching, all of those things on a regular basis, but not so much that he was hovering, but on a regular basis that he made himself available so we could have those conversations. So, I could work with – he made projects that he was working on readily available to help him. And, also I was comfortable with, again I’d worked as a staff person in my work life, so I was not hurt by the notion of, Guess what? I’m going to do a
bunch of work that my name may or may not get on it. I'm not expecting that because it's going to pay off in the long run. And he afforded me that opportunity. Most of the time in many of the projects, I was coauthor, I was part of that – he made sure I always had opportunities to do conference papers, to present, to do all of those kinds of things because that's really how you navigate the process. I didn't have to navigate the process from an internal politics side, because, remember where I started from: "Do all the things you need to do to be successful.” Most folks, and most times the process, they don’t have the guts to take you out if you do those things. In a straight up, in today's politically correct world of discrimination and racism, they don’t really have that.

Ericson revealed many of his White doctoral peers’ failed to pass their comprehensive exams. Ericson believed race was not a factor at University of Southern Midwest; that all students were held to the same standards during comprehensive exams. If they did not prepare and pass the exam, the professors regarded them as unworthy of receiving their doctoral degree. Ericson explained how professors who wanted to "get at" students were "equal opportunity getters,"

I had friends that failed out of their doctoral programs on their written exams because they didn’t check that box correctly. They had professors that wanted to get at them, White students, not African Americans, but they’re equal opportunity getters sometimes. He admitted to facing negative bias because he was a practitioner and graduate student, which was a rarity in that particular department. Doctoral students were limited to teaching and researching, whereas Ericson was working and gaining practical experience.

I, on the other hand, because, again, I did lots of practical work while I was being a graduate student, my only challenges as a graduate student were the bias against practical politics in the political science department – practical politics, people that went out and
their job was to work in real politics and you’re supposed to be, as a graduate student, not doing those things, you should be head down being a poor graduate student not doing those things and I just wasn’t going to do that.

Ericson credited his University of Southern Midwest mentor for being able to work around and through the doctoral process. The teachings and guidance of his mentor were highly instrumental to Ericson’s eventual success. The benefits of their collaboration led to successful senior graduate student years that resulted in Ericson’s empowerment and growth.

**Outcomes of Doctoral Success**

Ericson’s combination of practitioner and researcher skills paid great dividends. As a graduate teaching assistant, he was given the opportunity to teach and manage a course, and to advise and mentor a cohort of students.

The best success that I had was twofold. One was to – by the time I was a senior graduate student, I taught and managed my own course. Not as a graduate teaching assistant in a large class, but had my own students of record and did that and watching them grow and develop and do that early on, I’m much better now but that was a great opportunity to be able to do that as being a young graduate student, to teach a class.

His second accomplishment was to co-author a book chapter with Professor X.

My other great success was the ability to have a coauthored article in a academic text book with my major professor, my mentor, which was part of a third, fourth, fifth edition of a book relative to interest group politics. And, to have that opportunity to do research with him that then became published as still a graduate student, to have that opportunity was great and know that still it made an impact in the area of interest group research,
which is where my area of focus was, was interest group politics, and to be able to do
those kinds of things.

Ericson’s earned PhD was a daunting, yet privileged experience that allowed him greater capital
than his peers. He was given the ability to study and practice politics, which granted him high
job marketability and competence.

**Advice for Future Doctoral Candidates**

Ericson offered some words of character and wisdom to future candidates, regardless of
their color. He advised a mastery of skill set, work ethic, and determination to both HBCU and
PWI doctoral students.

Well, first of all, I would – we can talk about at a PWI, but I would start with
accomplishing your doctoral degree – period, requires that, whether it’s at a HBCU or
PWI, requires exactly the same wherewithal, skill set, determination, and thought
processes. So, if you’ve not got that straight, whether you’re at an HBCU or PWI, you
need to get that right. To me, that’s the foundation; is that one, doctoral degrees don’t
grow on trees and it is something that requires a level of dedication and a level of interest
and inquiry that is really important.

Ericson offered some insight for the future AAM candidate to attain his doctoral degree.
He advised that without a doctoral degree, an AAM’s marketability and occupational promotion
or mobility is severely limited.

And, understanding that we are joining a guild of scholars is not a practical degree, per
se, it’s a – from a perspective of a utilitarian that – but, in the world of academics, if you
are an administrator who happens to be African American, I strongly encourage that you,
at a university, get your doctoral degree because that piece, it’s utilitarian from the
perspective of that it will be utilized against you in the level of advancement because you’ve not gone by the way of others on that campus particularly on the academic side. So, it seems unfair because there will be others that won’t have to go that route, but you have to remember where I started, which was, I’m removing all obstacles.

There are many occupational barriers that an AAM employee or staff may face while striving to gain a promotion and wage increase. Ericson posits it is highly important to remove any and all barriers that may be viewed as grounds of denial of such upward mobility. That removal consists of achieving the highest training or education needed to lessen such rationale. Essentially, Ericson maintained that a doctoral degree puts AAMs on more equal footing with Whites who might not need the degree to advance in their careers.

Advice for the PWI

As for the advice for the PWI, Ericson wants institutions to identify young AAMs and recruit them. Ericson acknowledged that in some disciplines, such as Mathematics, very few AAMs are earning doctoral degrees and the few who attain the degree are highly sought after.

I think that the biggest thing we have to do is, those institutions that are challenged of recruiting – and I’m going to back into this. There are challenges in recruiting because we have to do a better job of cultivating and identifying and growing our own. And – as an institution, whatever institution it is – and, the example I will give is that there was one year that there were five African American mathematicians minted in one year – five. So, when we get critical of, –Well, they’re not hiring enough African American faculty in the Department of Mathematics,” well, let me just tell you, if there were only five in one year, you are exactly right, because in many instances there’s only five and if I remember right, two of those went to the private sector, two of them went to the same institution
that was paying exorbitant amounts of money, and then somebody else decided not to – so, okay, there were five.

To Ericson, the challenge for doctoral granting institutions is to nurture, develop, and support talented AAMs to pursue the doctoral degree. In an era where many AAMs are not pursuing higher education at all, Ericson believes it is more important than ever to demonstrate to young AAMs that seeking an advanced degree is “cool” and something many of them should aspire to.

So, the thing that institutions have to do, is they’ve got to go out and identify those targets of opportunity of individuals that have a glimmer of a spark and support them and encourage them and not make being an academic, or getting their PhD; getting their terminal degree be something that is prudish, not fun. Because, if we make it that, the way I talked about earlier, this notion of that this heavily important kind of thing, but also, we’re going to be continually challenged because first generation college students typically are not in the right mode to say they’re going to become academics because if they are in a discipline where they choose to get their PhD, they’re going to have other market opportunities.

Ericson constituted a need to proactively seek and recruit young AAM talents during their younger years. This will allow for a more thorough maturation and grasp of the benefits of higher education. Although it contrasts with his belief system, Ericson admits that the overwhelming majority of students of color who vie to have stakeholders in the educational system of the same ethnicity will better suit their growth and development.

I strongly believe in the “Grow Your Own” – I think I’m kind of an example of that. I think there’s ways to do it, but I think there’s also some realistic kinds of things if we’re talking about first time African American males going to college, there may be some
unrealistic expectations except for in the most unique case where that makes sense to them. Their kids may be more likely to be interested because they’re going to be in a different scenario.

Ericson acknowledges a barrier to pursuing an advanced degree is the need for employment and being a full-time student is not an option for many, especially AAMs.

The barrier to entry is the need to get employed, to do those kinds of things. So, you have to have the ability to do – to forego for five years. Not everybody is afforded the opportunity to be able to work full time and pursue a graduate degree.

Additionally, because many AAs who do receive doctorates do so in the discipline of Education, they use their degrees in K-12 education, where they can make a higher salary. Higher education, academic positions typically pay far less than public education. Ericson acknowledged the difficulty of convincing AAs with doctorates to move into higher education to serve as mentors and role models and increase the diversity of university faculty.

I’ll pick on where the majority of African American males, or African Americans, get their PhD’s is typically in education. So, they are typically going about that because it moves them up their salary scales in K through 12. We have to think, at the higher ed. level, how do we get them to be part of the higher ed. system, but we don’t – we’ve not quite jumped the broom and I think we’re getting much better at most places to say we want to have more of that diversity in our departments, which then helps do that. Don’t get me wrong, that’s important. That having people that look like or talk like me, is at the end of my train of what requires to make us have an opportunity – or makes me see the opportunity is there for me. For many folks, that’s really important.
Ericson's upbringing allowed him to see the world through a much different lens than most AAMs. He embraces diversity as highly important but simultaneously ascribes to a color-blind ideology where race is less significant when success at any level comes into question. Furthermore, through his lived experiences he believes the race factor is not totally dismissed from his psyche but believes it had very little impact on his successes while attending PWIs.

**Dr. Gerald Weathers**

Dr. Gerald Weathers, age 60, earned his PhD from a large Midwestern PWI in 2010 where he studied Urban Metropolitan Leadership and Policy Studies. He is currently teaching Advanced Leadership Theories Seminar leading cohorts of graduate students in educational leadership and teaches a class in Social Justice and Cultural Issues for future K-12 teachers. His true passion involves researching the history and politics of AA education. A nontraditional student, Weathers is proud of his academic accomplishments and readily shared his upbringing. He was the sole participant who insisted that I use his interview verbatim without the fictitious nouns to conceal his identity. The Institutional Review Board, however, does not allow real names to be used, and as with the other narratives, a pseudonym is used for Weathers' name, although the real names of locations are used.

**Early Years and Education**

Weathers shared his early childhood education and family history. He attended Charles Sumner High School, the first AA high school west of the Mississippi River. His family took part in the rich heritage of the Great Migration of the 1940s when AAs in the Jim Crow south fled to northern states to create better lives for their families. His family made St. Louis their home, where Weathers attended segregated schools.
I grew up in St. Louis, Missouri. I attended what is known as the first African-American high school west of the Mississippi River named Charles E. Sumner High School, St. Louis, Missouri. Missouri is a former slave state and after the Civil War, they did engage in legislating segregation. So there was – prior to 1954, St. Louis had a dual school system; one for Whites, one for Blacks.

Weathers is the proud offspring of parents who were raised during the Jim Crow south of Mississippi where segregation and oppression of AAs was a normal way of life. Unlike most AA families who fought for the advancement of AAs through riots, pickets, and marches; his parents firmly believed that education was the key to success.

Well, my parents raised us – my parents are members, participants, of the great migration, the second phase of the great migration. They grew up in southern Mississippi in the Hattiesburg, Mississippi area. They came to St. Louis in January of 1945. I am their second child. Their first child was born in 1945, October, and I was born in February of 1951. Their third child was born in July of ’52, and their fourth child was born in September of ’54. We were all raised to seek education and to do better, education-wise, than they had been able to do. My father completed what's probably a fifth or sixth grade Mississippi education at that time for Blacks. His father, my grandfather, who I'm named after, his father died when he was nine years old as a result of the local hospital refusing to admit him while he was having an appendicitis attack, so he died because of the refusal of treatment in southern Mississippi. But my parents always worked and expected us to do well in school. Now just because your parents expect you to do that doesn't necessarily mean that all of the children will do that. Out of four children, I am the only one who actually earned a college education.
Weathers was schooled in all AA Catholic environment through eighth grade. He attempted to earn a scholarship to a highly acclaimed all AA male Catholic high school but failed to attain a score high enough on the entrance exam to earn a scholarship. His parents were not fortunate to afford the tuition; therefore he attended the local public high school.

Well, my k-12 public school experience was from the kindergarten through the 8th grade, I attended an all-Black Parochial Catholic elementary school, which was run by the Sisters of Loretto. In my 8th grade year at that school, I was encouraged to apply and take a test to attend what's known as St. Louis University High School, which again, is a Catholic institution, and it's an all-boys Catholic institution. It's highly regarded as a college prep. I took the test to attend St. Louis University High School, but I did not score high enough to receive a scholarship from them, so my parents decided that it was not worth the expense for high school because there would be the coming expense for college. So that's when I attended the public high school known as Charles E. Sumner High School.

Weathers recalled being screamed at by his father for attempting to use a bathroom for “White only” during a visit to Mississippi. Unlike the Deep South, segregation in St. Louis was de facto instead of de jure. De jure segregations is backed and enforced by local and government laws whereas de facto segregation are unwritten social norms enforced by society. When Weathers unknowingly attempted to use a “White Only” bathroom in Mississippi, it sent a shockwave of fear through his father. His father carried a handgun at all times because of the potential threat of harm or victimization that could be inflicted upon an AA in that part of the country. Racial tensions were high during the Great Migration. His father vowed to defend him and his family at all costs against anyone who posed danger to the family. Weathers tells the story,
Well, as children, my parents, we went back and forth to Southern Mississippi often, at least once or twice a year. And I remember as a very young boy we were stopping for a bathroom stop, and we jumped out of the car, and we started running for the, I guess for the bathroom. My dad, he screamed to the top of his voice, “No! Come back!” And it was because we were heading to the wrong bathroom, and he knew that. But one thing about my father was always that, I didn’t know it, I was a really young man, but as I got older he told me that he always carried a pistol when he was in Mississippi, when we were going back and forth to Mississippi, he always carried a pistol, and it was part of his attire to carry the pistol. The reason that he carried the pistol was he would always defend himself and his family against any type of a mob of Whites. And we thought we had done something wrong when he screamed at us, and the only thing that I regret is that he didn’t explain it to us. He didn’t explain it to us. So we cowered, and we came back and got back into the car, and we just kind of left that particular establishment and drove off. But he explained it to me later. I was probably early 20s before he actually wanted to talk about it.

Weathers recalled that his parents were not politically active or militant when it came to civil rights or social justice issues, but they firmly believed in education as a way to a better future for their children.

My parents’ position was always that, even during the turbulent 60s, just do what you have to do. Don’t worry about, they did not go to Martin Luther King rallies, they didn’t do any of those types of things. They were not activists. Their whole position was, things are not going to change, you just need to get an education, okay, and do the best
that you can do because things are not going to change; it's never going to change. So that was my parent's position.

Weathers exuded tremendous pride and lineage to the AA community brought forth by the Great Migration. The Great Migration was a mass exodus of AAs leaving the Jim Crow south to north to seek better quality of lives and equal opportunity.

**HBCU and or PWI**

Although he attended PWIs for all three of his degrees, looking back, Weathers voiced that he would have rather attended an HBCU. He had many relatives who graduated from various HBCUs in the South and from them came to understand the lifelong bond that graduates of HBCUs have with the institution and with each other. He wished he could have had that experience.

If the question were if I had my choice for undergrad, would I have chosen HBCU or PWI, I would say HBCU. The reason is, having attended a PWI for undergrad, okay, I have no connection to the university whatsoever. I have relatives from the south, who attended all corners. They attended Jackson State University, and I have some relatives who attended Tennessee State, and it is like the bond that they hold with their colleagues, you know, their peers who were in college with them, they still go to homecoming, I mean, it is just, I have attended one with them. I mean it is just such a bonding that was created at that time. So I would much rather had gone to an HBCU at that time. In terms of PWI for my PhD, I would probably have bonded more so with people that I came through with as well.
For Weathers, the PWI not only did not offer the depth of relationship and connections, but he felt alienated and invisible. He shared being puzzled about how White students in class either failed to see him or refused to recognize him outside of class.

What I have noticed is that PWI, okay, I mean, I have had experiences that have shown me some very profound reflections. I have been in class with White students, male and female, and we are doing all of these different things in class. We are talking with each other, we are doing things like that, and if I see them at Lowes or Home Depot, it's like I have to reintroduce myself to them. It is like, how could you not know who I am, and we are in class together? But because we are outside of the confines of the university, you've got to be reminded of who I am when I am the only Black person in that class. So I don’t understand that. So the answer to your question is probably, if I had a choice to do it all over, I would do it at HBCU.

Weathers believed that an HBCU offers many intrinsic advantages for AAMs, including a strong sense of belonging absent of alienation, family ties, and genuine friendships outside the confines of the university setting. Yet, he enrolled at St. Louis University, a PWI, and majored in accounting.

**Undergraduate at the PWI**

Upon his arrival at St. Louis University in 1969, Weathers immediately began to encounter competitive rejection. Competitive rejection describes the ways in which AAMs, upon entry to college, perceived themselves insignificant in comparison with other students regardless of race and gender.

I attended St. Louis University, which is a Jesuit-run university in St. Louis, Missouri. I enrolled in 1969 with an academic scholarship and at the time that I attended St. Louis
University from 1969-1973, there were probably maybe 200 African-American students on the campus enrolled, and that would be undergrad, graduate school, med school, and the law school. So my experience there was one of I consider of alienation, isolation. My undergrad degree is in accounting, and while I was there, I noticed White students who would have all types of conversations and meetings with the White instructors after class, on weekends. I heard of retreats that they had, but I was never invited so I never had that experience with an instructor or a professor, but nonetheless, I stayed the course, and I earned a bachelor's degree there in 1973. In my undergraduate experience, I never had a White female teacher. All my instructors were all either men of the collar, as you say, or White instructors, White male instructors, or sometimes they were members of the Jesuit order, but I never had a White female instructor in my undergraduate life.

During his undergraduate experience, Weathers felt a great deal of alienation from his White peers and professors. He had yet to be taught by anyone other than a White male professor. There was no faculty of color at his institution in which he could seek comfort through the simplicities of being an AAM at a PWI pursuing a BA in accounting.

Graduate

In 2001, Weathers went on to receive his Masters in Special Education from the University of St. Louis based upon an inspirational epiphany to make a difference from within the AA community to assist young AAMs, which he explained was “being in the game.” Weathers spent 30 years working in the corporate world and at the age of 50 decided to become a teacher in the public school system in St. Louis, MO when an AAM principal presented him with a challenge.
I was very concerned about the plight of African American males, their graduation rate, their unemployment rates, their seemingly indifferent attitude toward academic achievement in high schools, and a guy that I graduated from high school with was a principal, and so whenever he and I and some other friends who weren't in education, when we would sit around and we would talk, we all seemed to have all these ideas and these solutions, and he challenged us then: "If you're not in the game, then you don't really know what you're talking about." So he issued a challenge that we should get in the game. I'm the only one who took him up on the challenge and I enrolled in a career transition program at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, and this program actually was set up to so that an individual could seek a teaching credential.

Weathers became connected with a professor who assisted in him in attaining two goals. He earned a Masters degree and his teaching credential simultaneously. This program was unbeknown to Weathers and he was grateful for the guidance he was given because the state of Missouri made it difficult for him to attain his teaching credential.

In the beginning when I was looking at and researching getting a teaching credential, I was told by several universities that I would have to complete 78 hours of educational credit without earning an advanced degree in order to get a teaching credential, which I thought was ridiculous because my research has shown that 90 hours of additional coursework, if you had 90 hours past the bachelor, you could actually have a PhD. So then I ran into a Dr. V at the University of Missouri-St. Louis and he had worked it out with the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education a program of coursework where 42 hours of graduate work would not only qualify you to be able to
obtain a teaching credential, it would also give you a master's degree of education in
special education, and so I got into that particular program.

After successfully graduating with his Masters in Special Education with a teaching license, he
taught mathematics to students with disabilities at a St. Louis high school.

**Experience with Racism at a PWI**

For his undergraduate degree, Weathers attended St Louis University, a Catholic Jesuit school, during the pivotal 1960s when both Malcolm X and Martin Luther King were assassinated. He experienced passive racism where he felt many White male professors
purposely wanted to keep AAMs from entering graduate school by awarding them letter grades
of Cs. When questioned about his experiences with racism during his undergraduate education he responded,

Well, it was something that I expected. At that particular time, I mean, I expected that. I
didn't feel like – I understood what the separation of the races was all about, so those
were the things I expected. This is 1969. This is after the assassination of Martin Luther
King. This is after the death of Malcolm X. This is during the time of so-called non-
vioent activities by African Americans contradicted by other African American
organizations like the Black Panthers, like H Rap Brown, Stokely Carmichael, who were
basically at odds with the Martin Luther King principle of non-violence. So I felt like
these were things that were expected. I did myself and other African-American students,
we went through a period where instructors all wanted to give us C-pluses when we
should've gotten B's. And when I look back on it now, I believe it was an effort to sort of
keep us out of graduate school. It's tough to get into graduate school if you don't have a
3.0 undergraduate. So those are reflections that I saw reflect by later in my life, not
necessarily at that time, although we knew, I always knew, that I deserved higher grade point averages in several of the classes.

As a result of the racial turmoil, many students were threatened to receive C’s to keep them from entering graduate school during the Black Power movement of the 1960’s. Weathers expected to experience racism and believed White male professors at his institution concocted this strategy.

**Passive Racism**

Weathers detailed during his master’s program experiences with passive racism, which is a form of nonviolent, non-confrontational racism that has evolved into current practices to discriminate, hate, or show intolerance in a very passive manner. It varies greatly from the active racism that may include lynching, verbal assaults, or other “in your face” customs of racism.

Well, I would say that any of the racism that I experienced was passive. But what happened is, as I was pursuing the Masters in Education Administration, there was an endowed professor, an African-American, Dr. LB, who became very instrumental in being my ally, and being my mentor, and encouraging me that I was what he considered to be PhD material. The passive racism that I experienced was that I wasn’t really getting any assistance, or any counseling relating to what courses I should be taking and things of that nature. I basically found all of that out on my own. Dr. LB actually had a cohort of; he had a program that was related to St. Louis public schools where he ran a cohort of students who were groomed to be principals in education administration. I just happened to take a course with him because I saw it as a course that I needed, and so I took the course with him, and basically was probably the shining star in his cohort. So that is why he took note of who I was.
Weathers voiced his experience with passive forms of racism by not receiving the assistance needed to properly move through the program. This experience also led to developing a relationship with a tenured AAM faculty member who became his mentor.

**Negative Stereotyping During Doctoral Program**

It is very common for an AAM to be branded as a militant or Afrocentric with anti-White sentiment, when he speaks publicly against racism and its roots that are traced back to Whiteness and White privilege. Weathers was no exception. During a class discussion about race, he dismissed the possibility of U.S. society as one that has the potential to become colorblind. At that point, he felt professors, peers, and other AA students negatively stigmatized him as a militant because of his views that opposed the ideal of America as a colorblind society.

Well, we had some pretty strong discussions in classes about the effects of racism, and things of that sort, and I believe that the popular discourse among Whites, at this point is, well you know, we have a colorblind society now, you know. We didn’t have a colorblind society in 1896 when the Supreme Court of this country legislated and rendered a decision that fortified and formed a legal foundation for separate but equal. But now we have this colorblind society, although we have predominantly White residential areas, Black residential areas, so I took a lot of flack because I have staunch opposition to this whole notion that we now have a colorblind society. I think that that probably negatively stereotyped me, even amongst other Blacks because my stand on society, at this point, and my stand on racism is that it is alive and it is well, and it just has a different face. Okay, once upon a, you know, in years gone by that particular racism was not protected by law, whereas now, it doesn’t necessarily have the protection of law, but it has the protection of interpretation of law. So the interpretation of law can make it
difficult for you to prove that you are being law. Show them prejudices and discrimination.

After researching White privilege, Weathers came to an understanding of how White privilege operates in US society. This was a life-changing incident that persists within his psyche today. He learned to deal with racism by expecting it as a norm of society. He believes this stance has well equipped him with the necessary traits to survive and succeed in U.S. society.

And one of the other notions that I have studied and come to embrace is that White privilege, you know, Whites have privilege. I am not mad at them, but Whites have privilege, and if you tell them that they have privilege, or you try to demonstrate the privilege that they have, they reject it. So I believe I have been negatively stereotyped.

Weathers decided to accept racism and White privilege as a norm therefore he embraced these ideologies. This process would provide him with the necessary mindset to internally defeat racism and allow him the mental freedom to successfully thrive in a society plagued with racism and social injustice. He found strength from racism and offered strategies in which to cope.

**Strategies**

Weathers’ primary strategy that has allowed him to cope with racism and negative stereotyping was to accept White racism as a social norm deeply embedded in the foundation of American culture. This strategy has enabled him to harbor no hatred or ill will towards White Americans.

I became strengthened by it because, as you will recall, earlier in this interview I talked about how I expected, you know, the racism and separation that I experienced as an undergrad student at St. Louis University. So these were things that I expected. I have a motto that in classes, in graduate courses, that I have stirred up a few students and
professors as well, in that my particular motto is, I don't get mad at White people for acting White. It is something that I expect because I believe that racism is embedded in the culture in America here in the United States. That is what I believe, and I am not angry. I am never belligerent, but these are the things that I expect, and when I don’t get that then I just feel better. I feel better all over, but at any rate, I am going to feel okay regardless because I have to do what I have to do.

Second, he stated another strategy was to remain persistent during his goal seeking.

I have my goals, I have my aspirations, and obstacles, in my opinion, are just put in your path to make you stronger. I believe you don’t fail until you give up. The day you give up is the day you fail. If you have a goal you just follow your goal. I mean, if they put a train wreck in front of you, you know, an airplane wreck, whatever it is that is placed in front of you, it's just an obstacle. So you have to figure out a way to go under it, on top of it, or around it, or get through it. My parents position was always that, even during the turbulent 60s, just do what you have to do. So you have to figure out a way to go under it, on top of it, or around it, or get through it.

Third, Weathers dealt with much heartache and pain when his two brothers were diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS). MS as described by the National Institution of Neurological Disorders and Stroke as an unpredictable disease of the central nervous system. Multiple sclerosis (MS) can range from relatively benign to somewhat disabling to devastating, as communication between the brain and other parts of the body is disrupted. Many investigators believe MS to be an autoimmune disease that launches a defensive attack against its own tissues. Hence, Weathers felt racism is miniscule in comparison to his experience with severe illness and death of loved ones.
Well, I believe that my emotions have developed because of events within my family. I spoke earlier, I have an older brother, who was 6 years older, and I have a younger brother, who is 1 year younger, and I have a sister that is 3 years younger. Well, in 1995 my oldest brother died with MS, multiple sclerosis, and 6 months after that my younger brother was diagnosed with MS, and he has been in a nursing home since 1997 with MS. He basically had no mobility, the disease has affected his ability to speak, and in 2005 they put a feeding tube in him so that he could receive nutrition on a daily basis. So with having to endure, you know, loved ones in your family, who basically are ill, and are not able to do much I felt like racism was the least of my problems. My sister, in 2007, had a heart attack and she was in a coma for 3 weeks, and they didn’t expect her to come out of it, but she came out of it, but she has brain damage. So she is like a child at her age. So I felt like this particular, the pursuit of a degree, and the pursuit of all of the things that I really want to do, I mean, if I don’t have any physical problems, if I have health, then I can achieve those. That is what I believe.

Throughout his life, Weathers was raised with the notion that racism will forever remain norm of American society. This afforded Weathers the alertness and calm that has attributed to his success throughout his life as a husband, father, professor, and agent for social justice. Apart from his family, Weathers received much needed tutelage and support from Dr. LB and particularly Dr. V.

**Support Systems**

Weathers’ main support came from Dr. V, a White male professor, who was instrumental in helping him navigate through his Masters program in Special Education. Dr. V and Weathers currently maintain their close bond and friendship.
I would consider Dr. V an ally. I would consider him a person who wanted to see anyone succeed in his program, so that's what I would consider him, but it is – I do attribute his coercion and consistent persuasion for me to go on and continue in academic work. So – but after the 42 hours, I had no more instruction from him, but I did talk to him from time to time. He would send emails and I was still at the University of Missouri-St. Louis seeking other degrees, a master's in the education administration, as well as an EdS degree, which was the education specialist. So he was instrumental in the initial. He did not have tenure, but he did have a program that was making the university money. So he was a director of a program, and he was recruiting students, and he was bringing them in. The reason he was bringing them in, there was a critical need in the St. Louis public school district for math teachers, science teachers, and special education teachers. So he was filling the void in the special education area.

The need to have a mentor with tenure is highly vital. Tenured professors have the greatest ability to assist and the power to fight for his or her respective students without any recourse. While professors without tenure are very reluctant to fully engage them and go the full distance for the students in fear of an institutional backlash that may derail his or her tenure and promotion. Dr. V did not have tenure but he had tremendous clout and was very financially resourceful for the university. Hence, Dr. V had the respect of a tenured professor, which was a great resource for Weathers.

**Outcomes of Doctoral Success**

With the proper mentorship from Dr. V and sheer desire to succeed, Weathers gives his reflection of the intrinsic and extrinsic values of attaining a doctoral degree.
Well, you know, I believe that degrees are something that you earn, and it makes you feel good about yourself. Once you earn a degree, it cannot be repossessed, it cannot be foreclosed, and I believe that having a degree, earning a degree puts a person in a particular category in life. I believe that you become one of the elite, not elite in terms of being condescending to people, looking down on people, but it puts you in the elite of achievement.

Weathers recounted the pinnacle of his doctoral success was enrolling and taking part in a doctoral exit course. The course was designed to prepare the student for the dissertation proposal. While other students were unprepared, he took full advantage of the course. To his delight, he was able to defend and receive his degree with relative ease.

My greatest success was, we have what is called an exit course at the University of Missouri, St. Louis, and the exit course was all about preparing you to write your proposal. What I noticed, I had been counseled prior to getting into that particular class that was the exit class. You take the class, and that would be your last class of course work for you, then you become a doctorial candidate. It would be the last course, and then after that it is writing your dissertation, but this particular course was designed to affect your dissertation proposal. You were supposed to write a proposal. Well, I had been counseled, go into that class, and when you get to the part where you are in that class, you need to have a topic. You need to know where you are headed with this because you can use this class to get this thing perfected. So I noticed that when we go into the class, I mean, I think there were 13 of us, and when we got into this particular class there were students saying they didn’t have a topic yet, and they were just going to write about something hypothetical. I thought, oh, okay, but that is not what I did. I had
my topic, I wrote my proposal, and I used the instructor, the instructor’s comments, edits, you know, to perfect it so to speak. Well, after the course I turned in the proposal, the proposal that I completed in the class is the proposal that I turned in to the graduate school as the proposal, and it came back from the reviewer as, without any comments, and that they were looking forward to seeing the finished product. So I just sailed right through on the proposal, and the dissertation defense.

Weathers was a nontraditional student who found strength through his trials and tribulations of life. Along his doctoral journey, he made valuable connections and attributes his upbringing as important component of his life. Nonetheless, many AAM doctoral students may lack the necessary fortitude or networks to succeed. Hence, he offers simple yet valuable words of advice for future candidates.

**Advice for Future Doctoral Candidates and PWIs**

Never give up. Keep your head up. Never give up. Keep your eye on the prize and before you even start the program know for yourself that you are going to complete the program no matter what it takes.

Weathers also offered some critical recommendations to the PWI. He suggested it is vital for the PWI to become more culturally competent by actively seeking students of color and mentors who are willing and equipped to serve them.

My suggestion would be that just because an individual wants to be on your dissertation committee, the doctoral student needs to interview that person and have some specific questions set up that will glean out the information that they need to be able to make a decision. But at the same time, I believe that the universities should – the PWI should actually seek out diversity of intelligence, meaning that we should be – the university
should be looking to recruit African American doctoral students and let it be known that they’re looking to recruit. All intelligence does not come from White America and so if the university has to feel that way and feel that they have an obligation to either look within the university, or outside the university for people with color, who they can find mentors for so that we can have a voice in this experience that we call doctoral students.

Weathers found strength through weakness. His experiences and expertise as a social agent of change has well equipped his ability to achieve his PhD and serves as visiting Professor at the Wichita State University in the department of Educational Leadership.

**Dr. Jacoby Stith**

Dr. Jacoby Stith, age 45, earned his PhD in 2010 from a large Western University with an interdisciplinary emphasis in Healthcare Disparities, Sociology of Race, Educational Foundations; Social Problems; Race and Ethnic Minority Relations; Transracial Adoption; Race and Religion, and Organizational Communication. Dr. Stith also teaches courses and lectures on Black masculinity and White privilege. His published works examine race, racism, and discrimination within variety of institutional settings. Dr. Stith was a longtime member of the Mormon Church, which played a significant role in who he is today.

**Education and Early Years**

Stith was born in South Central Los Angeles where gang activity was immense and problematic for inner city communities. In fear of him being lost to the streets of Los Angeles, Stith was sent to Nashville, TN to live with his grandparents. Relocating from L.A. to Nashville presented Stith with his first account of culture shock, which he vividly described.

Oh, okay, yeah, when I was in LA, when I was a young man in LA, young kid in LA growing up when I was probably about 10 or 11 I started to hang out with some cats that
were some gang bangers, some Crips. And my mother she didn’t tell me this, but she said you gonna go stay with your grandparents in Tennessee. And so I went to school and most of my educational experiences have been in Nashville. Ones that I remember at least were in Nashville. I remember the differences when I first got to Nashville, the striking contrast between Black and White. I never really noticed that until I wasn’t living in LA. You know in the city most – it’s a lot of Latinos and there’s a lot of Mexicans there and Black folk and a few White folks scattered around, but it wasn’t as segregated as it was in Nashville.

While attending school in Nashville, Stith admitted he did not put much energy into his academics. He explained his ill preparation stemmed from a single parent household where his mother worked many hours and he was without any support or modeling for academic success. That’s kinda how I started when I went to Nashville and lived there, went to high school and all that there, and I had – it was a decent experience but I wasn’t used to all the White folks. It took me a while to get used to them. I wasn’t a good student. I was terrible. Actually I was a terrible student. I mean terrible student since I wasn’t – I didn’t do well in a way in which White folks expect you to do well in public education. I wasn’t properly prepared. I was a product of a single family, single parent home. Yeah, I was a product of a single parent home, and so I just didn’t have a whole lot of support. My mother was working all the time. She was never home. I was – back then they called them latch key kids back then.

Stith admitted that he was a poor student in high school and was insufficient in many of the areas vital to achieving good grades while in high school. College seemed out of reach.
Undergraduate

Despite having poor grades, Stith was admitted into a small PWI in southeast Idaho on an athletic scholarship to play football.

I went to a PWI. And I went to a small school in southeast Idaho when I very first started school. In fact what’s interesting is that when I very first contemplated the idea of going to college it was kinda comical because I figured that nobody would take my ass because I was just a terrible student. I mean I wasn’t very good. I mean I think I graduated with like a, I think it was a 1.9 GPA, man, 1.9 from high school.

Although Stith’s high school GPA was low, his athletic prowess and ability to play football landed him at a small school in SE Idaho. His story is common among athletic AAMs who perform poorly in the classroom yet excel on the playing field of his respective sport, which provides a pathway to college entrance.

But I played football. So I think that helped me. That helped me kinda to get through, but I wasn’t really prepared. I think what really helped me the most is the fact that I belong to a church that really instilled the importance of education. I think that I sort of internalized that, and I think that helped me. So this school I went to in Southeast Idaho, they were known to take anybody. And the whole idea was you go there and you kinda get your grades straight and then you can apply to a bigger school. And so I went up there first, had a really bad year. I wasn’t prepared to be in college, but I went anyway, and end up playing more then I did any kind of substantial work.

After a short stint in SE Idaho, Stith transferred to the University of Utah, where he came to realize that he had lost sight of his AA heritage and history. He had been schooled in
predominantly White American epistemology. Epistemology is the study of knowledge and justified belief, which had been taught from the White American perspective.

So then I transferred there and went down to the University of Utah, down in Salt Lake City. And I remember being there for about a year. And remember I’m a cat that knew nothing about Black history, nothing about White folk, racism, nothing. I was in denial because when you eventually get to the point where you understand schooling, you understand it from a White person’s perspective, like what your boy talks about, Carter G. Woodson. You’re schooled in White epistemology. You don’t know much about the Black experience.

The remnants of poor study habits and lack of academic preparedness followed Stith during his first two undergraduate years where he transferred from two different PWIs.

Stith’s life made a drastic change at age 24 when he met an AA professor who was taking an aerobics class Stith was instructing. This AAM professor called into question Stith’s ability to relate to other AAs and quietly confronted him.

I met this professor in Utah, and that brother ever changed my life when I met him. I remember I was teaching aerobics. I was an aerobics instructor, so I would do like hip hop and fitness shit, fitness classes. I would teach fitness class. This brother was in my class and he’s always telling me – one day he said, –Man, you never talk to me, man. You never say a word to me. You never say hi or nothing. What’s up? Are you scared of Black folk?” And I didn’t know how to respond to that. He called me out. I didn’t know how to respond to that. I was like –no, I don’t feel – I’m not scared of Black folks.” –Well, you never – seem like you kind of shamed to be around Black folk or talk to Black folk.”
It was at that point Stith realized he had lost a sense of his AA identity during the process of assimilation while a member of the Mormon Church as well as being affiliated with the Republican Party.

And when I really looked at that, took a cold hard look in the mirror at myself I think that to some extent he was probably right. Because the church that I joined was a predominantly White church, and so my whole experience up to that point was primarily White folks, and listening to White folks. And I was probably a Republican, too. I can’t remember what my political affiliation was, but I would assume I probably was a Republican. I probably had Republican leanings at the time. And I didn’t really realize this. And then, so he and I became good friends, but he also became a good mentor to me, and really taught me about Black history.

Their friendship was a combination of brotherly love and in depth schooling of Black history.

Later, Stith received a phone call from Brigham Young University (BYU) asking him to instruct a course in AA studies. Even though his friendship had sparked a great interest and yearning to learn, he was not prepared to teach an AA studies course.

Then I got a phone call one time, there was a cat down at the school down south called Brigham Young University, and they were looking for somebody to teach African American studies. And so I didn’t know nothing about no African American studies. I mean I had no idea. I was interested in learning it, but I didn’t know that there was such a discipline called African American studies. So I called this brother up in Utah, I said, “Man, they asked me to teach this class. I know nothing about this.” And that’s when my education really started because from then on that whole summer I read – I probably read 20, 30 books, several articles, had long discussions with this cat about Black history.
And that’s where the metamorphosis took place right there, when I finally discovered what Black folk had gone through for 450 years. Then I suddenly got some “act right” in me.

The knowledge of AA History and the social responsibility to carry the legacy to teach was how Stith defined his “act right.” Stith had now found his calling and motivation to learn by having the responsibility to teach an undergraduate course in AA studies. After many trials and tribulations, Stith graduated from the University of Utah in 1994 with Bachelors of Science in Behavioral Sciences and Health that carried a 2.9 grade point average. In addition, he earned his Physician Assistant’s certification from University of Utah in 1996.

Graduate Studies

Upon the encouragement to apply to graduate school by a professor at BYU, Stith applied and was accepted into the Master of Higher Education program where he was provisionally accepted due to his low GPA, and graduated in the year 2000.

I didn’t think I could get in because my grades weren’t that great. I think I graduated finally with a 2.9 or something like that. But I got in. They let me in, and I did really well in graduate school there.

After successfully completing his Masters degree, Stith embarked upon his PhD in Culture and Society with emphasis in Cultural Competence and Race Education from the University of Utah. His program was centered on an educational experience and teaching philosophy that focused on race. The theory of choice for his department was Critical Race Theory.

And so I remember one of my advisors in my Masters program told me about the University of Utah’s program. You’ve probably heard of it, education, culture and – a lot of cats that enter into the program use CRT. There’s several people who do CRT from
the University of Utah. But he talked to me about going to Utah, and I applied and I got in there, and that’s where I did my PhD. And my PhD was primarily in race studies. I focused on race.

It took him 10 years to complete his PhD. After serving a short term in the Army reserves, he dedicated two years to missionary work for the Mormon Church. These experiences put much-needed perspective on the importance of education. He did not want to be a part of the poor working class society and the undisclosed experiences he had on his Mormon missionary duty were deemed pivotal in his decision to pursue his PhD and serve his true calling of teaching at an institution of higher education.

When I finished there (Army Reserves) also I served a mission for my church. I went on a two-year mission, Christian mission for my church. And then when that was done that also set me straight too. So when I came home I did much better. I was much, much absolutely more prepared for the rigors of academic life.

Once his service commitments to the Army Reserves and the Mormon Church were fulfilled, Stith focused on his doctoral studies. While writing his dissertation, Stith was deployed to serve as a Physician’s Assistant in the Iraq war.

And I’ll tell you the truth, I barely finished this shit, and it was the grace of God that I did because what happened is I got deployed to Kuwait. I had one year to sit on my ass while the Army paid me, which allowed me to write. I got paid to write. I saw patients too, yeah, but it took what, all but an hour to see them, maybe two hours to see serious patients. Most of the patient care that I did in the military was done by the medics – that I showed them how to do what they gotta do. If it was something serious they would call me, but they didn’t call me hardly any.
His Armed services commitments and lack of money to pay for tuition did not provide a smooth experience toward doctoral degree attainment.

Yeah, and so then when I finished my PhD in 2010 there’s a long – it was a long, I don’t know how long you’ve been in University, Larry, but it took me ten years to get my PhD. It’s hard when you don’t have the money, when you have to work. It was tough. For a Black man, for any person of color I’d imagine it’s tough, but for Black men in particular it’s damned near impossible. That’s why the numbers are so small.

Stith spent every minute of free time he had and devoted it to writing his dissertation in small living quarters he referred to as his —hooch.” Desperation began to set in and Stith strategically chose committee members who were most likely to see him succeed with the least resistance possible towards his dissertation research.

So I’d spend most of my time in my hooch, writing my dissertation. Praise God. Had that not happened I still wouldn’t be done. I probably still wouldn’t be done. I knew that when – Larry, I knew this was my shot, my last shot to make this push to get this thing done, right, and so I strategically put my committee together hoping that they wouldn’t fight. You know sometimes committee members fight and argue over dumb shit, right? So trying to find the best person to help me get through. I don’t want them to know about – they don’t have to be content experts on this, just help me get through. Help me ask the right questions to help me get through. And so that question you asked me is a really interesting one because sitting here right now, I can’t really answer it definitively and say if it’s been a good experience for me. Only time will tell. But I can tell you right now that I’m certainly leaning toward the notion that the price was too high. It was too high. There was many times, man that I used to like I’d get frustrated.
After ten years of hard work and perseverance, Stith earned his PhD in the year 2010. His journey from an underprepared latchkey kid to PhD was filled with many obstacles. Stith’s passion to teach Black history and examine race discourses was ignited by a conversation he had with an AAM professor. His passion and religious affiliation with the Mormon Church came to a crossroad after he published research, *Black and Mormon*, which exposed how Mormons viewed and treated African Americans. This book ultimately caused him to be terminated from Brigham Young University. While serving in the Army, Stith experienced another cultural lesson on social class rather than racial stratification. Race wasn’t an issue, as he witnessed Whites, Latinos, and African Americans who shared the same socioeconomic status in the Armed Services.

**Experiences with Racism**

Stith was an AA member of the Mormon Church; therefore he began to research the relationship between AAs and Mormons. He uncovered a troubled past between the two that the Church did not want to be publicized. Stith’s moral integrity propelled him to publish a book that revealed the mistreatment of AAs by the Mormon Church. This was the pivotal era in which he was ostracized and experienced racism from Brigham Young University.

And then that’s when my ineffectiveness with the Mormon Church came in to play. I started looking more closely at the Mormon history and Blacks and African American, the treatment of African Americans. And that was the beginning of the end of my days as a Mormon, which for about 30 years. Oh, yeah, yeah, I think I told you that part of my coming out, my wakening, was dealing with – was discovering Black history. And I actually did a book called *Black and Mormon* where I talk about the history of the Mormon Church in there. When that book came out, it got all kind of media attention.
Although he was called in by his Dean at BYU to discontinue the media exposure of the Mormon Church and its history with AAs, or be terminated, Stith felt morally and ethically obligated to carry on his quest. Stith was an active member of the Church for 30 years. He felt a sense of betrayal and was embittered that he would be terminated for exercising academic freedom and intellectual thought.

So I was doing interviews and giving interviews, and I was on all these different shows. And then they called me on the carpet. The chair called me in and said, “We can’t have you doing all this.” I said, “Doing all what?” Said, “I can’t have you talking about the church like that.” I’m like, “I’m only telling what the history says the church actually did that’s verifiable from y’alls own literature base. So I’m only doing, but now you can’t doing that, man. If you keep doing that we’re gonna have to let you go.” “I’m like, “So basically you’re threatening me?” “Yeah, we are.” And so at the end of the day I kept doing it and I actually got terminated from that position. Shit man, that was hurtful, man because I figured that part of the whole process of university was to be able to have academic freedom, but what I soon discovered is that on a private institution like BYU, no, academic freedom doesn’t exist. So yeah, I felt betrayed. I felt – because my whole purpose of me doing what I did was to bring greater truth and light to the issue; to try to educate folks about the significance and seriousness of the issue. If you’re going to have Black people on your campus, you better have some systems in place to help these students to be successful. And part of it is knowledge. They have to understand the history, the context in which they’re being educated. And unfortunately BYU wasn’t prepared to do that, and wasn’t prepared to really teach those students how to think.

Critically think about what it means to be Black, what it means to be Black and White on
a PWI campus. So none of that happened, so I felt like I was doing a service for these students but the institution felt like I was betraying them. And that’s really unfortunate, so. Yeah, I felt pissed off and betrayed initially, but now I don’t give a shit.

Although Stith experienced many hardships related to being an AAM, he admits he has never been confronted with overt racism. He disclosed that most AAs experience racism on a very covert level, but do not recognize it. Instead, African Americans have accepted passive racism as a social norm and are only intolerant of blatant acts of racism.

Have I ever had any overt, in my face racism? Nobody’s ever called me the “N” word.

Most Blacks experience – most of the racism that we experience as Black people is at the micro level. So most of it just goes right past us. It’s the big shit that we remember. Right? So we experience racism every day on some level. On some level we’re experiencing racism, or mistreatment. But some of the smaller things, we let it slide because they happen all the time. So have I ever had any really big things happen to me? Not that I can remember, other than me getting fired from BYU. That’s about it.

After his termination of employment from BYU and disaffiliation from the Mormon Church, which is comprised of predominantly White Americans, Stith felt that AA faculty caused him the most duress during his academic experience as an AAM doctoral student. He felt that internalized oppression was the root of the entire dilemma. Internalized oppression is described as a subconscious belief in negative stereotypes about one’s own ethnic group that results in the perpetuation of negative acts upon members of the same group.

So, and what I mean by that, Larry, is that Black faculty members can be some of your worst enemies. Black faculty members can be some – they can cause a lot of – they can make the process a lot more difficult then it should be because they, –Well, I was a
doctoral student, too.” And when I used to come to my chair I had to call them Dr. so and so, and I had to wait 30 minutes before I… This one Black faculty member was telling me – “So y’all pretty spoiled around here.” So most of the problems that I had with my doctoral program had to do with Black faculty members. That was like, damn. That was really – to me that was like, wow. Okay, y’all – you know they went through the same thing, or similar, and they gonna perpetuate the very thing that you trying to do. And I vowed I would never do that. I said, – “I’m never gonna do that to a Black student.” It’s already hard enough.

Breaking the cycle of internalized oppression by vowing to do everything in his power to assist AA students to reach their desired goal was his mission, motivated by his negative experiences with AA faculty. Although he never experienced blatant racism, Stith’s daily struggles were due to racial battle fatigue brought on by the oppressive behaviors of other AA faculty at the University of Utah. Racial battle fatigue is defined as the social psychological stress responses, such as frustration; anger; exhaustion; physical avoidance; psychological or emotional withdrawal; escapism; acceptance of racist attributions; resistance; verbally, nonverbally, or physically fighting back; and coping strategies, associated with being an AAM attending a PWI.

And so I can’t recall any particular events, but I can certainly – if you talk about fatigue, one of my mentors actually coined the phrase – ‘racial battle fatigue.’” His name is William Smith. He’s from the University of Utah. He was actually staying at my house. I think I mentioned that to you. But that’s his phrase, – ‘racial battle fatigue.’” I think I experienced that every day, even when I was a doctoral student to some extent. Are there particular events that stand out? Most of them have to do with Black faculty members. Like I said, Black faculty members, dealing with them. Yeah, absolutely. Well, it’s
caused by White society by default. But the actual insults, the daily insults that I encountered as a doctoral student largely came from Black faculty, who made it more difficult for me to finish – who made it much more tedious then it should have been. Like having to rewrite papers over and over again. Having to wait and get feedback from your chair in your committee. It takes weeks and weeks and weeks to get feedback. Come on man, weeks and weeks to get fucking feedback? Sometimes months, dog, months to get feedback. You know that kind of stuff. And then when you call them on it they like –I’m busy."

Stith recounts the actual circumstances that magnified his racial battle fatigue and stressors of being an AAM doctoral student. The compilation of being an AAM at a PWI and being oppressed by members of his own ethnic group was largely responsible for his agenda of completing his degree as quickly as possible.

I have a writing agenda, too. Not serving students? Not recognizing, or maybe they – cognitively they understand the struggles of what it takes to be a doctoral student. What we encounter. What we go through as doctoral students. But not being empathetic to it, not trying to – say –Well, we gotta get this person done, and get this person – this person is not doing us any good sitting here in this program. We gotta get this person done and get him out.” Trying to make you write an award winning dissertation, which that’s not the point. The point is you’re capturing a slice of a particular phenomena. Right? You ain’t trying to win a fucking award. You was trying to capture a slice of it. All that kind of extra stress that’s on you. So most of it came from Black faculty members.
To his chagrin, AA faculty presented many undue barriers and obstacles towards his doctoral degree attainment. Stith wondered if some AA faculty were envious that his publication record was better than theirs.

And that may have been the source of some of my problems because some of my faculty members didn’t have a good publication record. They’re like — What’s this Negro doing here publishing this stuff?” I even got — I mean you know how hard it is to get something published, right? It’s very difficult to get something published. The peer review process can be brutal, right, let alone trying to publish it in a tier one journal like *The Journal of Cultural Studies*, or getting an academic press to publish your book.

Stith was a 1.9 high school student, 2.9 as an undergraduate; he has ultimately become a well-respected scholar of race studies. Without assistance from other individuals within the academy, Stith’s success would not be possible. In spite of his tumultuous journey, he had the support from professors, peers, and the Mormon Church.

**Support Systems**

Even though he is no longer affiliated with the Mormon Church, Stith openly credits the Church for being instrumental in his academic and intellectual growth. Along with the Church, he credits Dr. J for her assistance and mentorship that orchestrated his success. His primary mentor, Dr. J was a fellow student, and she single-handedly ensured his PhD degree completion. He and Dr. J shared commonalities; both were Mormons, both shared a passion to teach Black history, and they were terminated from their respective institutions for asserting their ethical and moral duties as agents of social change.

I have a really good friend who is a professor who went to the program a couple years before I did, who graduated. And she taught at BYU. She and I met at BYU. And if it
hadn’t been for her I wouldn’t have been done. She single handedly dragged my ass through the dissertation process. And she used to be Mormon. She left the Mormon Church. She and I graduated in the same program. Her name is Dr. J, and she’s the bomb. She’s a very good qualitative – she and I have written a lot of stuff together, very good qualitative researcher. She single handedly pulled me through, man. She read my shit. She critiqued it. She knows qualitative research so well. Had Brenda not helped me get this done, I wouldn’t have been done. It wasn’t my committee that helped me, it was Brenda. She was my mentor. She was truly my mentor in this process.

His primary mentor and peer, Stith credited Brenda for being the most instrumental in his scholarly development and dissertation completion. They both shared the commonalities of being former members of the Mormon Church and being terminated at their respective institutions for exercising their intellectual freedom.

Yeah, she was Mormon from Utah. She left the Mormon Church. Brenda know more about Black history then Black folks do. And she got let go from BYU and then she went down to University of South Alabama, start acting a fool down there, talking back to the dean and telling him he ain’t committed to diversity. They fired her. And then she got picked up by Amherst, UMass Amherst. That’s where she is now, in a college of social justice where she needs to be. She’ll do a hell of a job there. But the woman can flat out – she’s a flat out scholar.

Stith’s devotion to race studies and Black History had a null effect on his ability to openly pay homage to the Mormon Church that supported him throughout his life. In the same breath, he adamantly criticized Blacks for the lack thereof.
The White folks have done more for me then niggers have. Pardon my French. That’s terrible to say that, man, but it’s true. The White folks have been there for me, man. Yeah, I mean they – I mean the Mormons have. And see that’s why the Mormons, like they turn around and say, —Why you criticize?” And I say, —Well, you gotta speak truth to power. It doesn’t mean I don’t like y’all. It just means we have to analyze, look at our practices to make them better. To make them better for folks coming in after me.”

Stith encountered much needed backing from a White full professor during his proposal defense. The professor was able to decrease his sample size from 50 to 12 participants. Full professors have the necessary influence to make these decisions without recourse from other faculty.

And then again, the White folk came through for me. My good friend who is a professor, full professor at BYU in sociology, he was on my committee, and he’s a sociologist, he does a – he says, —He doesn’t need that many participants. He only needs to have this many to – this is not – he’s not writing a book. This is to demonstrate that there is a pattern.” So they eventually backed down off that, and they said, —Okay, you can do 12.” But by then I had already done 50 because they told me to do 50.

After 10 years of perseverance and assistance from unlikely mentors Stith earned his PhD.

**The High Cost of Doctoral Degree Attainment**

Stith’s degree came with a stiff price. Unlike the rest of my participants who overcame barriers, made due sacrifices, and felt the degree was the epitome of success, Stith felt the cost of his PhD was too high. As we talked, he evaluated the whole process and questioned whether his doctoral degree was worthwhile. He lost family, friends, and money.

Hell yeah, it cost me my marriage. It cost me my marriage. I got divorced from this. I got – I mean because of the Black and Mormon and the attention I got. Yeah, I lost a lot
of friends because of it. Yeah, it cost me dearly. I probably lost probably $200,000 or $300,000 in salary that I didn’t make because I was working on my doctoral degree. I wasn’t working as a PA. So I was a full-time – I worked in ethnic studies as a graduate assistant. I really tried to enjoy my graduate experience. But I had no idea what the hell I was saying because it was much bigger then I thought it would be.

Even though Stith overcame the label of a “latchkey child” to achieve the pinnacle of higher education, he is unsure whether the price paid for the PhD was worth the sacrifices.

**Outcomes of Success**

In spite of all the major dilemmas Stith faced during his academic journey, he was able to publish a book and an article. These are his most prized accomplishments as a doctoral student.


Those are my two greatest achievements as a doctoral student.

Stith earned his PhD in 2010 and has had little time to reflect upon his career as an academic.

**Advice for the AAM Doctoral Student**

Upon other successes, he offered his views of knowledge of what an AAM doctoral candidate needs in order to avoid pitfalls that may lead to attrition. He felt the single most important asset an AAM graduate students needs is a good mentor, preferably a faculty of color.

He’s got to – he or she must find a mentor. They have to find faculty of color, somebody that’s willing to work with them. Someone that’s empathetic, understanding, that’s committed to seeing the success of Black students, seeing Black students succeed and finish their programs, or whatever their respective disciplines are. They must find someone like that. And I’m gonna go out on a limb and say this, brother, if they can’t
find that, then find a White one. A White faculty member that feels, they feel that way about Black students. Find a White one that’s doing – someone that’s doing the work that you wanna do, that you see yourself doing. Someone that’s gonna help mentor you through the process. And I would prefer it to be a Black faculty member, but sometimes we act the damn fool, and so it’s better to find a White one even. So that’s what I would do.

Stith remains to date dissatisfied with the mentoring he received from AA faculty during his doctoral program. He felt he was a victim of internalized oppression from other AA faculty. Many AA students feel that other AA faculty and staff have a sworn duty to reach out and assist. Stith was no exception. He still burns with animosity from the experiences with AA faculty at the University of Utah.

  I’m not happy with the process, Larry. I don’t like it. I didn’t like what I went through. I didn’t like it. It was a very, very difficult process for me. I’m angry about it. I’m angry about it because it was senseless, it was unnecessary, and most of the hurt and pain that I felt in graduate school was committed by, primarily by Black folks.

Stith vows to help anyone especially AAM students to succeed. He is devoted to breaking the cycle of the internalized oppressive that many AA faculty members inflict upon AA students.

**Advice for the PWI**

In addition, Stith had some advice to PWIs. He considers increased funding; recruiting more faculty of color, and the support of a student union will greatly benefit all stakeholders. Increased funding, opportunities for funding, or either longer assistantships or graduate assistantships for Black men to get to finish their doctoral degrees. So more money, more money would be helpful. More money. Have some system built in place where
once these Black men complete their degrees have pipelines already established for these men, so they can go and teach. And then go in the job market, but there are institutional affiliations with other universities that would be willing to explore or take this individual once they complete the degrees. That's another thing. Secondly, you must have faculty of color. In as much as I'm ragging on and bagging on Black faculty, they're necessary. Because it's important to see someone of color who's done what you, who is doing what you are trying to get. It's important to have positive mentors. It's something about that, a psychological process about that, that makes the process easier. You see another Black person who – oh, Lord, I can do this, too. It's like whew, I can do this, too. So it's important to have faculty of color around, on the campus and who are engaged with students, and they're not just there as a window dressing, but they're actually there actively participating in helping students to achieve. Having a union set up to help Black students to be successful. Black student, not Black student unions, but an actual graduate union set up to help Black students to be successful, with insurance to negate or limit or delimit the amount of time and efforts that they have to spend on resources. Black folks have to worry about eating and feeding their families and feeding themselves.

Dr. Jacoby Stith went from a significantly under prepared student to become a well published, charismatic, compassionate social change agent. He endured many hardships and overcame them all. Although he is no longer a Mormon, he is very boastful to give them their credit for providing the cultural, social, and financial capital necessary to ignite his career and passion to teach, research, and publish race studies.
Dr. Langford Hewitt

Dr. Langford Hewitt, age 36, earned his PhD in Curriculum and Instruction from a large Southeast PWI. Hewitt serves as Assistant Professor of Minority and Urban Education at a large mid-Atlantic PWI. He was the recipient of a prestigious teaching fellowship from the Center for Teaching Excellence and the Office of Undergraduate Studies at his current university. This honor is indicative of his commitment to teaching and leadership on campus. Involvement in this program provides an opportunity for personal growth and serves as a means to continue efforts to improve undergraduate education at the University. He was also been nominated to receive a 2010 Ethnic Minority Achievement Award. This award is designed to recognize faculty, staff, and students that have made outstanding contributions to the University’s diversity and equity efforts. The awards recognize those individuals and units that have worked to improve the racial climate on and outside of the college campus.

Early Years and Education

Hewitt is the youngest member of a family with seven children. His experiences as a child are proud and memorable. He was exposed to the serene environment of rural North Carolina while also being taught the culture of urban North Carolina. He proudly states that he received “the best of both worlds.”

I grew up in northeastern North Carolina. I am the youngest of seven kids, and we actually lived, when I was a kid, we moved into a singlewide trailer with our mother and father, and the seven of us. We were on free lunch, and then free reduced lunch, and later on as more kids moved out and got married, that helped my stock out a lot. I was always excited when they moved out and got married because it was the best of both worlds. When mom and dad had a little more cash, and then I had a sibling who lived near, none
of them moved far away at that time, I had someone with a house in the housing projects where I could go hang out and spend time with them in the city. Most of them lived in the city and had cable TV. Things that was just amazing to me. We had three channels in the country where I lived so that was neat. Because of them, I had some exposure to the city life and the country life. Both my parents met when they were very young and married, and they lived right there in both of the sides of their family. Pretty much, they grew up in the same county and, got married very young, and they are still married. They are in their 70’s.

Hewitt grew up near an old slave plantation. He has a true connection to his lineage through the family narratives that were told to him by grandmother at an early age during his preschool years. This oral history is very important to him. Although he appreciates the media heroes and heroines of Black history, he felt the knowledge passed to him gave him a deeper connection and appreciation because it involved a member of his family.

I grew up near the Bartlett Plantation. My mother’s family we have traced back, my mother’s family were slaves on that plantation, and the house, you know, for some years, I had forgotten that we used to actually drive past that place many, many mornings on the way to school. I do remember feeling this; the house always seemed like to scare me. Like it almost seemed it haunted me just seeing it. Even when I had forgotten that I had family members there, it just never felt right, you know this place. It was since torn down, probably about the time I was in high school. I remember, I think, they bulldozed and tore it down so they could use the rest of that land as a field to over there, to use the rest of it for farmland. So the history part of my family was very real, and my preschool days were spent with my great-grandmother, whose mother was a slave at that Bartlett
Plantation. And so I learned a lot of that history and local history. I think I grew up learning that my local history and local family Black history was just as important as any of the more popular figures that we learn about in schoolbooks. Not to diminish any of those folks and their work, but I learned, I think, at least the local folks were just as important as the ones that everyone learns about, okay, Rosa Parks, and those type of folks. Those messages, I think, were powerful for my siblings and me. I think they all will sit and tell you the same thing, we loved hearing their old stories, and some of the stories were horrible. My mother talked about family members whose toes were cut off when they were slaves so they couldn't run away because they had tried to escape.

Hewitt is deeply seeded in his family history in North Carolina who shared a true connection to slavery and knowledge of his heritage in Black history while attending predominantly White schools.

**HBCU or PWI**

The decision to attend a PWI for his PhD was heavily derived from what Hewitt described as negative stigmas placed on the value of an HBCU education, which he believes leads to discriminatory practices of hiring.

Even with the ones that are graduating, coming out I think many have discussed a stigma being attached. If you got your PhD at an HBCU it's more difficult for you to get hired at a PWI whereas the opposite isn't true. And so I do think that's a real threat that we're facing right now and there's elitism and I think an ingrained nature of race and racism is part of CRT that might be underlying some of that as well.
In addition, Hewitt experienced an encounter where an older AAM confronted him during an AA fraternity conference. While seated at a table, this individual heavily criticized Hewitt for not being a professor at an HBCU.

And they're like, oh one of the old guys said well, you know he stood up, he's like —What? You're at a predominantly White institution, you know you need to be at one of our historically Black colleges and universities because that's where they need you.” And I said, —Sir,” I said, —I got Black students in Maryland too and they need Black professors too.” And two of the other Omegas were sitting at the table going —Yeah, that's right.” They were like yeah, you know, you're making a good point because people fought and died so that Black folks could attend Maryland, the University of North Carolina, Wichita State, anywhere else they wanted to go to school.

Hewitt kept his composure during the verbal confrontation brought on by the older AA gentleman. He posited that the entire AA professoriate should not be dedicated solely to HBCUs because there are vast amounts of AA students who attend PWIs. In fact, Hewitt sought to apply to several prestigious HBCUs but they had no available positions open.

And so to then say okay well the entire Black faculty should only be at HBCUs, that means you have nobody there for those students and I think that's a big mistake to go back to segregating because we don't get a chance to be part of critiquing and changing the game, that parts of it that aren't working for us. And he sat down after I said that because he got up. I'm thinking you want to fight, you know people don't usually come jump up at me like that, but he was an old guy so you know I understood where he was coming from. I was looking at Howard and other places; they didn't have any jobs open when I was graduating first of all.
The invaluable lessons received from a close-knit family and historical narratives of slavery provided Hewitt the necessary knowledge to ground his position as an AAM and the importance of education.

**Undergraduate**

Although he completed his Bachelors degree at a PWI, while still in high school, Hewitt took enrichment courses through a local HBCU, Elizabeth City State University.

My first college experience that I write about, and that I am so proud about was Elizabeth City State University, which is an HBCU. I didn’t go to college there, college as an undergraduate, but I started attending, doing the enrichment courses there, and then the advance course work there when I was in High School. Those courses do not count toward college, but that was my hub.

Elizabeth City State University afforded Hewitt his first experience with AAM pedagogy. Even though his parents completed minimal levels of schooling, three of his siblings graduated from HBCUs. His sisters’ experience provided the family with knowledge gained from their successes of attending post secondary institutions. His sisters paved the way for him to go away to school, so he opted to attend the PWI University of North Carolina at Wilmington (UNC Wilmington) where in 1997 he earned his BA in Communication Studies and minored in English.

Three of my four sisters graduated from that local HBCU. Now I am the youngest of the seven, so by the time I got to be of age to start thinking about college I remember my youngest sister saying to me, you should go away to college, and she kind of, I think, talked to my parents about it. Neither of my parents completed grade school. My mother got to the ninth grade, and my father to the fifth or sixth grade, and that is even on my
birth records from Pasquotank, North Carolina. So my parents didn’t know that much about, you know, they didn’t have all the capital about college, but they learned a lot about it because my older sisters went and would tell them and teach them things, and they were learning, and my parents were open to learning so I ended up going to UNC-Wilmington, which is a predominantly White institution. That is where I started out, and that is where I finished my Bachelors.

UNC Wilmington resembled the demographics of his hometown, which created a greater sense of comfort than most AAMs who attend PWIs. The demographics of UNC Wilmington created a very distinctive racial environment. Hewitt shared how the White population experienced desegregated schooling and did not appear ethnocentric, yet they still remained culturally and physically distant from AA students.

You know Wilmington was actually, I think, the atmosphere was very sort of; it reminded me of home in many ways because I grew up on the coast, and I always liked the beach and the coastal area. I used to work, you know, many of us that lived on the coast. My parents lived about 30 miles inland from Kitty Hawk, Nag’s Head, and the outer banks of North Carolina. But that atmosphere [in Wilmington] was interesting. It had a mixture of White folks and Black. The White folks, in my experience were - there was a mixture of folks from the northeast, who really had an interesting outlook on Black folks. They had experienced a lot of desegregated schooling too, but they didn’t have the same sort of scenes like type of inferior beliefs about Black folks. They just didn’t necessarily want you to get too close. So they used to clean hotel rooms, motel rooms, and all that stuff at the beach, and I was kind of familiar with the sort of southern, White, beach person.
It was very common during the 1980s and 1990s for AAMs to closely bond with other White males and embark upon lifelong friendships. In previous decades this would be considered race mixing, a de facto taboo where it was not socially acceptable for people of color to intermingle with White Americans. While attending UNC Wilmington, Hewitt became close friends with two White male siblings.

So going to UNC-Wilmington I had a couple of the friends, actually two White guys, two of the only White guys that were very close to me, we became close friends to one another, they were actually in my wedding, they were brothers. Eric and Jacob, and Eric went to UNC-Wilmington. He was older than me and so I got to actually go visit to check it out, and I thought man, this place does seem more like home. I was such a homebody back then. I didn’t really want to leave. I didn’t want to leave really North Carolina, as my wife will tell you.

The fact that Hewitt could be accepted by White families as long as he did not embark upon dating their daughters could be attributed to the old —Southern Myth‖ of the Antebellum South (pre-Civil War) where AAMs were vilified as animal-like rapist bent on pillaging the innocence of White females. Although these families were open to their children having friendships with AAMs, they did not want AAMs to perform better in school then their white sons.

And the southern folks didn’t want you dating their daughters either, but you could be very close to a family in that way. I could spend the night, as long as you weren’t dating one of their daughters for long. They were very concerned, it seemed, about you being, you know, doing anything in school better than their kid. I remember meeting the children of these folks, and I certainly went through I think some of those stages, an aggressive model of identity.
Hewitt became fully aware of societies double standards for AAM as opposed to White male counterparts. He internalized these social stigmas and went through various stages of Cross's identity clusters. Yet, he managed to manifest positive and productive outcomes by acculturating a balance of his American and AA identities.

**Rugby as Capital**

After losing his football scholarship offers to a severe knee injury, Hewitt took up rugby at UNC-Wilmington and was heavily involved in campus activities while making the dean’s list. —I was originally supposed to go to play football on a scholarship, but I injured my knee my senior year. So I lost all the scholarship letters and stuff, you know, that was gone,” he shared. Rugby is an international sport comparable to football in America. Rugby is a team sport usually played in northeastern universities, but was an avenue that served many positive purposes for Hewitt. It allowed him to create bonds and with people from other cultures that normally would not exist. Hewitt stated, —I think I spent a lot of time just trying to fit in, trying to do my work, fit in, be the life of the party guy, although I still, even with all that I played Rugby.” He went on to explain,

   Luckily I kept my academics up well enough that I ended up going to Wilmington, which didn’t have a football team, but my knee had healed up so these northeastern guys, one of them was my roommate played Rugby and so he taught me how to play, and I started and made the team. I played and won trophies on it, and injured my knee again. What Rugby did for me though were a couple of things. That was my first experience with Catholics and Jews because these were my teammates.

When different cultures emerge as positive alliances, conversations of about race and stereotypes were topics of conversations. Hewitt and his AA ethnicity was the focus of many dialogues,
which he handled with great tact and intellectual thought. He brought about some inquiry about
his own stereotypes about other cultures.

We had a lot of really interesting exchanges because they would ask me, —Why do Black
people get so mad about the n” word, and only Black people can say it?” I said, —Will
you know the names and jokes that you have been telling with your other Jewish friends?
Don’t you get upset when anybody else is not Jewish comes in and starts saying those
things? Teasing you about your nose and all that kind of stuff, and that you do.” And
they said, —Yeah, okay I get it.” We started, it was the first time I was able to have those,
I was 18 years old and never really had met anyone Jewish. All I learned in my
Missionary Baptist church was they are all going to hell, you know, everybody is going
to hell except New Souris Credence Missionary Baptist Church, or just the church
friends, whatever, you know. So it was pretty eye opening because having those
dialogues, and being in a social setting where we were.

As Hewitt matured and became intolerant of passive racism such as racist jokes, his tact and
pristine candor methods of conduct were very effective. He did not lash out with anger; he used
theories to combat racism. Finally, he began to avoid those environments and refused to socialize
with those who persisted to spew racial ignorance.

I went from being okay you know White folks tell N jokes, I'm at a party, I'm still going
to drink and laugh and I'm not going to care, you know in my freshman year. And then by
my junior year I was like all right, yeah dude that's not really funny you know and just
like bringing all these theories and stuff to parties that they're like wow, this guy's smart.
And then just stop hanging out with anybody who would even say those types of jokes,
like just cutting them off. Like they didn't even know, there is, he's — you don't hang out
with me anymore you know, it's like, no because if you're not willing to evolve with this type of thinking by the time I was a junior and having this course for, but these brothers and sisters on campus — man you know, it had, that really helped my development. And it helped me, you know I didn't move through those steps like I went from step one to step two to step three, I mean I went back and forth, in and out, until the time I was say late junior year, early senior year I think I got the minority student of the year award you know.

Breaking the silences about stereotypes by creating an atmosphere of openness where Hewitt and his peers were able to debunk the social myths about one another brought them closer together and he was awarded minority student of the year. At the helm of these conversations was Hewitt. His AA female teacher, Dr. B, took notice and advised him to become a college professor. Although Hewitt was fully educated about slavery and its monstrosity, he enrolled at UNC Wilmington. UNC Wilmington was a university that closely resembled his home and where he felt very comfortable attending, learning and growing as an AAM student. This growth allowed him to develop his own identity and self-worth as an AAM.

**AAM Identity**

Hewitt later wrote a book about AAM identity. While many AAM make conscious efforts to fit in or acculturate themselves; sometimes he may lose a sense of AAM identity along the way and regain it when he is overtly challenged by a particular confrontation with reality or adverse occurrence. He experienced two contrasting of phenomena where AAM completely assimilated into the dominant culture of White America and abandoned their AA culture by refusing to date AA women and befriend other AAs.
And they said it you know. So that environment in undergrad I think that did prepare me for being a professor at a PWI, I think certainly by attending. Now I don't think you have to do that in order to be a good professor at PWI but it definitely I think you know some of the experience in a different types similar to those White folks have experience, different type of Black folks have experience. And the folks just like you named who didn't go through the stages that they just almost seem like they just completely assimilated and no Black friends, wouldn't date anybody who's Black, like they just — I always felt like these folks need some counseling.

Second, he witnessed AAMs who enrolled at a PWI but were fully entrenched with anti-White sentiments.

And then I met other folks who were on opposite end who I think should have been in counseling with them who completely—I'm at a predominantly White institution that I applied to and wanted to go to but I hate White people, I don't have any White friends, I don't like White professors. Now I'm just sitting there thinking well why are you here?” Because I had a lot of pride at the university you know and there were White folks there who I think were for lack of a better term who I think are authentic in our lives.

Hewitt described how he manifested his own views and ways in which to become involved as a campus leader.

My way was to be involved in multiple Black organizations and you know trying to stay involved in really trying to understand racial relations and bring things forward on campus and realizing then wow now you know I'm someone who's actually doing well here and making the dean's list and all this.
Remarkably, Hewitt and I share the same research agendas of addressing AAM identity by using the Cross model of Nigrescence mentioned in Chapter 1. He referred to famous celebrities who have been quoted refusing to date Black women. He voiced his displeasure with any notion of an AAM who refused to date an AA woman based on a negative stereotype.

So I met folks on those stages of aggressive Cross’s model that you were talking about and then the folks that were somewhere in between, which was me. I remember Charles Barkley's statements where I think I was a freshman or sophomore, I don't know. –Yeah I wouldn't date Black women; they're mean and all this stuff.” And I just, I just remember being so frustrated by that. Darius Rucker from Hootie and the Blowfish, –I wouldn't date a Black woman” and all this, I was like –your mom's Black,” like you know –you were in a Black womb but you can't share a life with a Black woman that is your wife?” And that was always very frustrating.

Even though his own wife is not AA, she greatly appealed to Hewitt because she too experienced the lived experiences of being a minority, while attending school in an urban area of Detroit, MI. Their shared experiences of being minorities enabled them to form a bond of holy matrimony.

My wife isn't Black but it's not because I had this mandate you know, just I met my wife the first day of school. And we both talk about that because I didn't go to school, I didn't go to Wilmington so I could find a White wife and come home happy with a White wife, like that's the last thing you want to come home with where I live. But you know when I met my wife it was strange because my wife grew up in the Detroit area and she was a minority at her school and I think that's probably why we immediately clicked you know and been married now for almost ten years, we now have one daughter.
Even though Hewitt married a White female, he despised the notion that Black females are unsuitable to date or marry. He is happily married to date.

**Graduate Experiences**

At the age of 28, Hewitt was accepted in a PhD in Educational Leadership with emphasis in culture, curriculum and change from the UNC Chapel Hill.

My doctoral discipline I focused on - our program was culture, curriculum and change, we called it three C's and my PhD is in Education. The change part was a focus really on policy and critique and reform but that was the program - culture, curriculum and change. It was an interdisciplinary program at Carolina at that time, UNC Chapel Hill. Yeah, you know I think about this approach, I write about it in my latest book with Theodora Berry, it's called *The Evolving Significance of Race: Living, Learning and Teaching*. The book's done, it's just not out yet, but I talk about these hits, misses and false alarms approach. That's what I think I started developing while I was there. False alarms are the miscalculations or the overreactions that AAs exhibit when he or she feels confronted with what may or may not be a racial encounter.

Hewitt mastered his ability to deal with his own false alarms by the simplest of means. He classifies these ordeals as a hit, a miss, or a false alarm. He explained,

*Like when an incident happened and I felt that it was race related, I'd step back and go “Okay is this a hit?” Like meaning do I have evidence you know as I'm seeking evidence over time, do I have evidence that that actually was a threat based on my race ethnic identity? Was it a miss, which you don't learn about till later where I have evidence that oh man, this was actually totally race related and I didn't even catch it and I'm kicking myself because I should have caught it. Or is it a false alarm where I perceive it as a*
threat based on my race but it actually had nothing to do with that. I later find evidence that I mean the person just, we just didn't click or it was just some other misunderstanding but race was really not at the forefront as far as a threat goes.

Hewitt further explained actual occurrences that entailed the possibility of one occurrence entailing a hit, miss, and false alarm depending upon the perception of the individual. The first would be described as a hit and the second either a miss or false alarm.

You know a couple of the things that come to mind first when I arrived was White folks talking about two White professors who would consistently recommend Black students to go to the writing center even when they meet or study with their White colleagues and compare their writing, that they would be referred to have to go to the writing center when the White folks wouldn't be. Second, now you know this is a tricky one because on the other hand I experienced some of my peers saying they didn't feel they were discriminated against because they were Black. But, they didn't get as much critique and feedback from any of the White professors because the White professors were trying to show they were egalitarian by avoiding the possibility of being inequitable if they gave a really strong critique to a Black student, which was obviously race related. Those experiences I think were definitely strong there. You know interestingly enough neither of those two professors that were accused by some of my peers of sending folks to the writing center sent me to the writing center, but I still believe what my peers said, it's disproportioned. Human beings are complex but I think they disproportioned it probably did make that recommendation and it wasn't necessarily because the Black folks writing was worse.
Stereotypes are unreliable generalizations that assume members of the same ethnic category are completely homogenous in every aspect of his or her social existence. Hewitt’s wife, a White female, does not have the same views of the stereotypical White American. In the attempt to analyze the situation, she had to put great thought into her advice to Hewitt.

My wife talks about — she said to me, she's like you know what? As a White person, she’s saying I'm trying to think like some of these folks, right. She said now think about some of these White professors who have been studying Black kids who aren't doing as well, who've gone to school, you know their public schools are disproportionately worse, so they spend their whole career doing that. So when they see you somewhere deep down in there they're thinking a little Tyrone and certainly you must have had not as strong of a learning background either, right. And so you end up being de-valued and de-skilled and then vilified by them when you're not careful because they're used to studying Black kids that had these terrible situations so the assumption is I think deep down that maybe you're one of them. So clearly, you're here but you may not be as good and had as strong of a background as some of the White students.

Hewitt and his wife posited that White researchers who study AAs tend to extend the researcher as reality that exists among all AAs, therefore perpetuating scientific racism. Scientific racism is the usage of research or scientific principles and expertise to support inequality of race, religion, gender, class, sexualities, and physical or mental capacity.

Hewitt exemplified a champion of diversity through his interpersonal skills, competence, and scholarship during his academic career first as a student athlete and then as a PhD scholar. He identified the key essential outcomes of his success as possessing the access and power to congregate and implement change with other PhD scholars and high-ranking officials.
Support Systems

Hewitt recognized Dr. B, an AA female, who was instrumental in encouraging him to attend graduate school and become a college professor.

It was one of those things where it wasn’t they were above me, you see what I am saying? We were on an equal plane, and so we could have those conversations like that. I was already, I think, growing up being a minority in the south, I was used to answering those type of questions, and I remember Dr. B said that to me after class one day, just as a sister that I later wrote, actually we were just talking this past weekend, she said, ‘You know, you really handle these type of questions really well, and you should think about being a professor.’ And that's when I first started thinking about being a professor in college because of her and I always thank her and thank her and thank her. And I was then at that point maybe 19 or 20 years old, because she noticed in my class I could respond to those types of questions even though I may go back to my room and be like man why did—they should know that already. I'd you know go back to my room and just be frustrated and call my parents and it’s like can you believe there's still this craziness.

One of Hewitt’s most prized attributes is his calm, cool demeanor when he is confronted with questions of race. Many AAMs are unaware of his abilities due to the infliction of internal doubt brought about by stereotypes threat, vilification of AAMs though social media, and scientific racism that touts him as intellectually inferior. These phenomena can negatively impact the identity of AAMs such as Dr. Hewitt.

But you know my demeanor, she's like you know if you can respond that way because you're going to get that type of questioning as a Black professor too sometimes. You may want to think about it when you're writing strong, so she definitely was my catalyst.
And this was a Black woman at a predominant White institution. And I think part of the atmosphere that helped me was having her there, Dr. Hale and some other Black professor, had some great White professors too. But if I didn't have those folks I don't know so much about what my trajectory would have been because she was there as I was going and working through this identity stuff. I have to thank Dr. B. because if Wilmington didn't have those professors of color there, and that's a big problem now, I mean in most of the places we don't have enough professors of color.

Although the significance of diversity is an ongoing topic that many PWIs discuss as an important agenda, very little action is done to increase diversity. Hewitt proposes the elitism of aversive racism exists on today's campuses. Aversive racism is a subtle form of racism when a person has negative feelings toward a particular race and uses a non-racist reason to "justify" their negative thoughts, opinions, or actions of them. Though subtle and indirect, aversive racism has consequences just as impactful as overt racism such as the refusal to hire faculty of color at a PWI. Aversive racists often claim to have egalitarian beliefs that all races are equal so their negative feelings do not always manifest. Often times, aversive racists may tend to show favor of races over their own in an effort to fortify their egalitarian image. However, in situations where issues of race are vague, aversive racists will find a non-racist reason to discriminate against another race. Hewitt states, –And so I do think that's a real threat that we're facing right now and there's an elitism and I think an ingrained nature of race and racism is part of CRT that might be underlying some of that as well.”

**Outcomes of Doctoral Success**

After receiving his Bachelor's degree in 1997, Hewitt began his PhD candidacy in Culture, Curriculum and Change from School of Education at the University of North Carolina at
Chapel Hill (UNC Chapel Hill) at the age of 28. He chose this particular program because it catered to his passion to invoke cultural change through curriculum. Passion is the driving force behind his pedagogy, research, and scholarly publication.

I'll tell you one thing is access, and the legitimate authority of sitting at a table with other scholars who are concerned about a particular issue. Those two things I definitely didn't have without the PhD from the University of North Carolina. And I think the sponsorship that goes along with it— even though I may have these deep down concerns about a young Black male who's doing his work and I'm not so sure but he went to Carolina.

After receiving his PhD, Hewitt's hard work and dedication paid vast dividends. His scholarship and awards are testaments to his success and has allowed him greater access in the community of higher education.

**Advice for the AAM Doctoral Student**

Along with having these accouterments of success, Hewitt offered some advice for future AAM candidates to do the necessary research about the university in which they desire to attend. One must take into account his or her undergraduate education and possibility of the scrutiny it may accompany.

Trying to find out, talk to someone that you can trust about the structure and about what the support networks are, about what the graduation rates are, and then about where brothers and sisters go upon graduation once they graduated from there, what type of support they have for preparing for applications, job talks, recommendation letters, which are taken very seriously in the academy. They really look to see whose name is on those
recommendation letters for everyone, but as I said, in particular, there's sometimes a scrutiny that I don't even think people realize.

He recounted that students may have a limited or distorted comprehension about inequality or cultural diversity that make it difficult for them to effectively respond in manners that will allow them to act in favor of a truly equitable education while at a PWI. This dysconsciousness applies to all stakeholders. His pilot student, using me for an example, identified that AAs tend to perpetuate unjust and inequitable beliefs of AAMs in the classroom. AAMs have to perform at a higher academic level to avoid the pitfalls of a stereotype laden academic experience. If he performs with mediocrity, Hewitt’s study indicates that he will be measured lower than his classroom peers.

I think the bar is sometimes higher and I do think it's a dysconscious thing. I can give you an example. I'm doing this as part of the research I'm doing with this old instrument I was telling you about with the student is that when I put that – we have these passages written that are – one's written – they all have about the same number of incorrect grammatical mistakes and that kind of thing, and then one of them is written in a school-based norm like you would see on a test, and when I attach a Black face to it; and a White female face; and a Black male face for the time when I did the small pilot, even the Black teachers scored the Black male lower for the same passage. So I mean, if they read it, and all the teachers said I didn't even notice the face. I didn't see the guy because I had the face actually on the thing they were using to score. So they read it. They're like okay, Larry wrote this passage, and I see Larry's picture and I'm reading this passage. Okay, in the end, I give Larry a score of a 36 and the other person's reading the White
female, same exact passage, but the two people don't know, right? Same exact passage and they awarded the White female a score of 42. These were veteran teachers.

After an AA student achieves the doctoral degree, he or she must conduct tenure research. Tenure research can provide the percentages and likelihood of an AA male or female’s ability to be awarded tenure at a particular PWI.

I would argue you want to tell any young brothers and sisters who were looking to it that ten PWI's or to be professors at them, to try to learn what the support is going to be and what the type of experiences that brothers and sisters have had there. You want to find out if you're going to get tenure, your brothers and sisters get tenure there.

The achievement of tenure is the highest and most rewarding experience one can have besides passing the dissertation defense and receiving the doctorate degree. Hewitt offers excellent advice to future students. In other efforts to assist students, he offers his views of change and implementation to the PWI.

**Advice for the PWI**

Throughout his academic and scholarly journeys, Hewitt has developed a good sense of what is he thinks is needed in today's higher education community to improve the retention and graduation of AAMs.

Again, I think having – one of the things we've done in our minority and urban education program, Dr. M and I are the only full-time professors in Minority and Urban Education. Our program has about 50 students, and we actually apparently make up 67 percent of the diversity as far as race ethnicity goes because there are Black and Latino students. We make up 67 percent of the diversity for the whole college, just our one little graduate program, which offers MAs and PhDs. One of the things we've done is try to
immediately connect, and we do like this orientation/party gather type of thing where they get to meet one another. I would suggest for the rest of our college and university is having – building that type of support network that's genuine.

AAM professors are faced with added responsibilities that are outside the realm of tenure and promotion. Besides teaching and publishing duties, they must carry the weight of obligations that far extend mentorship. Some professors welcome the task with due diligence while others embark upon a tenure-driven mentality that views mentorship as burdensome. Hewitt necessitates that students are to be assisted and molded by faculty who have a genuine interest in student success and development. AA students are not lobbying for a cohort solely of AA professors but they do want the ability to voice his or her concerns freely without recourse.

I mean, the Black students aren't saying we only want to see Black people and only want to be surrounded by Black people, particularly those that are coming in the doctoral level, okay, because they're so cosmopolitan and so multi-dimensional people that we're getting at PWI. By the time they reach that level, they aren't saying we want all Black all the time, but they are saying we do want some spaces where we can have some genuine conversations without any threats or having to be concerned that someone's going to take you the wrong way and make sure there's a threat to us in our classroom or coursework or piss some professor off or whatever.

Hewitt further exemplifies his commitment to develop new and innovative techniques to connect students with various avenues of success through the usage of technology.

So creating those veins, which we have our little parties and gatherings. We try to support whatever they are doing, advising. I'm actually trying to develop – a second component to this is I'm trying to develop what I'll call a "F" teacher's connection, which
is the connect – shouldn't even probably call it a –T” – educator's connection because it's
more than just k-12 teachers but college folks, too – to connect our alumni through
Facebook or what other ways of web 2.0, Skype, to connect them to e-mentoring, e-
coaching, so that our folks who are in our second or third years have like three or four
people who've already graduated in positions that they can just call on for anything, for
reviewing papers, for hey, how did you deal with Ms. Such-and-such when you were
here? Second, they need to be in consistence before they're actually working with
people, represent this – all this diverse urban area, you need to actually be in, working in
urban school type of residency type of programs where you actually interacting with
people and kids, and then third, mentoring. That mentoring component, man, and I just
like the official mentor on the paper that's your mentor when you're a pre-service teacher
because a lot of times, that's not the person that you go to when something goes down
because they're in an evaluative role, but there's all those informal mentors and that's
where I'm hoping this –T” – educator's connection, whatever. Carolina has a thing
similar called the teacher's connection, I think it's called, but those are two of the ideas
that I have because it's very old. It's going back to community, man. That's all it is. I'm
not saying anything new. It's just going back to so the brothers and sisters don't feel like
in this individualistic culture and country that we have that's a win-lose society that you
have to be a minority among minorities when you're a Black in a predominantly White
institution and a PhD, that you also then have to be alone there, too, and have no one and
you got to go it alone to show us how smart you all are by yourself. People do that. I did
it. It's not good for your health. I did it when I was at Wake Forest. When I got to
Carolina, I had the support. At Wake Forest, not so much, and I can't tell you it helped
my health or anything else when I was there. I was ill a lot, gained a ton of weight. Its brother rights of our racial battle fatigue.

Not only is support vital for the student, it is critical that AA PhDs have a support system as well. If not, the racial battle fatigue reciprocates which can have an immense effect on an AAM scholar’s production and service commitment to the PWI and the students he may serve. Hewitt reaffirms this phenomenon as he lacked the support at Wake Forest University where he riddled with stress, anxiety, and weight gain.

Acknowledgments to the Researcher

Lastly, he offered the researcher some very inspiring words of encouragement. While acknowledging the need for similar research, he was very emotional when he spoke the many students who are enduring peril at the hands of racism in all forms combined with the lack support from other AA faculty.

Keep going, brother. I think you are doing a really great service. I guess what hurts me in my heart and brings tears to my eyes is brothers and sisters around the country at PWI's that feel so alone when something like this happens. I talked to people from Colorado; you name it, doctoral students that have a sense of feeling like they're by themselves. That's what hurts me and because many of them feel like there not even Black faculty they can go to because the Black faculty are like I'm sorry, but you gotta – I always tell them look, I'm busy, man, but I'm not – I'm never gone push you away. We hear it said it sometimes that meet, something, to make sure I can help you, but I guess that's what I think hurts me the most. So you doing this will hopefully shed some light on this and for the policies that we have. We're going to get really serious about the type of things that we need to retain Black students, and in the end, the retention issues like this, I
think, we are going to help with recruitment because the word's going to get out that this is a happy place for Black doctoral students because they have a lot of support from multiple spaces; from alums, from peers, and from a list of multi-ethnic, multicultural faculty, and part of that support is co-authoring, man. When you talk about doctoral, even if you plan on going back to teaching in a k-12 school, being happy and lovey-dovey with you is great, but if you're not offering an opportunity to publish with them as a co-author to be part of some of this grant work education, then hugging me is fine, but they know the game. They know how many publications – it even helps you now, as you know in a cutthroat economy, showing that you've published in *The Teacher's College Record* or any of these things they put your name on, you've done the work. It's gonna make you stand out, and that part of our – I hate that part of life, but it's real and it exists, and you want your students to really graduate some depth this sort of – as being as multi-dimensional as they can, and part of that is being part of publications.

Dr. Langford Hewitt, a husband, professor, scholar, and social agent of change informed to keep my legacy afloat by taking part in as much research and publications as possible.

**Summary of Findings**

There were a number of themes that emerged during the data analysis that provided insight into the lived experiences and narratives of AAM doctorates. The primary themes were verified across all seven participants' transcripts. Therefore the categories presented represent the experiences of each participant in the study because no two people will have the exact same experience. Although living in a race and class conscious society African Americans have shared historical struggles yet, homogenization does not exist in the lived experiences of all AAM doctorates who attend PWIs (Williams, 1995). The narratives in this chapter were inserted in the
most suitable context to offer an enriched vision of lived experiences by means of a best fit practice (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The themes derived from comparing across the narratives were (a) cultural and social capital acquired through mentoring, relationships, and athletics, (b) generational differences, (c) internalized oppression, (d) passive racism, and (e) persistence strategies. These will be discussed in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER 5
Discussion of Stories and Thematic Analysis

This study investigated the lived experiences and persistence strategies of seven AAMs who earned doctorate degrees from a PWI. Critical race methodology was used as the qualitative research method to guide this critical inquiry. Critical race methodology identifies race as endemic to American culture, attempts to analyze the power structure of the dominant culture, and finally, critical race methodology foregrounds narratives and counter stories of people of color as a means of liberation. I must also acknowledge my perspective in this investigation. My critical race perspectives as delivered the voices of the research participants as meaningful and reverberating.

Semi-structured interviews were utilized to collect data, explore, and create themes from the participants‘ narratives. The data were structured by the participants‘ explanation of their experiences and the researcher‘s interpretation of those descriptions. In this investigation, a qualitative approach along with critical inquiry was used to explore the thematic meanings as articulated in participant accounts of persistence strategies and lived experiences. This chapter presented a discussion of the common themes in the narratives, a discussion of the narratives in relation to the components of the theoretical framework, recommendations for PWIs and conclusions that may be drawn from the study.

Research Questions

In this study, three research questions were used to guide the study of the phenomenon of race, identity and persistence strategies needed to attain a doctoral degree from a PWI by AAM doctoral students.
1. What are the perspectives of AAMs who graduated from a PWI of racism and racial identity on their doctoral success?

2. What are the perspectives of AAMs who graduated from a PWI on how stereotype threats did or did not affect their doctoral success?

3. How might the success and achievement of AAMs who graduated from a PWI assist other AAMs who may experience racism achieve his doctorate degree?

**CRT Counter-stories**

Critical race theory was integrated into the study to maintain the outsider-within stance to provide insight and vision to AAM doctoral student lived experiences while attending a PWI. The perspectives of AAM doctorates in their own voices provided critical insights into actions that PWIs can take to increase quality of life at their respective campuses. It is not just a matter of fairness, but inclusiveness is central to the university’s ability to provide appropriate and effective services to all of its constituents beyond the dominant culture.

The common themes all reflect part of the elements of critical race theory (CRT). These AAM narratives support the ideas that racism is endemic to American life, challenge dominant claims of colorblindness, neutrality, objectivity and meritocracy, and finally, respect the experiential knowledge of people of color and their communities (Matsuda, et al., 1995). A critical race methodology used in conjunction with the tenants of critical race theory solidifies the narratives as actions that foreground race, challenge traditional research paradigms to explain experiences of students of color, becomes a transformative tool to fight racial, gender, and class subordination, and is focused on the racialized and classed experiences of people of color. The ultimate goal is an attempt to connect the theoretical and methodological actions of CRT with the narratives of my research participants. In doing so, the common themes of the research

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participants help call into question the experiences shared by other AAMs who pursue doctoral degree from PWIs. These themes are part of the research participants’ realities. My reflexivity allowed me to state my position as I acknowledged these emerging themes within the narratives because I have also experienced hurt, silence, and marginalization associated with each theme.

As a critical race theorist, I adhere to what Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) address as naming ‘one’s own reality.’ I offer this assessment of my research as the instrument that provides voice to the research participants. However, each reader is challenged to interpret, examine, and construct his or her own reality along with those of the research participants.

**Thematic Discoveries**

The study participants offered open, in-depth, candid descriptions of their lived experiences as AAM doctoral students who attended PWIs. Within this context, the structure of doctoral degree attainment centered around questions on the perspectives of race and racial identity, perceptions of stereotype threat, success and achievement influence, advice to other AAM candidates and all other stakeholders within the academy higher education. Within the data, interview questions and interrelated sets of themes served to structure meaning. Five themes emerged from the participants lived experiences and narratives. They are (a) cultural and social capital acquired through mentoring, relationships, and athletics, (b) generational differences among participants, (c) internalized oppression, (d) passive racism, and (e) persistence strategies.

**Cultural and Social Capital: Mentoring, Relationships, and Athletics**

The first theme common to all the counter stories is the importance of acquiring cultural and social capital to attain doctoral success. For these AAMs doctorates, those sources came in the form of mentors, relationships with others at the university, and through athletics. Being
members of an underrepresented highly vilified group, AAMs need social and cultural capital as a vital component of academic and social survival let alone success. Capital is defined as something that may bring about a future benefit. Capital combined with ―social‖ then leaves one with social relations of a special kind – containing and, potentially, generating resources (Seippel, 2006). Social capital is defined as the ability of person(s) to secure various benefits through the memberships of social networks, while cultural capital is defined as institutionalized, widely shared, high status cultural signals (Bourdieu, 2008; Eitle & Eitle, 2002). These signals may include attitudes, preferences, formal knowledge, behaviors, goods, and credentials.

For the AAMs who participated in this study, faculty mentors and relationships with supportive peers were important sources of social and cultural capital. All seven participants voiced there were various strategies that contributed to their persistence as AAM doctoral students. The overwhelming need and appreciation of mentoring was mentioned throughout each participant’s academic journey. Mentors equipped participants with persistence strategies that encouraged an understanding of their academic environment, and establishing some form of a support system. The participants all understood that no matter the circumstances surrounding their race and racial identity, achieving the doctoral degree was most important. Participants felt their degree has made them marketable beyond the institution; therefore connecting with the proper mentor was paramount.

In addition, participants felt that deconstructing to understanding culture and race in its proper context helps to better navigate within the institution. Participants conceptualized culture through observing the formal and informal relationships among various members of the institution. From their mentors, participants gained social and cultural capital to successfully navigate and achieve success through the attainment of his respective doctoral degree.
Participants felt the culture at PWIs can be passively hostile and biased towards AAMs. All participants with the exception of Ericson felt their racial salience were reminders to stay guarded due to the unpredictable nature of politics and the history of the environment of the PWI towards AAMs. On the contrary, Stone, Weathersby, and Stith felt the need to challenge authority. Doing so, they were excluded and vilified as militant, which resulted in subtle victimization that led to exclusion from the privileges of being part of the student body within the institution. This group of men communicated a message of their Afrocentricity serving as a deterrent from fitting in with other peers and White faculty within the institution. Consequently, they ignored the legitimacy of the message to acculturate. Gee and Johnstone adopted an appearance in order to be more accepted among their graduate faculty resulting in their acculturation. In addition, there was not a need for Ericson to espouse an acceptable appearance because he was raised in a predominantly White rural society. Of all the participants, Hewitt was able to simultaneously question authority without contributing to self-alienation and still developed positive relationships.

Also, mentors played a highly impactful role as a sounding board to vent school-related or personal frustrations. In addition to faculty mentors, the AAM doctorates in the study utilized other students or student groups as a support system to sponsor their decision-making processes. Having the support of other peers helped them to ease the academic tensions and other possible institutional dilemmas that could limit their success. Lastly, participants heavily relied upon a support network by counting on others to supply the cultural and social capital needed to successfully attain their particular doctoral degrees.

Due to their athletic prowess, four of my seven participants found that sports provided them the social and cultural capital that otherwise was not afforded to AAMs who did not
participate in intercollegiate athletics. For instance, Stone and Stith each earned a full scholarship to play football. Particularly for Stone and Stith, athletics enabled them to pursue higher education even when their financial situations and/or grades would otherwise have prevented them from getting a college degree. Ericson earned a full scholarship to play his respective sport, and Hewitt participated in rugby. All of the aforementioned were afforded more benefits than their AAM non student athlete counterparts. For example, Hewitt participated on the rugby team and it opened a whole new paradigm for him and his teammates. It was the first time he had interacted with people from Jewish and Catholic cultures. Since he was the only AAM on the team, many discussions emerged from the inquiries he and his teammates had from one another enabling close bonds and friendships to form from these encounters. Hewitt had unique expertise in cultural interactions with others. He was well respected and revered as a model student where he earned Minority Student of the Year.

Sports were major assets of these participants’ ability to attain cultural and social capital. Athletic departments have vested interests in its athletes. They are governed by rules of athletic association that promote academic and social responsibility. Eligibility requirements hold athletic departments and its student athletes accountable by setting stipulations on grade point averages, and hours passed. To ensure these rules are enforced athletes are assigned tutors free of charge along with mandatory team study sessions. A huge part of athletic programs are donors and/or alumni who are diehard fans of the program that donate money, host special events, and secure employment for student athletes. All these are accoutrements of having the student athlete status which provides the athlete with connections and support otherwise oblivious to the non-student athlete.
Many AAMs who lack academic resources may be attracted to sports because of the benefits that one can acquire by participation, either short term signals such as popularity, attention from adults, and enhanced self-esteem, or long term signals that accompany the wealth, fame, and fortune afforded to professional athletes (Eitle & Eitle, 2002). These overlapping explanations point to the importance of examining how participation in sports may affect academic achievement (Eitle & Eitle, 2002). Snyder and Spreitzer (1990) suggested several reasons sports may promote academic achievement, including increased interest in school, the need to maintain good grades to stay eligible, boosts to one's esteem, increased attention from adults like teachers and coaches, membership with others who are academically oriented, and expectations to play college sports all of which can attribute to positive AAM identity. The compilation of social and cultural capital that an AAM college athlete receives has the potential to pay great dividends during his navigation at a PWI. To illustrate the benefits of sports, Uslaner (1999) declares that sports build social capital because they build self-confidence and teach respect for rules, widen social contacts, and spread tolerance and egalitarian values on the sly. Athletes do not play sports for moral purposes. Morality lessons are a byproduct of athletics (Brunswick, 1970).

**Generational Differences**

According to research conducted 40 years ago, African American elders were found not to be the reliable guides to society they once were (Brunswick, 1970). In the year 2012, this trend still holds true. AAMs in the hip hop generation and born between 1965-1984 in particular, whose life situations are different from those of their parents seem to require a whole new set of attitudes, values, and behaviors in order to cope with their current situation and may seek a new role identity (Frazier & Rhoden, 2011; Kitwana, 2002). Brunswick examined three aspects of
generational differences among AAMs over and under the age of 40: (a) outlook on life, (b) tolerance and its counterpart, hostility, and (c) attitudes toward the advocacy of violence. In summation, with equal education, AAMs in Brunswick’s study under the age of 40, the younger, always indicated more negative beliefs about whites than the AAM over the age of 40. Among those under 40, education only moderated their negative views of Whites, rather than increasing positive perceptions of Whites as friendly and sympathetic (Brunswick, 1970). In addition, AAM college students under 40 still believed that White America does not care about AAs rather than believing that most whites want to help them. The younger generation felt newer times called for a new set of values, attitudes, and standards with which to find their way into society. In the wake of riots across the country, the youth, with nothing to lose, began to say increasingly more about change here and now, and less about nonviolence. The youth challenged their parents and the prerogative of the leadership of the old civil rights organizations and engaged in outright civil disobedience (Eitle & Eitle, 2002). Mithun (1977) posited the Black Power movement of the 1960s forced AAMs to adapt to changing societal norms and to reevaluate them for themselves.

All seven participants recounted stories where they felt singled out due to race, as well as stories that relate to their generational differences, which encompass the Civil Rights Era and hip hop generation. The two older participants, Weathers and Johnstone, who grew up during the end of the Jim Crow era and in the midst of the Civil Rights movement, had different views of race relations. Having lived in segregated neighborhoods and attended all-Black schools, these men had been explicitly taught how to survive in an often-hostile white world. The remaining five participants were younger and grew up in a different cultural context than Johnstone and Weathersby. Stith, Stone, and Hewitt were the offspring of a new age, having grown up in the hip hop era of the early 1980s. During this era racism in any form would not be tolerated and
these AAMs would present themselves in a reactionary method to thwart their opposition. Unlike Weathers and Johnstone where their parental influence heavily guided their responses to society, Stith, Stone and Hewitt rejected any perceived notion of oppression, inequality, or passive racism, using their intellectual ability to challenge these notions made by professors, peers, and society at large.

Unlike the others, Gee was a hybrid of a cross generational identity where he also refused to allow his social identity of being AAM to be stigmatized, instead he chose not to resort to what he called “old patterns” of forcefully rejecting racism as the norm. Instead he chose to make alliances with powerful groups who historically denied AAMs access by following the formula of author Reginald Lewis and his book, “Why Should White Guys Have all the Fun.” Similar to Gee, Ericson is a unique case, as he was raised in rural White America, yet was reminded of racial segregation and atrocities his father endured. Nonetheless, his parents taught him to look beyond a person’s skin color, choosing to raise their son in a white, rural community. Consequently, he took an approach that was absent of race but where one was judged on the basis of one’s character. In conclusion, all of my participants showed great persistence and fortitude to attain their respective degrees regardless of age, identity, or strategies their outcomes were the same. Today, they are all are endorsed by the moniker of Dr.

**Internalized Oppression**

Internalized oppression (or *internalized racism*) occurs when socially stigmatized groups (e.g., AAMs) accept and recycle negative messages regarding their aptitude, abilities, and societal place, which results in self-devaluation and the invalidation of others within the group (Lipsky, 1987). In turn, members of the group consciously or unknowingly endorse the ideologies of the oppressor by communicating counterproductive and racist messages to other
group members. For most of my participants, their AA male peers as well as AA faculty perpetuated this form of oppression. Participants felt victimized by internalized oppression from AA peers. For example, Weathers felt singled out by AA peers because he denounced the ideology of colorblindness. Ericson was ostracized because he did not speak the Black vernacular and was not accepted by AA peers on campus because they felt he was not Black enough.

Stone and Stith encountered AA faculty who were reluctant to offer dissertation feedback and revisions in a timely manner. Both expressed disappointment in AA faculty whom they believed had set out to make the doctoral experience as daunting as possible for AAM students. These AA faculty members did not receive support when they were doctoral students, and perpetuated a rite of passage that their AA students should suffer through the process as they did. Stone and Stith also felt that AA faculty members were obligated to assist them in any and all matters that would better serve their cause as AAM doctoral students. When these expectations were not met, the fallout was heavily internalized with great disappointment, abandonment, and even severe loathing towards AA faculty.

Ultimately, the outcome of internalized oppression is within-group socialization toward negative, and what is perceived as racially normative codes of conduct often ensues. When these occurrences take place the phenomena of oppression occurs (Schwarbaum & Thomas, 2008). Lipsky asserts this tendency is not a basis of racism but instead an internalized reaction to oppression. Lipsky also observes the many failed attempts at AA unity and collectivism as well as the decline of leadership within AA communities can be explained by internalized oppression. As applied to this study, internalized oppression compels AA students to condemn, attack, or have unrealistic expectations towards AA faculty.
Internalized oppression by AA faculty who perpetuate oppressive and stereotypical attitudes also induce normative behaviors that erode the educational enthusiasm of AAM candidates, and demoralizes collaborative action of their student support (Jones, 2000). For example, instead of collectively striving to dispel faulty stereotypes regarding AAs, many AA faculty will endorse those misperceptions by viewing AAMs as thugs, spoiled students of the academy benefiting from affirmative action, or blatantly or passively show contempt toward an AAM student who subscribes to today’s hip hop culture. Further, Freire (1970) discussed the self-deprecation phenomenon, which posits a sense of self-hatred and low self-esteem among the oppressed. “So often do the oppressed hear that they are good for nothing, know nothing, and are incapable of learning anything—that they are sick, lazy, and unproductive—that in the end they become convinced of their own unfitness” (p. 94). This ideology is similar to the tenets of stereotype threat.

Hill Collins (2004) contends the AA community may view AAM elected officials, business leaders, executives, and academics as “intellectual sissies” who have sold their blackness for White success. This view may permeate into higher education towards AAM doctorates who seek success through his intellectual mastery by way of attaining a doctoral degree from a PWI. Gee, Johnstone, Ericson, and Hewitt purposely set out to align themselves with the culture of a PWI. They joined White fraternities, excelled at a sport dominated by Whites, and made connections with Whites that had power and influence to create better avenues towards success. However, there were those, like Stone, Weathers and Stith who did not align themselves, and endured much more hardship during their campus navigation. These individuals challenged professors during lectures, disregarded wearing conservative attire, and ignored directives from administrators. Their actions would be considered as “keeping it real” by the AA
community. Thus, while AAM doctoral students may aspire to achieve their degrees, they may feel pressure to act in ways that work against achieving it. Stone later regretted his militant stance and wished he had done more to acculturate to make his student experiences more smooth and pleasant. In short, internalized oppression experienced by AAMs from other AA faculty and/or peers at a PWI can be summed as a remanifestation of distressful patterns towards other AAs that are direct results of racism and oppression entrenched in American society.

**Passive Racism**

Passive racism as Marx (2006) defined it is a subtle form of racism (e.g. laughing at a racist joke, not challenging exclusionary hiring practices, and avoiding typical race-related issues). It is ingrained in American institutions, philosophies, and practices and may seem oblivious from the dominant groups that benefits from it (Marx, 2006). Passive racism also has the propensity to be unnoticed by those who are victimized by it. Stone, Gee, Hewitt, and Weathers, all spoke of the form of racism that affected them: passive institutional racism from college professors and/or peers. They described incidents that pointed to institutional traditions, perceptions, and every day practices that disadvantaged them on the basis of their racial group and perceived identity. Their narratives give vast accounts of the passive formats of racism inflicted upon them. For example, Gee was informed he was not graduate school material on the sole basis of a standardized test. Stone felt he was purposely failed during comprehensives exams. Weathers believed professors during his undergraduate years deliberately gave lower grades to AA students to prevent them from pursuing graduate school. While they acknowledged race was an issue, they found ways to continue their academic pursuits despite overt or passive experiences of racism and discrimination.
Persistence Strategies

All seven participants spoke of how their understanding of race and identity influenced various persistence strategies when navigating within the institution. Participants viewed their own persistence as either going along to get along, being defiant, or remaining steadfast to competency as an AAM doctoral student. Those who chose to go along to get along felt the best way to survive as an AAM doctoral student was to assimilate within the dominant institutional culture. To some participants, including Gee, Ericson, and Hewitt that meant aligning themselves to share ideologies and ideas or by choosing to accommodate, support, and empathize with the decisions of the ruling majority. Meanwhile, Stith and Stone felt that it was their responsibility as AAMs to continuously fight for equity and stimulate change. Therefore, they chose to reject any form of unequal treatment. Lastly, Johnstone chose to not focus on either acceptance or rejection. He preferred to acculturate himself, socialize, and conduct business without feeling the need to sacrifice or compromise success to accomplish the task at hand. As members of said group, participants were conscious of prejudices held against them, scrutiny of their qualifications, and the double standard of status privilege. Consequently, the AAM doctorates in the study felt it was paramount to work harder and contribute more than their White counterparts to attain the doctoral degree. Participants felt their perceived constant reaffirmation of minority statuses are evidenced through institutional communication.

Several of these AAM doctorates felt there were unwritten rules regarding privilege that were biased against them. For instance, Weathers and Gee observed their White counterparts receiving more institutional support and opportunities that were not readily available to AAMs. Specifically, Stone, Gee, Weathers, and Stith felt their intellectual freedoms and voice were often limited or scrutinized and passively silenced. Also, Stone, Weathers, Gee, and Stith spoke of
isolation and racial battle fatigue as an influence on their persistence strategy. For these AAMs, their isolation manifested from lack of inclusion and capital essential for the knowledge and competence of the doctoral processes at PWIs.

**Racial Identity Typology of Participants**

The perspective of race and identity of AAM doctorates is a category that captures the various ways in which participants shared their views, emotions, and experiences on how they were able to view racism and racial identity while attending a PWI. From the participants’ perspectives, they often felt the need to overachieve within their courses and remain competent despite their knowledge of cultural and structural barriers of race within the institution. In this section, I use Vandiver et al.’s theory of Nigrescence cluster (Vandiver, et al., 2001) to categorize each participant. The assigned typology represents what I believe each currently exudes in the form of his identity. I understand that although I have placed each participant into a single category it does not absolve him from experiencing others simultaneously or experiencing other identities during his lived experiences as an AAM at a PWI. Not to be confused with the Cross Model of Identity, (Vandiver, Cross, Worrell, & Fhagen-Smith, 2002) subgroup typologies are based on attitudes, beliefs, and interpretations of how racism impacts their lives which aid in culminating identity. There are three subgroups: (a) **non-compliant believers** are those who believe in the importance of education and share the American dream but challenge the conventional means; (b) **cultural mainstreamers** fully embrace the current culture without resistance; (c) **cultural straddlers**, who believe they can successfully negotiate the culture of their own group but are also highly competent of the culture of the dominant group (Carter, 2005, pp. 12-13).
Definition of Typologies

Pre-encounter assimilation
Describes an AAM whose racial identification is organized around a sense of being more of an American and an individual. He places little or no significance on racial solidarity, and has willfully disengaged from the AA community and culture (Cross & Vandiver, 2001).

Pre-encounter miseducation
Describes an AAM who subscribes to the negative imageries, stereotypes, prejudices, and historical miseducation about AAs. Consequently, he sees little or no desire to engage in any involvement in the AA community (Cross & Vandiver, 2001).

Pre-encounter self hatred
Suggests the culmination of his experience may produce profound negative feelings and severe self-loathing due to being identified as an AAM (Cross & Vandiver, 2001).

Immersion-emersion
In the first stage of immersion-emersion, the AAM is almost consumed with anti-White sentiments. He is deeply entrenched into AA culture and separates himself from anything dealing with White society. In immersion-emersion, it is suggested that the individual becomes almost obsessed with AA pride filled with ethnocentric values (Cross & Vandiver, 2001).

Internalized nationalist
Expresses an Afrocentric perspective about himself, other African Americans, and the world. Typically, these individuals are fully engaged in the AA community without any anti-White sentiment (Cross & Vandiver, 2001).
Internalized biculturalist

Describes an AAM who fully ascribes to being both AA and American without reluctance of exuding varied ideals (Cross & Vandiver, 2001).

Internalized multiculturalist

Describes an AAM whose identity fuses between two or more social categories or frames of reference, and is interested in resolving issues that address multiple oppressions and is confident and comfortable in multiple groups (Cross & Vandiver, 2001).

Dr. Stone

Dr. Stone’s experiences can be described as institutional racism concocted in a collegial manner in which members of a particular institution collaboratively decide to exercise their power discriminately or use covert methods of failing individuals on the premise that he or she has challenged conventional wisdom of the professorate. He or she may refuse to conform or assimilate to a department’s pleasing therefore denying the completion of a doctoral degree by various means. During this time Stone may have endured the immersion-emersion stage in which his frustrations and dealings with racism influenced him to become deeply entrenched into AA culture and separate himself from anything dealing with White society. In immersion-emersion it is suggested that the individual becomes almost obsessed with AA pride filled with ethnocentric values. Stone, today, would be described as an internalized nationalist, one who stresses an Afrocentric perspective about themselves, other African Americans, and the world. Typically, these individuals are fully engaged in the Black community without any anti-White sentiment (Cross & Vandiver, 2001).
Dr. Johnstone

Johnstone was born in the Jim Crow south and experienced a unique upbringing compared to the other participants. Even though he grew up in Mississippi where AAMs were brutally oppressed, he did experience pre-encounter black self-hatred, which suggests the culmination of his experience may produce profound negative feelings and severe self-loathing due to being identified as an AAM. However, he now takes pride in helping all students regardless of color, creed, or religion which classifies him as an internalized multiculturalist whose identity fuses between two or more social categories or frames of reference, and is interested in resolving issues that address multiple oppressions and is confident and comfortable in multiple groups.

Dr. Gee

Dr. Gee lived in a fairly diverse society all his life until he became a doctoral candidate. He voiced his inner conflicts of dealing with racism. He uses the term —old patterns‖ that may serve as a connotation to act with forceful intolerance of oppression, which may have worsened the situation for him. Instead, in order to break out of those old patterns, he internalized much of his frustrations and channeled them into positive reaction or other methods of coping. He sought out mentors, broke color barriers by joining White fraternities, and developed an identity that is consistent with an internalized multiculturalist. This identity has led to the increase of his cultural and social capital.

Dr. Ericson

Dr. Ericson was reared in a rural Midwestern community in which race was almost a non-factor on his worldviews. Because he was not groomed in the inner city urban lifestyle, and was rurally schooled, Black vernacular was not a part of his vocabulary and he excelled in a
predominantly White male sport at a PWI. Vandiver, et al. (2001) would characterize him in the  
*pre-encounter assimilation* identity which describes an AAM whose racial identification is  
organized around a sense of being more of an American and an individual. He places little or no  
significance on racial solidarity, and has willfully disengaged from the African American (AA)  
community and culture. His success can be attributed to the identity of an *internalized*  
biculturalist, is an African American who fully ascribes to being both AA and American without  
reluctance of exuding varied ideals.  

**Dr. Weathers**  

Dr. Weathers, also raised during the sociopolitical movement of the Civil Rights Era,  
adamantly denied any anti-White sentiment or any identity affiliation with the *pre-encounter*  
identity cluster. He was raised not to succumb to the victimization many AAs faced but learned  
how to successfully counter racism by accepting it as social norm and placing more value on  
family and good health. He would typify an *internalized nationalist*; one who stresses an  
Afrocentric perspective about themselves, other African Americans, and the world. He is an  
agent of social justice for AAs absent the anti-White attitude.  

**Dr. Jacoby Stith**  

Unlike the others, Stith was born during the hip-hop era in the urban streets of South  
Central Los Angeles and later relocated to Nashville, TN to avoid the pitfalls of street life.  
During his transition as a member of the Mormon Church, he questioned his identity and purpose  
as an AAM. As he found his calling as a professor, author, and academic he uncovered the  
mistreatment of Blacks by the Mormon Church and published a book that prompted national  
attention. Upon being pressured to halt the media attention, he was fired from his institution,  
which resulted in him losing his job, family, and income. Further, he fell prey to internalized
oppression by AA faculty during his PhD quest. Not only did he carry some resentment towards the Mormon Church, the anguish and bitterness directed toward AA faculty at his former institutions still infuriates him today. My analysis would suggest that Stith underwent pre-encounter assimilation stage where his identity was organized around a sense of being more of an American and an individual. Due to his relocations and acculturation in predominantly White culture he saw little or no significance on racial solidarity, and willfully disengaged from the African American (AA) community and culture. He encountered immersion-emersion, where he was almost consumed with anti-White sentiments due to the treatment of the Mormon Church of AAs, his termination of employment from BYU, and his social research on Whiteness through CRT. This may have lead to segment of internal separation from anything dealing with White society. In the course of his lived experiences greatness has emerged within him to become an internalized multiculturalist. He fuses between two or more social categories or frames of reference, and is interested in resolving issues that address multiple oppressions and is confident and comfortable in multiple group settings.

Dr. Hewitt

Distinctively, Hewitt would best fit the mold of an internalized multiculturalist. Like all other participants he endured a bout with racial battle fatigue and more importantly the stereotype threat. His AA allegiance was called by another AAM to question because he was employed at a PWI rather than an HBCU. The gentleman felt that AAM doctorates would be better suited to serve at HBCUs rather than PWIs if not he was labeled as sellout or or abandoning their own cultural heritage in order to attain success (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). He responded by reiterating that PWIs need AA faculty to serve other AA students as well. His
calm intellectual responses to racism allowed others to have a different viewpoint which has earned him respect from peers and faculty.

**Persistence and Presence of Racism**

Participants addressed what they felt were the conceptualization of race on their persistence strategies. Interviewees spoke of two forms of racism encountered: institutional and individual. Institutional racism is defined as an entity that perpetuates inequality based on racial membership. These patterns and procedures serve to actively or passively function to disadvantage people of color (Better, 2008). They spoke of experiences in which institutional racism occurred in everyday practices and institutional traditions. Having recalled and lived those situations, participants referenced those instances as reminders of their perceived value as minorities within the institution. For many, their knowledge of institutional and regional history better illustrated the inherited boundaries and identification towards their own classified racial group. Rather than fight the perceptions tied to the conflicts between majority and minority racial groups directly, many participants chose to understand and work around the issue so barriers presented by race or culture does not become a distraction to their performance (Cole & Arriola, 2007; Ewing, Richardson, James-Myers, & Russell, 1996). All AAMs felt their personal value system guides them through many of their decisions. They defined their value system as being fair, having good work and personal ethics, and staying true to one’s self. Most participants felt they did not have to compromise themselves in order to serve their administrative post as minorities, yet others did.

Those who did not compromise themselves comfortably accepted that no matter the decision, there would be some type of negative feedback. Therefore AAMs felt that it would serve them best to make decisions they are comfortable with rather than trying to please others.
Meanwhile those who compromised their identity did so knowingly to attain positive result that benefits all involved. Consequently, they either assimilated or accommodated themselves within the dominant administrative culture to negotiate their decisions.

Politics is an aspect of university culture participants believed hampered their decision-making ability. AAM doctorates posit that unlike non-academic institutions, politics extend beyond data driven decision-making. Due to the culture of the institution and its function within the surrounding community, certain decisions may result in poor public image for the university. Therefore, in mastering politics, the participants understood how and why some pronouncements are not utilized. AAM doctorates felt that politics can be very frustrating and a distraction. As a result, participants chose to utilize either one of two strategies to master politics: play the game or make alliances. Those who chose to play the game did so in choosing to consciously code switch while accommodating and sometimes assimilating between environments and contexts. For example: (a) Gee, joined an fraternity that had been historically exclusive to White males, (b) Stith was a member of the Mormon Church, and (c) Hewitt chose to play rugby, a majority White international sport, mostly played by White males in America and Europe. Those who preferred not to engage in such behaviors made sure they had an alliance with someone of a higher power to buffer or back their decisions such as Weathers who refused the to accept the ideology of colorblindness in America, had Dr. V as ally despite his —militancy.” These AAM doctorates relied heavily on support networks as they navigated their way through the academy. Participants all spoke of the need for a mentor to help guide their decision making as an individual or as an advisory team. Their mentors provided a point of view and a reference that helped them to better understand the environment, various experiences, or possible consequences to certain decisions.
Color-blind Ideology

Denial is the primary mechanism by which "color-blindness" sustains itself (Lawrence, 1995). The cultural practice that enables and sustains this denial is a societal taboo against discussions about what we see, feel, and know about racism (Lawrence, 1995). In fact, playing off the well-known quote in which W. E. B. DuBois (1994) stated, "the problem of the 20th century will be the problem of the color line," or color blindness, which is the refusal of American society to acknowledge the causes and prevalence of racism. He also asserted to the world the idea of double consciousness. In educational settings, not only does the idea of double consciousness become apparent, but it is more apparent for some. Many AAMs see themselves in an educational setting but not a part of it. The AAM in many educational settings has been neutralized and responded to in a colorblind manner. Too often, much of sociological research in America on colorblindness is highly saturated and limited in researching colorblindness to those who are White. Despite the positive strides AAs and Whites have made throughout our nation's historical battle with racism and oppression, racism still exists deeply embedded in today's culture. In short, because of the increasing prevalence of color-blind ideology, the very nature of "white experience" today makes it difficult to study. However, research on whiteness must not fall prey to focusing on whites only when the denial of racism can exist amongst the dominant and/or subordinate group. On the contrary, there is very limited research that employs the studies of the phenomena of AAM colorblindness regarding his denial of racism during a racist act against him or others. Lack of the responses to this neutralization and colorblindness may be the result of a denial that is deeply embedded in his consciousness.

Research designed to specifically emphasize AAM narratives that foreground issues of the neutralization of racism and colorblindness in educational settings are absent. As a result, my
intentions were to connect the narratives with some of the scholarly materials that highlight racial neutrality and colorblindness. Ultimately, the research participants’ narratives of this study may or may not explicitly reflect their experiences with racism and admissions of colorblindness but their realities reflect an implicit struggle. For example, Dr. Johnstone changed a section of his dissertation to the revision recommendation of a White male committee member and was later accused of plagiarism for doing so. He vehemently denied any racial undertones of the incident and simply concluded that the incident was something that all doctoral students encounter during their dissertation defense.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

Critical race theory, stereotype threat, and racial identity were integrated into the study to maintain the outsider-within stance to provide insight and vision of AAM doctoral cosmology at PWIs. These perspectives, in their own voices, provided critical insights into actions that PWIs can take to increase candidacy and degree attainment. It is not just a matter of fairness, but inclusivity is central to the university’s ability to provide appropriate and effective services to all of its constituents beyond the dominant culture. Therefore the study may have significance to all university stakeholders.

Interaction amongst faculty and students is paramount for creating communities in college classrooms therefore improving the collegiate perceptions of AAMs (Dawson-Threat, 1997). Faculty should foster classes that promote expression of personal experiences without recourse, facilitate and promote multiculturalism, and provide the opportunity to explore AAM identity issues to enhance in-class experiences for AAMs. Hence, PWIs should allow environments in which AAMS can express their thoughts about experiences of racial salience.
AAM identity is deeply rooted in his hyper awareness about how he is negatively perceived and stereotyped (Dawson-Threat, 1997; Steele, 2010).

The findings, when kept in context, were beneficial when determining policy or factors that may contribute to establishing an academy of doctoral leadership that is based on equity, inclusion, and diversity. For researchers, the results of this inquiry provide counter-narratives to presumed neutrality of equal access and opportunity for AAM doctoral degree attainment. Additionally, this study provided participants an opportunity to reflect on their counter narratives as AAM doctoral students who attended a PWI.

Stereotype threat was a non-issue for participants. Although failed to mention that negative stereotypes were experienced during their lived experiences as doctoral students. My reflexive approach denotes otherwise. The researcher determined that although it was never mentioned, stereotype threat (ST) lay deeply embedded in my participants' consciousness. The sheer drive and determination of my participants were partially fueled by the ST. Again, ST may produce intense pressure to over achieve and not succumb to the threat of underachievement which I believe that all my participants subconsciously internalized as the powerful mechanism that fueled persistence, overcame barriers, and lead to degree attainment. For example; (a) Gee, was told that his GRE scores deemed him incompetent of being a doctoral student, (b) Stone effectively taught criminal theory for two years, yet was failed on the theory component of his comprehensive exam, (c) Johnstone and Weathersby were older nontraditional students who refused to allow the age factor to hinder their degree completion, (d) Stith endured many obstacles and suffered undue losses of family, friends and income yet maintained his course of receiving his PhD over a ten year period. The vilification of the AAM in American society acts
as highly motivating entity deeply embedded within his psyche to disprove the negatives stigmas about him.

**Implications**

Culturally sensitive research recognizes ethnicity and positions culture as central to the research process. Improved and innovative theoretical frameworks for culturally sensitive research approaches for AAs rely upon the researcher to produce culturally congruent research methods, culturally specific knowledge, cultural resistance to theoretical dominance, culturally sensitive data interpretations, and culturally informed theory and practice (Tillman, 2002). It brings forth a new framework that represents theoretical and methodological possibilities for more culturally informed research, theory, and practice. When research on AAMs who attend PWIs is approached from a culturally sensitive perspective, of his culture, historical and contemporary experiences will be greater acknowledged through research and scholarship.

AAMs need more mentors to overcome their environment and are competing with AA females. The analysis of research on AA educational experiences and outcomes yields several theoretical and methodological considerations for future efforts, including (a) theoretical attention to how race-related negative stereotypes shape educational outcomes, (b) attention to the way race is a product of educational settings as much as it is something that AAMs bring with them, (c) a focus on how everyday interactions and practices in higher education affect educational outcomes, and (d) examination of how AAMs make sense of their racialized social locations in light of their schooling experiences. Researchers use culturally informed knowledge to propose educational change and work to build meaningful, productive relationships with the nonacademic community (Tillman, 2002).
When asked about experiences of racism some participants mentioned they had never experienced racism from peers, instead they identified vivid recounts of their experiences in the classroom, during comprehensive exams, and dissertation defenses. Most of them indicated that while they are knowledgeable of certain cultural and institutional barriers against racial minorities, they must continue to represent themselves as if unaffected. To the participants, that means maintaining proper appearances, always being prepared, and above all else, remaining competent.

Finally, America provides a place where freedom reigns and education can be obtained. There are great deals of disparities however; one can rise above them to soar to the top of America’s who’s who. Education has always been the key to unlock some of the most prestigious careers and professions. Though there are countless individuals who have become successful without education, no one will disagree that there are still more successful people who have obtain higher education than not. Something must be done to motivate the AAM and help remedy the cyclical barriers of success to advance self-fulfillment and establish more role models for tomorrow.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were used to investigate the experiences and persistence strategies of AAM doctoral students who attended PWIs. This study aimed to contribute to the scholarship of persistence of racism among AAM doctoral students. Upon completion of the study, the following recommendations for future research are made:

A. To continue to examine the factors that contributes to the persistence of racism at PWIs and the strategies that AAMs learn in order to successfully navigate at a PWI from his perspective. In viewing the study through the eyes of the normally marginalized voice, allows or a more
complete picture of the narrative on disproportionate representation within dominating cultures. Additionally, beyond African Americans, there are other minority components to examine in culture. For example, the same concepts can apply to White males attending an HBCU, Latino students who may attend a PWI, professors with an alternative lifestyle among leaders in a culture that's dominantly heterosexual, and perhaps AAM doctorates with a religious sect considered unique among the dominating culture in power in the academy. Each case has a dissimilar history, understanding, and context at their institution, therefore all interactions should be examined.

B. To study and compare AAM and African American female doctoral students in an effort to measure, compare, and contrast marginalization of racism and/or sexism at PWIs.

C. Competence of University politics emerged as a strong theme within the study. A closer examination of power and politics is needed to increase the understanding of access, equity, and inclusion in higher education. Specifically, politics could be used as a tool to contextualize means of navigation.

D. Throughout the study I began to notice that some questions were answered differently due to generational differences. Research should explore the dissimilar differences in cultural lenses and views on race and racism that are impacted by generational differences. Specifically, from those who have experienced the civil rights era and those who are referenced as a being a part of hip-hop generation.

**Conclusion**

Both AAM doctoral students and the PWI must assume a larger active role in ensuring the successful degree attainment of all students. This research has enriched the literature about how the impact of racism and identity may influence doctoral success or attrition, as well as
provided additional support of the existing literature upon the roles of mentorship at PWIs. It also identifies areas for future inquiry. Exploration of evaluation through the lens of the observer is a powerful concept, given the practical nature of the phenomena. Researching the lived experiences of AAM male doctoral success in lieu of the presence of racism gives credence to personal experience, helps to inform future practice, and additionally provides a new avenue of testing theory. The experiences, opinions, and accounts given by the participants in this study enhance the theoretical framework of the role of race in higher education. The interview findings helped to supplement and further expound upon the findings from the questionnaires by adding individual experiences and personal accounts by AAM male doctorates. These personal narratives provide further evidence of the importance of researching the lived experiences in order to better comprehend evaluation from an AAM perspective. Understanding the dynamics that encourage further investigation of AAM success will aid in providing recommendations for AAM recruitment and retention in doctoral programs. To further develop intentional interventions designed to increase the numbers of evaluators of color, specifically AA evaluators, research on evaluator experiences is imperative. In order to provide greater awareness of evaluation, one must explore the experiences of those directly a part of the system. The researcher hopes that the findings from this research will provide a wealth of knowledge about AAM in doctoral programs.

After degree completion and employment AAM doctorates will still face challenges unique to him at the by virtue of his social identity as AA, one that is influenced by racism and negative stereotyping resulting in a double consciousness. To illustrate this twoness, W.E.B. DuBois (1994) states:
It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness— an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (p. 2)

In closing, as the racial and cultural demographics changes in the U.S., these transformations continue to shape universities across the land. Therefore, stakeholders of the PWI must be prepared to embrace and guide their universities to serve the on growing multicultural society. To accomplish this, change must be imminent within the leadership structure itself where policies are developed to ensure equity and inclusiveness for students, faculty, and staff. In addition, we must do more than just action research in social justice and diversity. We must actively embrace it by the inclusivity of all minorities. Coming to terms with racism and other issues of social justice are not to invigorate past injustices, rather they are ultimately a platform of redemption that gives us permission to move forward together.

This research opens the door for further discussion and studies on the importance of recognizing culture and experiences as an integral part AAM doctoral candidacy and graduation. If the PWIs in America were open to the idea that educational experiences are not just academic, but they are political, cultural, gendered and racial, they would deconstruct the current negative realities and reconstruct these realities that may induce positive meanings for all students who are of the minority.
List of References
References


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Appendixes
Appendix A

Letter of Participation Invitation
Department of Educational Leadership
Box 142, Wichita, KS 67260-0142

Dear:

My name is Larry Callis, a doctoral student at Wichita State University. For my dissertation research, I am seeking African American males who earned their doctoral degrees from Predominantly White Institutions between 1995-2010. You were selected due to your affiliation with my familiarity with colleagues and faculty.

Your participation in this study would consist of a sixty to ninety minute Skype or telephone interview using a recording device that I will provide. The data gathered during your participation has great potential to aid in the recruitment, mentoring, and degree attainment of future African American males who select to attend a Predominantly White Institution. You will have the opportunity to share your doctoral student experience which may have a major impact on the candidacy and degree completion of future African American male candidates. To protect your identity, anonymous names will be used (i.e., AA male, 37, Wichita State University, Educational Leadership.)

Since you have successfully completed your doctoral degree, your lived experiences and world views are highly valued and deemed very impactful. I would greatly appreciate your acceptance of being a part of this insightful and very significant study. You have a unique story that researchers, universities, and all need on why it is an extreme accomplish when African American males achieve success through doctoral degree attainment. Once the study is complete, the finding will be accessible to you. Wichita State University will also keep my findings on file. If you have any questions or concerns, call me at 913-748-9220 (cell). I can also be reached at ldcallis@gmail.com.

Larry Callis, Doctoral Student
Appendix B

Department of Educational Leadership
Box 142, Wichita, KS 67260-0142

Consent Form

**Purpose**: You are invited to participate in a study of African American males who attained a doctoral degree at a predominantly White institution. I hope to learn the qualitative factors and perceptions of racial identity, negative stereotyping and racism as it related to the successes of African American Male doctorates.

**Participant Selection**: You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are an African American Male who attained his doctoral degree from a Predominantly White Institution between 1995-2010. Approximately 6-10 AAMs will be invited to participate in the study.

**Explanation of Procedures**: If you decide to participate, you will if you agree to be in this study, we will conduct an interview with you via videoconferencing technology. The interview will include questions about your lived experiences and persistence strategies while you attained your doctoral degree. The interview will take about 60 to 90 minutes to complete. With your permission, I would also like to digitally record the interview.

**Discomfort/Risks**: There is the risk that you may find some of the questions about your doctoral experience to be sensitive.

**Benefits**: Your lived experiences may aid in the retention, molding, and increased awareness of future African American males doctoral candidates and the Predominantly White Universities they may attend.

**Confidentiality**: Any information obtained in this study in which you can be identified will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. Because I believe what I learn from the study will benefit others, I plan to present the results of this research at national conferences and publish it in scholarly journals. No names will be used in any document produced from this study.

**Refusal/Withdrawal**: Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with Wichita State University and/or the university in which you attained your doctoral degree. If you agree to participate in this study, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.
Contact: If you have any questions about this research, you can contact me, Larry Callis, 913-748-9220 (cell) and ldcallis@gmail.com or my advisor, Dr. Jean Patterson at 316-978-6392 and jean.patterson@wichita.edu. If you have questions pertaining to your rights as a research subject, or about research-related injury, you can contact the Office of Research Administration at Wichita State University, Wichita, KS 67260-0007, and telephone (316) 978-3285.

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above and have voluntarily decided to participate.

Please keep a copy of this consent form.

____________________________________________________ ______________
Signature of Subject       Date
Appendix C

Interview Questions and Relevance to Research Questions

A. What are the perspectives of AAM academics who graduated from a PWI of racism and racial identity on their doctoral success?

Tell me about yourself.

1) What is your:
   1) Where did you grow up? What was it like growing up where you did?
   2) Tell me about your K-12 school experience?
   3) Tell me about your undergraduate/Bachelors experience (where he attended; what it was like, was it a HBCU or PWI etc)
   4) Age
   5) Doctoral discipline
   6) Current employment

2) What school did you attend to attain your doctorate? Describe.
   1) Why did you decide to pursue a doctoral degree?
   2) How did you come to attend this university?

3) In the time that you were a doctoral student did you experience racism?
   1) If so, can you give some examples of what you experienced?
   2) And how it affected you as an AAM?

4) Can you identify barriers –personal or organizational- may have impacted your progress? Explain.

5) What was your support system at the PWI?
   1) Did you have a mentor? If so, was she/she a minority or person of color?
   2) How did this person support you?

6) What strategies did you use to sustain your success in this institution?

7) Describe the emotions felt during your doctoral pursuit?
8) In attaining your degree did you make any identity sacrifices? If yes, explain.

9) How did attending a PWI impact your life and or lifestyle?
10) Would you have rather attended an HBCU instead of a PWI? Why or Why not?

B. What are the perspectives of AAM academics who graduated from a PWI on how stereotype threats did or did not affect their doctoral success?

12) Did you feel that others at your institution negatively stereotyped you as an AAM?

13) If so, how did you respond to or deal with that?

14) What, Where was your earliest memory of being negatively stereotyped?

15) What, Where was your earliest memory of being negatively stereotyped at your PWI?

16) List and describe your coping strategies when confronted with a negative stereotype?

17) Was there ever a situation where you miscalculated a statement, action, or gesture as a negative stereotype? If so, how was it rectified?

C. How might the success and achievement of AAMs who graduated from a PWI assist other AAMs who may experience racism achieve his doctorate degree?

18) What were your greatest successes as a doctoral student?

19) How has your doctoral degree from a PWI affected your life?

20) What have you done or are willing to do to assist other AAMs in their doctoral candidacy at a PWI?

21) What advice would you give to AAMs who wish to pursue their doctoral degrees at a PWI?

22) What improvements are needed at your institution to support AAMs seeking a doctoral degree?

23) Is there anything else you would like to tell me that I haven’t asked you?

24) Are there other AAMs that you know who completed their doctoral degree at a PWI that I could talk to?
Appendix D

Acronyms/Abreviations

African American (AA)
African American Male (AAM)
Brigham Young University (BYU)
Critical Race Theory (CRT)
Ethnocentric Monoculturalism (EM)
Graduate Record Exam (GRE)
Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU)
Ku Klux Klan (KKK)
Legitimizing Myths (LMs)
Medical College Admission Test (MCAT)
Predominatly White Institutions (PWIs)
Stereotype Threat (ST)