Their voices emerged: a grounded theory of learning resilience among African American women in the formal education environment

Sandra L. McGee
Iowa State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/rtd

Part of the African American Studies Commons, Educational Sociology Commons, Home Economics Commons, Social and Philosophical Foundations of Education Commons, Social Work Commons, and the Women's Studies Commons

Recommended Citation
https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/rtd/15659

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Iowa State University Capstones, Theses and Dissertations at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Retrospective Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact digirep@iastate.edu.
Their voices emerged: A grounded theory of learning resilience among African American women in the formal education environment

by

Sandra L. McGee

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

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Family and Consumer Sciences Education

Program of Study Committee:
Cheryl O. Hausafus, Major Professor
Leah C. Keino
Marsha Rehm
Carlie C. Tartakov
Kathleen K. Hickok

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
2008

Copyright © Sandra L. McGee, 2008. All rights reserved.
UMI Number: 3307086

Copyright 2008 by
McGee, Sandra L.

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleed-through, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

UMI Microform 3307086
Copyright 2008 by ProQuest LLC
All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

ProQuest LLC
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346
Table of Contents

List of Tables .......................................................................................................................................... v
List of Figures .......................................................................................................................................... vi
Acknowledgements .............................................................................................................................. vii
Abstract.................................................................................................................................................. x

CHAPTER 1. The Impact of Messages ............................................................................................... 1
Assumptions, Research Questions, and Purposes .............................................................................. 6
Assumptions........................................................................................................................................... 7
Research question ................................................................................................................................. 8
Purposes.................................................................................................................................................. 8
The Voices Emerged .............................................................................................................................. 13
The Participants .................................................................................................................................... 15
Demographic eras ................................................................................................................................. 17
Key Terms.............................................................................................................................................. 17
Overview of the Study .......................................................................................................................... 20

CHAPTER 2. A Grounded Theory Approach to a Literature Review .............................................. 21
About the Literature .............................................................................................................................. 21
About Approaches to Research ........................................................................................................... 26
The Movement Toward Qualitative Research ...................................................................................... 27
Specific Qualitative Research Approaches ......................................................................................... 30
About Grounded Theory ...................................................................................................................... 32
A look at grounded theory .................................................................................................................... 32
Theoretical sensitivity ............................................................................................................................ 35
Theorizing the data ............................................................................................................................... 36
About Learning Resilience .................................................................................................................... 39

CHAPTER 3. The Procedures for the Research ............................................................................... 42
Describing Grounded Theory Constructs ............................................................................................ 42
Confidentiality and credibility .............................................................................................................. 42
Notes and memos ................................................................................................................................. 44
Attentive listening ................................................................................................................................. 45
Preparing for the Study ......................................................................................................................... 45
Grounded Theory Institute .................................................................................................................... 46
Meetings.................................................................................................................................................. 47
The POS committee and IRB process .................................................................................................... 48
Defining the Study Participants ............................................................................................................ 49
The invitation ......................................................................................................................................... 49
The response .......................................................................................................................................... 49
The study participants ............................................................................................................................ 50
Gathering Data ....................................................................................................................................... 52
Initial interviews .................................................................................................................................... 53
Member checking.................................................................................................................................... 54
Oh! The Possibilities.......................................................................................................................... 163

References........................................................................................................................................... 166

List of Appendices................................................................................................................................. 179

A. Institutional Review Board Forms.................................................................................................. 180
B. Invitation to Participate Letter....................................................................................................... 200
C. Thank You for Participating Letter.............................................................................................. 202
D. Informed Consent and Confidentiality Form ................................................................................. 204
E. Telephone Script for Research Participants .................................................................................. 208
F. Questions for Research Participants.............................................................................................. 210
G. Follow-Up Questions for Research Participants .......................................................................... 212
H. Statement of Confidentiality for MSN group room ................................................................. 214
I. Invitation to Participate in the MSN Group Chat Room ............................................................. 216
J. MSN Group Chat Room Access Instructions................................................................................ 218
K. Initial Coding Chart...................................................................................................................... 222
L. Timeline of the Eras ...................................................................................................................... 227
List of Tables

Table 1. Study participants pseudonyms, ages, and contact indicators................................. 16
Table 2. Relationships between the generations, eras, and birth years ................................. 17
Table 3. Comparing participants’ generations, societal factors, school decades, and
        birth years........................................................................................................................ 51
Table 4. Data gathering time line .......................................................................................... 53
Table 5. Study participants and their data gathering activity participation........................... 60
Table 6. Sample responses to a question about hurdles ........................................................ 68
Table 7. Sample responses to a question about the influence of family ............................... 68
Table 8. The eras of schooling, the generations, and the years when participants
        were born ........................................................................................................................ 71
Table 9. Ways of viewing the study participants ................................................................ 152
Table 10. Study participants by age and data-gathering participation ............................... 156
List of Figures

Figure 1. Results of the initial, focus, and selective coding processes ..................................... 64
Figure 2. Sample memos............................................................................................................... 66
Acknowledgements

This project is dedicated to all the wonderful individuals who make up my circle of family and friends. I have put a considerable amount of thought into how I could possibly begin to thank those individuals in my life who have made significant contributions and provided the loving support needed to accomplish such a task as this project. It seems most appropriate to start at my beginning with thanking my mother and father, Catherine and Pete Daniels, who instilled in me strong values, pride, humility, and the staying power and resilience needed to conquer the hurdles Black females face in this life. Both have gone on to glory, yet their spirit of hope lies deep within me. I will carry their torch of sacrifice and love all the days of my life. To my grandparents, aunts, and uncles who influenced my life greatly: Thank you for the stories, life lessons, family events, and the sense of connection that only close relatives can provide. My brothers and sisters, Tanya Lowery, Michael Daniels, Jeanetta Crossley, Rene Gatewood, and Richard Daniels, grew up with me and learned the importance of love, connection, and passing on our family values. You provided me with a loving and well-loved network of nieces and nephews, and I want to express my deep sense of gratitude to all of you for your support and encouragement throughout my years of schooling. Still you rise!

When I returned to school in my late thirties, Uriah’s unwavering faith in God inspired me to continue climbing to greater heights. You envisioned the possibilities, and here I am—faith has been our cornerstone.

To my beautiful daughters Teresa Hobson, Urhonda Jelks, and Felicia Nunn, I cannot begin to put into words the joy and pride you bring me. As a blended family, our love for one another has allowed us to transcend boundaries that sometimes hinder families as they
come together. You are my inspiration, my encouragement, and my light in dark times. You and my sons-in-law, Casey Jelks and Andre Nunn, have blessed me with a tremendous legacy, my beloved grandbabies—Donald and Tyrany; Cajuan, Christian, and Cassidy; and Azsia and Sayvion—whose spirits of innocence, hunger for learning, and genuine unconditional love for others give me hope for our future as a family, our culture, and the world you will go on to shape. You are all such great beings in your own right—your possibilities are limitless.

My friend and colleague, Barb Hirsh-Giller, has had my back; your support brought me to this place and I am grateful. My dear friends Nansi Woods, Leeann Davis, Joann McCracken Young, Pam Patton, Phyllis Butler, and many, many others—you know who you are—provided a listening ear and more at just the right times. I cannot thank you enough. Your wisdom, knowledge, and willingness to support me have been invaluable. I want to thank Chris White, my editor, coach, and friend, for teaching me the art of scholarly writing, a skill that will serve me well in the future. Harriet Kalinsky and Teresa Hobson your expertise and technical assistance on this project have been so appreciated.

To my team members in my workplace: You all do a terrific job in difficult situations. I can’t thank you enough for taking up the slack while I, yet again, worked on this project. My warmest, heartfelt thanks go to Betty, Rhonda, Jo, Brenda, Tammy, Sara, Chris, Mary, Maria, Kate, Breanne, and Sherry for your patience, hard work, and support.

I am beyond grateful for the support I have found in my committee members Leah Keino, Marsha Rehm, Carlie Tartakov, and Kathy Hickok. Your leadership and guidance will carry me as I move forward in both my professional and personal life. I literally could not have done this work without the encouragement, challenge, advocacy, and support of
Cheryl O. Hausafus, my major professor. Thank you all so very much for your inspiration, your compassion, and your genuine support of women students.

To the 27 wonderful women who courageously shared your stories with me: you are more than conquerors. I feel honored to have heard your voices and privileged to have been able to carry your messages of hope and resilience into the world. I am in awe of you and forever indebted to each of you.

Finally, to all of the African American women who walked the educational path before me, I say thank you for leading the way. And to those coming behind, I say be strong my sisters and trust that the learning resilience among African American women in the formal education system will see you through your journey.
Abstract

Rampant, negative messages about the capabilities of African American women in the education system pervade society. I suggest that these negative messages fail to account for Black women’s learning resilience. In this study, the voices of 27 African American women who described their experiences in the formal education environment emerged through interviews, focus groups, observations, and two electronic interactions, participation in a chat room and e-mail exchanges.

This multigenerational study spans 71 years of educational experiences that I organized into five generations that correspond with eras of significance for both the African American culture and the education system. These generations and eras are: traditionalists (schooled during segregation), pioneers of integration (integration), baby boomers (busing), generation Xers (crack cocaine crisis), and millennials (hip hop culture).

While the women reported adversities and hurdles both in the education system and in their families and communities, they refused to be defeated in the pursuit of their educational goals, a resilience that was consistent across the generations. I show how the voices of the women narrated a continuum that goes beyond a simplistic dichotomy of adversity and benefit and makes the case that an unwavering love for learning and personal spirituality and faith are the foundation of learning resilience these women demonstrated.

This study was based on a two-part question: What are the lived experiences of African American women in the education system? and What influence have family and community had on these experiences? Through employing grounded theory techniques of memo-writing and developing the data (open, selective, and focus coding) I identified sixteen issues (e.g., Black self-sufficiency, racism and oppression, and Black role models) that
combined into five themes (e.g., education system and resources), which were, in turn, refined into three coding categories—educational experiences and the influences of family and of community. Through verifying commonalities, theoretical sampling, and conceptualizing the data, the grounded theory of learning resilience among African American women in the formal education environment emerged.
CHAPTER 1

The Impact of Messages

Without education, there is no hope for our people and without hope our future is lost. Charles Hamilton Houston

Technology allows for a continuous flow of information. Around-the-clock television and radio with analysts and experts sharing their perspectives on any given situation, tragedy, or story are readily available. Information can also be received through the Internet, iPhones, text messages, or email. This information superhighway continuously floods our world with news, statistics, reports, gossip, and hearsay. The constant stream and repetitiveness of these communications can result in information overload.

People don’t know how to switch off—or feel they can’t—and so are always in touch, no matter what time of day or night. Not only can this overload have an effect on our mental and physical health—at least one study has suggested that it contributes to conditions ranging from stress and irritability to heart problems and hypertension. (Hoen, 2006)

These health problems, especially heart problems and hypertension, exist in epidemic proportion and are among the leading causes of death in African American communities (American Heart Association, 2006; National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, n.d.). For many African Americans, constant exposure to information that perpetuates negative stereotypes about Blacks and other minorities contributes to the added stress they experience. Hill, Kobayashi, and Hughes (2007) assert, “experiences with racial discrimination may contribute to stress-induced blood pressure (BP) elevations among African Americans”
(p. 404). (Note: the terms African American and Black are used interchangeably in this report to refer to the ethnicity of the participants and other members of the race. Further, it is a cultural norm to describe the population using both terms.)

According to Davis (1995), “across America, headlines vibrate with news about Black kids in trouble” (p. 290). In addition to messages that stereotype African Americans’ in terms of crime, violence, and drugs, African Americans are inundated with negative messages about how African Americans fare at every level of the education system. For example, news and reports on discrepancies between the academic achievements of Black and White students emerge from research about education.

While 9 percent of White students have repeated a grade, twice as many or 18 percent, of Black students have been held back at least once. Of Blacks 16 to 24 year-olds, 13 percent have not earned a high school diploma or GED [General Education Degree] compared to 7 percent of their White counterparts. (Smiley, 2006, p. 33)

Cosby and Poussaint (2007), both recognized for their work with Black males, explain that, “in some cities, black males have high school drop-out rates of more than 50 percent and by the time they reach their mid thirties, six out of ten black high school drop outs have spent time in prison” (p. 9). Another study indicates that the percentage of Blacks—especially those in their 20s and 30s—who have obtained bachelor degrees is much smaller than all other cultures of color put together (Trusty, 2002). Studies conducted in higher education show that, in spite of retention programs, Blacks continue to struggle to stay in school (Alford, 2000). At public institutions, the graduation rate for Blacks is 43%, while Whites graduate at a rate of 63% (Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2007). “The
nationwide college graduation rate for enrolled Black students is only 40 percent, compared to 61 percent of enrolled Whites” (Smiley, 2006, p. 33).

This type of information—although needed to monitor progress in education—fails to empower African Americans and sends forth messages that fan the flames of deeply rooted feelings of internalized oppression and hopelessness that pervade the Black community. This phenomenon is particularly disturbing when it is observed in young African American children before they even begin their formal education experiences.

The media is largely responsible for influencing mindsets and cultural beliefs. Their continuous stream of negative information concerning the Black culture through daily news reports, special programming, sitcoms, movies, and rap videos and hip hop images promote stereotypes and messages of inferiority throughout society. Omi and Winant (1986) report film and television, for example, have been notorious in disseminating images of racial minorities which establish for audiences what people from these groups look like, how they behave, and ‘who they are.’ The power of the media lies not only in their ability to reflect the dominant racial ideology, but in their capacity to shape that ideology in the first place. (p. 17)

Williams (2006) explains that, “young black people watch TV more than do Hispanic or white children. They are searching for a reflection of themselves, an identity in a society that gives them little affirmation” (p. 136). Further, in his article “Enough is Enough,” Graves (2007b) of Black Enterprise asserts,

Today, we live in a society happy to watch black people denigrate themselves, a culture that sees such self-denigration as a form of entertainment—and a lucrative one at that. The worst, most profane and self-destructive of the black community are
celebrated in comedy, music, television, and film in the name of “keeping it real.”
(p. 14)

In an article on sports media’s perception of Blacks, Evans (2007) reports similar tactics. Specifically, he discussed the media attention to both Michael Vick and Barry Bonds, two prominent Black men in sports. He explained

Vick was accused of harboring fighting dogs . . . the local media in Atlanta and around the country pounded on him. Most headlines and stories nationwide editorialized that he would be suspended from the National Football League before any facts surfaced . . . this story commanded front pages and back page sport pages around the nation as if Vick had committed a mass murder. (p. 47)

Evans goes on to explain that the story received almost as much ink as the story of the student who killed 30 of his fellow students at Virginia Tech University as well as more coverage than daily deaths among U.S. troops in Iraq. He also cited the media coverage concerning steroid use among major league baseball players. “Major League Baseball hires this Mitchell guy to dig up the guys using steroids . . . he came up with what he said was 80 names. The only one he could remember or reveal was Barry Bonds” (p. 47).

Black media is also guilty of stereotyping and exploiting Blacks, particularly African American women. Samuels (2007) of Newsweek argues that author Terry McMillan has “never shied away from challenging the ways black men portray women in film, videos, and rap songs.” Samuels quotes McMillan as saying, “no other culture disrespects their women the way our culture does, and it has to stop” (n.p.n.). Cosby and Poussaint (2207) emphasize “youth are being swept up in decadence and glorified self hatred. . . .we need more constructive rap that will encourage black youths to feel proud and positive. There are rap
songs that encourage self-help, but by and large the big media push self-destruction” (p. 145). Williams (2006) explains, “anyone who spoke out against the self-destructive core of gangster rap was put down as acting white or selling out the ghetto. Violence, murder, and self-hatred were marketed as true blackness—authentic black identity” (p. 127). No matter the source bringing forth negative information carried across the media and press, the results are damaging and have long lasting impacts on all segments of the Black culture, including men, women, and youth.

Contrary to statistics and stereotypical messages, education is valued within the African American community, especially among African American women who have endured the double bondage of race and gender. These women demonstrate learning resilience at every level of the education system. In fact, the work of this dissertation is to report the results of a qualitative study of a group of African American women from five generations. I will show how these gutsy, brave women overcame a variety of hurdles and met their educational objectives in spite of their circumstances. Their stories convey a resolve to move forward in their learning even when the education system was at times unsafe, hostile, and unwelcoming. Some women had strong support from family and community, while others did not. Whatever the experience it has not tainted the women’s perspectives, as all are passionate advocates for education in their roles as mothers, grandmothers, educators, and mentors. The value for learning is ingrained in their spirits; they carry the torch of encouragement for other Black women, men, and children.

A consistent theme that emerged from the stories told by these women was that of resilience in the face of adversities in the formal education system, within family systems, and in their communities, another system. What emerged was a common narrative that
revealed how these women were able to pursue learning despite adversity, to stay focused on
learning, no matter what.

The remainder of the chapter provides questions and assumptions that ground the research. It also offers an overview of the study participants and describes the characteristics of the five generations—demographic eras—of the women in the study.

**Assumptions, Research Questions, and Purposes**

As with any research project, this one is situated within a set of assumptions that govern how the research was conducted and informed the analysis. In the same way, a broad, two-part research question opened the doors for gathering and interpreting the narratives that are the data for the project. Further, although the primary purpose for a study like this is to contribute new knowledge to the discipline, in this case, Family and Consumer Sciences, I brought three additional, general purposes to this task.

First, I intended for this study to offer hope to other African American women by sharing the stories of five generations of African American women that reveal both the adversity they faced and their successes with the education system at every level from primary grades to doctoral programs. The second purpose of this report is to offer an historical look—86 years of history to be exact—at how the partnership between the African American family and community, and the education system has changed over time, profoundly influencing a student’s educational experience. Finally, I sought to bring an authentic, researcher’s voice to the study.

Helping other Black women speak out about experiences was the inspiration behind this research. The words of hooks (1989) reveal personal experiences that resonate deep
within my soul. “There are some folks for whom openness is not about the luxury of ‘will I choose to share this or tell that,’ but rather ‘will I survive—will I make it through—will I stay alive” (p. 2). I have a strong desire to privilege the voices of women from my culture. Historically, Black women have suffered multiple traumas by society; therefore silence has been our greatest survival skill. Venues for African American women to speak about such experiences are not always perceived as safe or readily available.

As an African American woman I received—and embedded—many shaming messages from the formal education system, a story I seldom tell. I have had to work hard to identify and then shed these groundless messages that are deeply rooted in my memory. In my role as an adjunct professor, I encounter other Black women who are struggling to rid themselves of the untruths they internalized from their experiences with the formal education system. I feel compelled to help these women unlatch the shackles that hinder their educational gains. I conceived this research project as an opportunity to privilege the voices of five phenomenal generations, 27 African American women, who took the risk and shared their educational experiences so that educators, administrators, and other African American women can become better equipped and able to make a difference in the lives of Black women and others they encounter in their classrooms, families, and communities.

**Assumptions**

As I approached this research project, I assumed that African American women might be reluctant to tell their stories, especially the women whose stories interested me the most. I was most interested in women I perceived as the “unsung s/heros,” the everyday African American women who make a difference not only in their own lives, but also in the lives of others, even though their efforts may go unnoticed. I assumed these women would have no
interest in sharing their stories because they might not recognize the significance of their life experiences and how those experiences would positively and unquestionably influence the lives of others. I also believed that I would only hear the negative side of each participant’s experiences with the education system. I did not expect that the participants would represent such distinct generational divisions. Needless to say, the voices that emerged have proven these assumptions to be wrong.

On the other hand, I expected that the women in the study would have experienced racism, discrimination, oppression, and isolation as they pursued their educations, and that they would have had some kind of support that would keep them moving forward and motivated to achieve their goals. These assumptions would prove to be correct.

Research question

The two-part question that is the basis for this study is: *What are the lived experiences of African American women in the education system?* and *What influences have family and community had on these experiences?*

Purposes

One of the main purposes of a dissertation is to demonstrate a researcher’s ability to design and conduct independent research and to bring new knowledge to the discipline, a goal met in this work through a grounded theory approach. To that end, I discuss how this study fits in the body of knowledge of the Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) discipline. This grounded theory study addresses this first purpose by

- providing a multigenerational look at African American women’s experiences within the education system,
- examining the contributions of family and community to those experiences, and,
ultimately, bringing an historical perspective to help future researchers and educators who encounter African American women to improve their access to and success within tomorrow’s education system.

I bring two additional purposes to this study: first, offering hope to African American women and, second, privileging the voices of the study participants as well as my experiences as an African American woman and a grounded theory researcher. The following sections discuss these purposes in more detail.

**Situating the study in Family and Consumer Sciences**

Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) is the scientific study of humankind, and FCS professionals deal with the manner in which race, class, gender, economics, politics, and education influence the quality of life for individuals, families, and communities. In 1902, the American Home Economics Association defined the profession in this way:

> Home Economics [now FCS] in its most comprehensive sense is the study of the laws, conditions, principles, and ideas which are concerned on the one hand with man’s immediate physical environment and on the other hand with his nature as a social being and is the study especially of the relationship between these two factors. (Bubolz, 2002, p. 87)

The education and practices of home economists shifted over the next nine decades and ultimately resulted in a “framework [that] was developed and accepted by those participating in the Scottsdale meeting, October 23, 1993” (Kappa Omicron Nu, n.d.). The shift in the name from Home Economics to Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) reflected a “unifying focus. . . [that] uses an integrative approach to the relationships among individuals, families, and communities and the environments in which they function” (Kappa Omicron
FCS professionals work toward strengthening relationships within the family and between the family unit and the systems in which they are expected to participate throughout their life span.

As with any profession, FCS is grounded in a body of knowledge and a philosophical framework. In January 2000, the American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences hosted a professional think tank session to establish the body of knowledge for the profession in the 21st Century (Baugher, Anderson, Green, Nichols, Shane, Jolly, et al, 2000). The group established consensus in several areas, specifically on the key elements and common themes of the body of knowledge critical to sustaining families in the new millennium. Further, they decided that the profession must be a strong force in helping with the basic human needs to achieve a quality life, focus on the well being of families and communities, and be strong advocates for humanity as they interact with systems.

The major themes that interrelate with the existing body of knowledge and must be the driving force for curriculum and practice are: wellness issues; increasing awareness of global interdependence; strengthening resource development and sustainability; appropriately utilizing technology; and focusing on human development (Ralston, 2002). This framework provides a base for FCS professionals as they work toward the valued ends of perennial problems fundamental in the lives of individuals, families, and communities.

The study of African American women reported here contributes to the FCS body of knowledge in important ways. For example, this single study spans recollections of 86 years, from 1922 to today, and privileges the voices of women from five distinct generations, revealing what sustained them during their experiences with the education system as well as the influences of their families and communities on those experiences. The problems and
concerns identified by the 27 women in this research project can at times be identified across the generations. FCS professionals can utilize the results presented here as well as from similar studies as they develop curriculum and work to create an academic environment that is conducive to learning among African American females of all ages.

FCS educators are an invaluable resource within the education system. They are concerned with “understanding, values, and the breadth of perspective with which a student will perceive and act upon conditions and problems of the family” (Brown, 1980, p. 103). These professionals are teaching subjects that are relevant to the lives of young people. The coursework consists of time and resource management, goal setting, decision making, clothing, nutrition, child development, relationships, and marriage and family life issues. These are all lessons needed for self-sufficiency whether one chooses—as the women in the study have—to go on to higher education, enter into a career, or begin a family.

In fact, FCS educators impact the lives of youth, particularly those without positive support systems, by providing consistency. “Home economics [FCS] education, in being associated with the schools, has the opportunity of providing continuous educative service to the same person over a long period of time, especially in the education of youth” (Brown, 1980, p. 102).

Offering hope to African American women

Research emphasizing successes, such as this one, is imperative to influence and bring hope to other African American women who have lived some of the same experiences and may, for many reasons, have put their education on hold and need strength, support, and encouragement to begin again. This study focuses on the learning resilience among African American women in the education system, a common theme found throughout the
generations of women involved in this project. A sincere love for learning is also a theme found among the participants. Each generation of women experienced multiple problems unique to their age groups; they share what they found helpful and not so helpful in their endeavor to get beyond the hurdles in the formal education system, their families and communities.

The lives of African American women are complex, and the impact of their issues is immeasurable. African American women confront the racism and sexism in every life system in which they are expected to participate. The renowned author bell hooks (1989) explains that racist and sexist messages particularly in higher education systems are given in subtle ways. African American students are more likely to be discouraged from getting a graduate degree, their points of view are ignored, educators may act like they do not know the student’s name, or may ignore them all together “by pretending they do not hear you when you speak” (p. 57). Narrowing the focus of this research to a single problem encountered within the education environment would render it unrepresentative of African American woman. Therefore the major issues identified by each generation are presented in this study.

**Privileging voices to influence others**

Family members of African American women will discover the impact their choices had or have on their loved ones’ experience with the education system. This information hopefully will raise their awareness. In addition, a call to action for the Black community is conveyed in this research, as this entity is ultimately responsible for the well being of its members.
This research is also a guidepost for educators, politicians, community leaders, and social service program directors attempting to serve African American women effectively. It provides crucial information for colleagues, fellow students, friends, neighbors, and the community at-large desiring to interact in a culturally competent manner with Black women on the vital matter of education. It is within this context that the voices of the research participants emerged and coalesced into a grounded theory of learning resilience.

The Voices Emerged

Five generations of spirited African American women, ages 22 to 91, responded to the research question. Their multi-generational accounts of lived experience span from the time of Segregation through the Millennium. Three Traditionalists (born in the 1910s and 1920s), four Pioneers of Integration (born 1930s and 1940s) four Baby Boomers (born between 1945 and 1964), twelve Generation Xers (born 1965 to 1976), and four Millennials (born 1977 or after) offered their stories—actual first-person depictions of their experiences—which are the data for the study. Williams (2007) used the descriptors traditionalist, baby boomer, generation Xer, and millenial in a diversity workshop; I coined the pioneers of integration descriptor during this project.

Their stories reflect changes in both family and community from generation to generation. The Traditionalists, the Pioneers of Integration, and the Baby Boomers were schooled during a time when Black families and communities were intact, thriving, and focused on children. Blacks during the 1930s, 1940s, 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s lived in the spirit of community and built strong foundations of support so that young people would be successful in every system in which they participated, especially the education system. The
creed that “it takes a village to raise a child” was the general practice of the African American culture. Taking care of one another was a cultural custom. However, many of the Generation Xers and Millennials of this study experienced family and community very differently. Some had families that were small, yet intact, while others had to reinvent family by surrounding themselves with individuals outside their blood relatives who nurtured and supported them. The African American community as it was known by earlier generations was nonexistent for the women of these demographic eras. In fact, many of the youngest women of this study could not even picture the thriving, close-knit Black community that once existed for their parents and grandparents.

Educational attainments varied greatly among participants: when considering the highest educational level attained, one woman is a medical doctor, two hold doctoral degrees, four are educated at the masters level, five participants completed their bachelors degrees, five graduated with associates degrees, five completed high school, three of the women received their General Educational Degrees (GED), and two did not complete high school but feel that their educational experiences adequately prepared them to manage their homes. It is important to note that five of the women discussed above quit high school, of this number three returned to complete their primary education and also went on to obtain either an associates or bachelors degree. Four participants dropped out of college but returned later to successfully complete their degrees in higher education. Several others without degrees from higher learning institutions completed course work at the college level.

The socio-economic make up of the group includes women whose incomes place them at the high end of the upper-middle-class bracket and ranges to individuals managing their lives on fixed, government assistance incomes. All participants reside in the American
Midwest. Six of the 27 participants were educated either totally or in part in the southern school system, in Mississippi, Tennessee, and Missouri; the other 21 were educated in the Midwest.

Life lessons passed down through the generations were influential in the academic successes of the women in this study. Race, class, gender, and intracultural issues concerning internalized oppression strongly influenced their educational environment. Family and community were important parts of their experiences. All remain connected to and involved with the education system in their roles as mothers, grandmothers, educators, and mentors.

The work of this report is to relay the powerful stories of the women who participated in the study. I will relate these stories in several ways. First, I will situate each woman in a demographic era. Next, I discuss the themes that dominate the experiences with the education system of the women within each era. Finally, I will bring together the women’s stories through their roles as mothers, grandmothers, educators, and mentors. In addition, to achieve the secondary purposes of this work, I relate these stories to resonate with other Black women no matter their personal history, level of education, and/or family and community circumstances.

The Participants

The following chart offers information about the study participants. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to provide anonymity and ensure confidentiality. Identifying the elders of this study with the title Miss in front of her name was done purposely. Addressing elders in a formal manner is a tradition and a sign of respect and honor practiced in the
African American culture. I chose pseudonyms that had meaning to me and other African American women. For example some of the pseudonyms are derived from names of women who are part of my circle of family and friends, and other pseudonyms recall historical figures (e.g., Harriet recalls Harriet Tubman).

The following indicators reflect my contact with each participant: I = initial interview, S = second interview, FG = focus group, and O = observation. The participants are not listed in the chronological order of each interview, but are arranged according to their particular generational age group. I decided to list the participants this way for the purpose of consistent reference and to facilitate tracking data.

**Table 1. Study participants pseudonyms, ages, and contact indicators**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant pseudonyms</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Initial interview</th>
<th>Second interview</th>
<th>Focus group</th>
<th>Observation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Miss Martha</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>I-1</td>
<td>S-1</td>
<td>FG-2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss Harriet</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>I-2</td>
<td>S-2</td>
<td>FG-1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss Felicia</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>I-3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss Violet</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>I-4</td>
<td>S-3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss Rosa</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>I-5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss Maya</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>I-6</td>
<td>S-4</td>
<td>FG-2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss Diane</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>I-7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perri</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>I-8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>I-9</td>
<td>S-5</td>
<td>FG-1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angela</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>I-10</td>
<td>S-6</td>
<td>FG-1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peggy</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>I-11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhonda</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>I-12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>I-13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>I-14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>O-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shane</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>I-15</td>
<td>S-7</td>
<td></td>
<td>O-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barb</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>I-16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karri</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>I-17</td>
<td>S-8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katherine</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>I-18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanya</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>I-19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>O-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natasha</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>I-20</td>
<td></td>
<td>FG-2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicki</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>I-21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candie</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>I-22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louise</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>I-23</td>
<td></td>
<td>O-4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ricki</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>I-24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bobbi</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>I-25</td>
<td>S-9</td>
<td>FG-2</td>
<td>O-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nieva</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>I-26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>I-27</td>
<td>S-10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Demographic eras

Five distinct periods of time that are significant both to African Americans and the education system are featured in this study. These time periods are offered in the following demographic eras that represent when the generations attended school.

- **Segregation** covered the educational experience of the women schooled during the 1930s and 1940s.
- **Integration** spanned the 1950s and 1960s.
- **Busing** came about during the 1970s.
- **Crack cocaine crisis** devastated the culture during the 1980s.
- **Hip Hop culture** strongly influenced the generation of the 1990s.

Table 2 summarizes the relationships between the generations, the eras, and the time spans of the birth years of each generation.

### Table 2. Relationships between the generations, eras, and birth years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Five Decades of Schooling</th>
<th>Five Generations of Participants</th>
<th>Birth Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Segregation 1930–40s</td>
<td>Traditionalists</td>
<td>1910–1929</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration 1950–60s</td>
<td>Pioneers of Integration</td>
<td>1930–1945</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Busing 1970s</td>
<td>Baby Boomers</td>
<td>1946–1964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hip hop culture 1990s–present</td>
<td>Millennials</td>
<td>1982–forward</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Key Terms**

The next chapter describes the relevance for this research, but first I want to introduce and define several key terms utilized throughout this report. When ages or a range of ages are included with references to a participant or a demographic era, those ages refer to the age of the participants or demographic groups at the time the data were gathered.

*African American* and *Black* refer to the ethnicity of the participants and other members of the race. These references to the population are used interchangeably throughout the research as to avoid repetitiveness. It is also a cultural norm to describe the
population using both terms. The *University of Louisville’s Editorial Styleguide* (2007) emphasizes that “‘African American’ and ‘black’ can be used interchangeably in an article or document, but use African American on first reference” (University of Louisville, para 1).

*African American/Black community* means a demographic area where families and individuals from the culture live in the spirit of community having established resources that meet the emotional, spiritual, and educational needs of its members. Study participants indicated that this term carries the idea of a safe place where they felt safe and secure.

*Busing.* In the 1970s busing was the strategy put in place to enforce the 1964 Civil Rights Legislation intended to desegregate public schools.

*Crack Cocaine Crisis.* The 1980s saw the rise of addiction to crack cocaine among members of the African American community and the devastating impact this drug had on an entire generation of the culture, the emergence of Black-on-Black crime, and huge numbers of Black men jailed because of crack cocaine.

*Education system* refers to the formal school system including the primary, secondary, and higher learning institutions.

*Family* means a close support system of blood-related individuals or others identified by the participants as people having a positive influence on their learning experience.

*Formal education environment* means the behaviors of educators, administrators, staff, students and their parents or supporters and refers to more than what happens in the classroom. The formal education environment encompasses the culture of learning
experiences and includes situations such as counseling, assemblies, and other school events.

**Hip Hop Culture.** Beginning in the 1990s and continuing through the time of this study, parts of hip hop culture served as a negative influence on the Black culture. This negative influence often took the form of degrading images of and messages about women, the glorification of violence, and Black-on-Black crime manifest in gangs and gang violence in the Black culture.

**Internalized oppression.** Hatred turned inward or self-hatred evidenced by oppression of self as well as other members within the African American culture.

**Learning resilience** as a personal characteristic is demonstrated by a participant’s educational attainment, her ability to appropriately apply academics into life lessons beyond the classroom and vice versa, and her willingness to advocate for the education system in spite of the hurdles she encountered.

**MSN** refers to the Microsoft Network, defined as “Microsoft’s ISP and online content service, launched in October 1996. Not to be confused with Microsoft Networking” (http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/The%20Microsoft%20Network).

**Spirituality** means a strong inner belief and practice of praise, prayer, and thankfulness through a faith unbroken by either external or internal forces influencing the participant’s educational experiences. This meaning emerged from the data.

**School Segregation** (1869–1954) legalized segregation in formal systems in the United States including the education system.
School Integration. The 1954 United States Supreme Court ruling of Brown versus the Board of Education ordered the desegregation of public school systems. School systems across the United States resisted this mandate until the late 1950s.

Overview of the Study

This study is divided into five chapters. This first chapter introduces the study, the research questions and assumptions that guided the study, the fit for the study within family and consumer sciences, and discusses key concepts. Chapter 2 discusses research approaches featuring grounded theory. Chapter 3 presents the procedures and practices of grounded theory research. Chapter 4 offers the emerging voices of the participants accompanied by supporting literature. Chapter 5 provides general conclusions and proposes implications for future research.
CHAPTER 2

A Grounded Theory Approach to a Literature Review

The breadth of issues that emerged in this study—notably resilience, and especially learning resilience, as well as the factors that contribute to the external and intracultural forces that pervade Black women’s lives—required that I consult a vast array of literature and incorporate those findings in accordance with the principles of grounded theory. My challenge—and the accompanying responsibility—for incorporating this array of literature meant that I had to balance the traditional requirements of dissertation research and stay true to the procedures of grounded theory. Therefore the structure of this chapter contains some central elements of, but is different from, a traditional literature review.

In the following sections you will find a discussion of the kinds of literature that inform this project, a discussion of the literature about historical perspectives and specific qualitative research that have been used in studies about Black women. I follow this discussion with an explanation of the theory of grounded theory and the development of the grounded theory of learning resilience.

About the Literature

In many ways, grounded theory rejects the conventional process of first consulting the literature and building a theory, then conducting field research to find out if what you think is true is true. Instead, grounded theory requires that the researcher must constantly remain alert to her emerging data and identify areas where that data sends her to relevant literature. A grounded theory researcher can’t simply package a certain body of literature into a “review” and move on, but must instead constantly situate her experiences—and those
of her participants—in whatever literature must be consulted both to support the truths and to challenge misconceptions in that literature.

For example, my emerging data prompted me to call into question some reports that claimed to reflect not only the capabilities but also the contexts and circumstances of Black women in the formal education environment. To illustrate, Terhune (2008) reports that according to the 2000 U.S. Census, “Black women make up 6.4% of the U.S. population, representing more than half of the Black (12.2%) population. . . . Although Black women account for the majority of the Black population, little is known of the complexities of their lives” (p. 547).

Also, Shorter-Gooden (2004) explains that Black women have endured centuries of stereotypical cultural messages and racism yet little has been said about coping mechanisms (p. 407). Jones, Cross, and DeFour (2007) suggest that “unfair race-based treatment can cause negative emotional reactions and stress” (p. 209), and Terhune (2008) describes that, “the pressure Black women place on themselves to achieve at inordinate levels is the manifestation of Black women fighting against the negative messages of inferiority (Hones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003)” (p. 549). Thomas (2004) also asserts “no other group has been victimized by hegemonic domination and located within the hierarchical power structure as Black women have been in American society” (p. 287). These findings are all consistent with concerns voiced by the women in this study.

My challenge, then was to ensure that these valuable findings from the academic literature were congruent with the experiences of the study participants, which meant that I also had to consult the literature that the Black culture consults on a consistent basis. This lead me to consult periodicals and books such as Essence, Ebony, Jet, and Black Enterprise,
and the works of Cosby, Poussaint, and Cashin, to name a few, as sources that study participants find to be relevant to their lives. As an example of confirmative material from those resources, Graves (2007a), who is the publisher of *Black Enterprise*, emphasized that “too often mediocrity in black culture is presented as a form of entertainment for the rest of the nation and the world, a widely acceptable butt of every joke” (p. 10).

Grounded theory work humbles the researcher because it demands that she confront the preconceptions she brings to the data. In my experience, this approach is humbling, respectful, and humane, because it privileges the participants’ voices, in every sense of the word. They lead the dance; as the researcher, I was privileged to follow.

The themes of problems cited by the women in this study stemmed from either external, societal forces or intracultural phenomenon. The study participants—especially the women of the older generations, the Traditionalists, the Pioneers of Integration, and Baby Boomers—described the external forces that affected their experiences. These forces are presented as the literature that encompasses oppression, poverty, segregation, integration, busing, and stereotyping.

Many of these issues are addressed under the umbrella of research about racism. For example, Bell (1995), Omi and Winant (1986), Few, Stephens, and Rouse-Arnett (2003), Bryant (2005), Reyes (1997), Thoma, (2004), hooks (1989), Johnson-Bailey (1999), Kivel (2002), and Ladner (1998) are among the scholars and researchers who write about racism.

The two younger generations were confronted with the intracultural problems that wreaked havoc on Black families and communities during the decades of the 1980s and 1990s. Hip hop culture both grew out of and contributed to the horrific conditions being experienced in the Black community. The widespread influence of the hip hop culture was
cited as the reason for problems that included crack cocaine addictions, Black-on-Black crime, violence and messages of violence, the degradation of women, broken families, and fragmented communities. The hip hop culture’s power was fueled by feelings of isolation. Young Blacks felt their voices were privileged through this medium. Accurately reflecting the complexity of lived experiences among each age group of participants meant privileging the voices of both academic researchers and voices from other sources, especially those voices that the Black community relies on for information about and reflection upon their community.

On the other hand, participants belonging to the two younger generations pointed to intracultural issues as sources that wreaked havoc on their lives, problems whose effects were flamed by the widespread power of the hip hop culture. The negative messages prevalent in the hip hop culture set the tone of the environment for the younger generations. Emerson (2002) cites Watkins (1998) as a way to explain how influential hip hop has been—and still remains—in Black culture and beyond: “Since its emergence in the mass media mainstream in the early 1990s, hip-hop culture has affected the arenas of film, fashion, television, art, literature, and journalism” (p. 115). Adams and Fuller (2006) suggest that gansta rap had a huge influence on the culture of those decades. The hate spewed toward women can be felt in and throughout the culture and beyond.

Misogyny in gansta rap is the promotion, glorification, support, humorization, justification, or normalization of oppressive ideas about women. In the genre of rap music, women (specifically African American women) are reduced to mere objects—that are only good for sex and abuse and are ultimately a burden to men.

(p. 940)
A study by Woodard and Mastin (2005) revealed that both Black and White media continue to stereotype Black women in one of three roles, mammy, matriarch, or sex siren (pp. 271–281). The women in the study discuss how the negative portrayal of Black women has bled into the classrooms and environments of educational institutions across the country.


Literature explaining the effects of family and community on women’s educational experience also is presented alongside the voices of the participants, including works by Bubolz (2002), Garbarino (1995), Hira (1996), Kerpelman, Schoffner, and Ross-Griffin (2002), DeFransisco and Chatham-Carpenter (2000), Jarett (1998), Taylor, Chatters, and Jackson (1993), and Feret (2007). Generally, and in keeping with the historical span of the generations, the emerging voices confirmed assertions like those found in Reid (2004), who reports, “the Black family of yesterday is not the same as the Black family of today; the Black community is not the same; the Black experience in many ways is not the same” (p. 444). Some participants found strength and support in their families and communities, but others did not. The emerging voices describe the battles encountered by each generation of women, and these descriptions are accompanied by references to literature about learning resilience. This literature contributes to understanding how the grounded theory of learning resilience emerged from the voices of the women in this study.
About Approaches to Research

Quantitative studies emerged in the late 19th century when researchers wanted to test cause-and-effect by looking at separate variables. Through scoring surveys, questionnaires, and tests, researchers gather numerical information to create a statistical picture of the relationships between variables. In this way, data can be collected from huge samples and replicated. When used properly, these features add to a study’s credibility and yield scientifically sound information that can, in theory, be generalized to individuals outside the sample population of the study. During both World Wars, the military brought in researchers who used quantitative methods to test people’s mental capacity and readiness for combat and established a prototype so the military could focus its recruiting efforts and expand the armed forces. This type of quantitative research also opened the door for the development and use of standardized testing in the education system (Creswell, 2002), a type of testing that was long thought to be the best indicator and predictor of a student’s future academic success.

Quantitative studies present a statistical picture of what the researcher assumes to be true about a particular group or culture. However, some researchers argue that numbers alone cannot accurately depict the real issues because people can misrepresent research results and perpetuate negative stereotypes. Three researchers who study from a Black feminist perspective, Few, Stephens, and Rouse-Arnett (2003), identified five ways in which Black women and families are misrepresented in research. They assert that “deviance and negative developmental outcomes historically have been the dominant foci of studies on black family life (Bell-Scott, 1982; McLoyd, 1998) and that researchers commonly have represented Black family life though comparative quantitative data collected mostly from Whites” (p. 205). Quantitative research about African American women in education
sometimes fails to tell the whole story. Educators may base their attention and efforts on single instances of one or another negative finding and generalize to an entire population, which results in dismissing individuals whose lives are more complex than can be rendered with graphs and charts based on numerical data.

Adding the life stories of women research participants brings clarity and depth of understanding to the cause-and-effect of the variables under examination in a given study. Thomas (2004) reports that, “the neglect of a study of certain segments of the population, such as Black women, results in key information missing, therefore making the accuracy and credibility of the research questionable” (p. 290). Failing to include the voices of African American women in such studies perpetuates the unjustified stereotypes already confronting this population. Therefore, many professionals in family and consumer sciences have moved away from strict statistical research approaches to embrace qualitative methods that bring participants into the research process.

**The Movement Toward Qualitative Research**

In 2001, Berg explained that qualitative research techniques for evaluating unquantifiable facts about the research participants began to emerge in the early 1900s. Researchers in this tradition are interested in human behavior, so they use field study-based, interpretive approaches to gather information and answer their research questions. Grinnell (1997) asserts that one of the techniques of qualitative research has the researcher observing people in their natural settings (such as home, work, schools, or communities) in an effort to make meaning from the experiences people bring from their environments.

Generally participants are not constrained to completing a survey or behaving in a controlled setting. Their actions are not limited because the study takes place in their natural
environments. Although qualitative approaches yield large amounts of rich data, this kind of analysis is not without drawbacks and complications such as chaos or emotionally laden situations. Qualitative approaches can be considered unsafe because at times the researcher may or may not be able to control any of the variables for the study. Instead, researchers attempt to join with the environment rather than control events taking place around them (Bailey, 1996). The characteristics of this style of research may be extremely demanding and taxing on the individuals conducting the studies.

Qualitative researchers use a combination of several observational techniques to obtain information, such as data from case studies; transcriptions of personal interviews; narratives of personal experiences and life stories; records of interactions; and journals, historical materials, and visual texts (Grinnell, 1997). This research style is considered to be a longitudinal design because it often takes a considerable amount of time to collect the data for the study (Bailey, 1996). Some studies may be one to two years in duration, although others may take even longer. Some researchers may choose to follow up a qualitative study with a quantitative study that uses the same or a similar, representative sample of the population as a way to retest their hypotheses.

Although there is flexibility within procedures when conducting studies, qualitative research is methodological. There are specific guidelines for conducting the research. The systematic approach to such studies can be replicated, therefore allowing theories to be tested repeatedly (Berg, 2001). “A common strategy with qualitative data is to use as many cases as are needed to reach saturation—the point where one has a sense of certainty about one’s findings” (Shorter-Gooden, 2004, p. 414). The process of saturation allows the researcher to find the common themes that exist among the studies. The repetitiveness of the stories
establishes a degree of credibility in this style of research. Qualitative studies are a more lengthy approach to ascertaining information that the researcher already knows or suspects; often qualitative studies end with even more questions. Because the research is open-ended, more voices can emerge and contribute more points of view to the stories.

This style of research is not without its critics. Some argue that these studies are less credible because the empirical and quantified method is absent from the research (Berg, 2001). Ethical matters—notably deception—have been cited as a major concern in qualitative research (Bailey, 1996). The lack of trust is of particular concern to African Americans because historically researchers have deceived them. The 40-year-long Tuskegee Syphilis Study conducted on African American males is one example of extreme research misconduct. In 1932, the Public Health Department and the Tuskegee Institute began what was to be a six-month long study of 600 Black males—399 who had been diagnosed with the disease and 201 who did not have the disease—called the “Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis in the Negro Male.” Over the next forty years, trusting participants were not allowed to make informed choices about their diseases and subsequently were denied treatment for syphilis. The Department of Health and Human Services Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2007) suggests that this deception by the United States Public Health Service has had consequences far beyond the participants’ generation. The Abstract of the Final Report of the Tuskegee Syphilis Study Legacy Committee, dated May 20, 1996, states that “the Study continues to cast a long shadow over the relationship between African Americans and the biomedical professions; it is argued that the Study is a significant factor in the low participation of African Americans in clinical trials, organ donations, and routine preventive care” (para. 2). An online introduction to Final Report of the Tuskegee Syphilis
Study Legacy Committee concludes that although President Clinton apologized to study survivors in May 1997, the horrendous aftermath is still present in African American communities (Tuskegee Syphilis Study Legacy Committee, 1996).

As another example of issues related to studies of African Americans, some members of the African American community point out that the lack of cultural competence among researchers is problematic and creates barriers for participants (Bent-Goodley, 2004, p. 308). Culturally competent researchers should engage the participants with as much knowledge about the culture as possible. In addition, the researchers must be cognizant of their assumptions, prejudices, and stereotypes and aware of how those influence not only interactions during the study, but also the way research findings are presented.

Few, Stephens, and Rouse-Arnett (2003) found that historically researchers who examine Black behavior tend to present that behavior as deviant and outcomes as negative. They also assert that researchers have consistently used traditional theories to explain research results, theories that do not reflect Black women’s experiences in an historical context. It is vital to include and value Black women’s past experiences as important contexts for and elements of research into their lives because occurrences of trauma and suppression of their voices are experiences that still haunt African American women today. Researchers must investigate and understand the past in order to contextualize current traumas.

**Specific Qualitative Research Approaches**

Research approaches that have been used to study the issues that specifically pertain to Black women are presented here. Several models have been considered successful in terms of gathering data on African American women. The black feminist perspective
encourages Black women to become empowered through speaking about their experiences. Non-literary materials, non-traditional information sources, and personal experiences add credibility to this research approach (Few, Stephens, & Rouse-Arnett, 2003). Few (2007) explains that black feminism is “the birthmother of womanism, coined by Alice Walker,” a term describing “Black woman committed to the survival and wholeness of an entire people” (p. 455).

The systematic approach begins with a clearly articulated theoretical framework, then seeks to inductively discover a participant’s experiences and perspectives within the conceptual framework. The systematic approach philosophy is that every individual belongs to several cultural and social groups, and that some groups offer social privilege while others present social oppression (Croteau, Talbot, Lance, & Evans, 2002). This theory attempts to have Black women recognize and acknowledge both the privilege and oppression that exists in their lives and to draw upon experiences of both privilege and oppression to overcome obstacles in their lives.

The adaptational perspective has been used in intergenerational studies of African American mothers and daughters to investigate the perplexing issues of generational poverty that have the potential to become life-long struggles for a family. The adaptational perspective uses qualitative data to examine familial patterns ingrained in demographical information (Jarrett, 1998). This perspective helps African American women who are struggling to break generational behavioral cycles without feeling disloyal to the family or guilty for questioning long-term practices that may not reflect their own personal belief or value systems.
Delgado and Stefancic (2001), experts in critical race theory, urge Black and Brown writers to participate in “legal storytelling” to recount their experiences with the legal system and use those unique stories to help educate others (p. 9). This model makes clear the historical impact that slavery continues to have on the lived experiences of African Americans in every system in which they are expected to participate.

Although the above approaches have been determined to be successful in examining issues pertinent to Black women, I argue that their tradition of starting with preconceived hypotheses and carefully crafted theory narrows the focus of the data collection process in an effort to make the information fit. The experiences of African American women are complex and multidimensional and demand careful examination and analysis before the main issues can be brought forth. Compartmentalizing them before one has even begun to explore, determine, or name what they entail limits the research possibilities. One qualitative approach, grounded theory takes a different view, one that I found more appealing and appropriate for examining the lives of African American women.

**About Grounded Theory**

This discussion of grounded theory has four parts. This first part offers discussion of the approach, the second, an explanation of theoretical sensitivity; the third, looks at theorizing the data, and the final part of this section shows how the grounded theory of learning resilience among African American women developed out of this study.

**A look at grounded theory**

Grounded theory looks at exactly what is going on. Glaser and Strauss developed this method in 1967, with the philosophy that all data, including the experience of the researcher,
are to be considered and utilized. Grounded theory is not restrictive; that is, it allows for participants’ experiences to guide the research as opposed to testing a hypothesis and discarding participant experience that does not fit within the parameters of the study. Grounded theory suggests that all data be retained and considered until major themes and patterns begin to emerge as participants respond to broad questions from their own perspectives and share as much or as little as they want. In other words, “Grounded theory is for the discovery of concepts and hypothesis, not for testing or replicating them. Thus the license and mandate of grounded theory is to be free to discover in every way possible” (Glaser, 1992, p. 32). Charmaz (2006) puts it this way: “We begin by being open to what is happening in the studied scenes and interview statements so that we might learn about our research participants’ lives. We also attend to what we hear, see and sense during the data collection phase” (p. 3).

The most distinctive feature of grounded theory is that the key information emerges from data. As the critical facts for the study emerge through the participants’ stories, the research problem, hypothesis, and theory are solidly grounded in the participants’ truth. The researcher’s responsibilities are to analyze the data throughout the process of designing, carrying out, and reporting on the research process in a systematic manner. Creswell (2002) stresses the importance of process when he says, “A grounded theory design is a systematic, qualitative procedure used to generate a theory that explains, at a broad conceptual level, a process, an action, or interaction about a substantive topic” (p. 439).

The goal of the grounded theory analyst is to cover a “substantive topic,” a particular area of interest, as the researcher keeps in check her theoretical preferences and pre-conceived notions about the participants or the subject matter. As a result—and as distinct
from traditional research methods—the researcher builds the literature review and begins to understand the data at the same time that she gathers, writes, sorts, codes, and analyzes the data. In fact, Glaser explains that

from the very moment a research project is begun, a grounded theory is systematically and inductively arrived at through covariant ongoing collection and analysis of data. It is a fresh start, open to the emergent. One does not begin with preconceived ideas or extant theory and then force them on data for the purpose of verifying them or rearranging them into a corrected grounded theory. (1992, p. 15)

In these ways, grounded theory minimizes the perpetuation—whether intentional or not—of the stereotypes that can be found in numerous studies involving African Americans. For example, I believe that the statistics by Smiley, Trusty, Alford, and the Journal of Blacks in Higher Education reported in Chapter 1 were not intended to stereotype Blacks. However I suggest that researchers who enter the field with unchecked bias could use this kind of information to feed their preconceived thoughts about African Americans and their experiences with the education system. The systematic way in which grounded theory is carried out demands that the researcher critically reflect and question every aspect, detail, and thought shared by the participants in an effort to ensure the researcher’s bias does not taint the process and the outcomes.

On the other hand, grounded theory research cannot be generalized to the larger population, even though research conducted according to the principles of grounded theory can be verified and applied to others who readily relate to the phenomenon under study. Glaser (1992) says, “generalizing to a larger population is a unit orientation that is not appropriate to grounded theory” (p. 106). For example, in this study African American
women describe unique life circumstances, data that others outside the study will relate to and, thereby will validate the lived experiences of the research participants and the grounded theory that emerged from the voices of those women.

**Theoretical sensitivity**

Two features of grounded theory contribute to theoretical sensitivity. First, Glaser (1978), one of the fathers of grounded theory, explains,

The first step in gaining theoretical sensitivity is to enter the research with as few predetermined ideas as possible—especially logically deduced, and prior hypotheses. In this posture, the analyst is able to remain sensitive to the data by being able to record events and detect happenings without first having them filtered through and squared with pre-existing hypotheses and biases. His mandate is to remain open to what is actually happening. (p. 2–3)

The hope in grounded theory is to have the analyst enter the field with the most non-judgmental and receptive attitude toward the research participants as is possible. This level of human compassion is critical for African American women because they are, at times, extremely vulnerable in a society that continuously perpetuates the stereotypical messages about the race. In fact, Ramos, Carlson, and McNutt suggest that, “continued racism, oppression, and discrimination affect Black women in countless overt and subtle ways not measured by research (West, 1998; Myers, 1990)” (2004, p. 154).

The second feature of grounded theory that cultures theoretical sensitivity springs from discouraging the analyst from reading an overabundance of literature before the study. Indeed, reading is a critical part of grounded theory research. Grounded theory analysts are encouraged to begin reading from the onset of their research projects. In this study, it
quickly became apparent that, given the age span and breadth of experiences of the participants, the literature that would inform this project would be extensive. In fact, the data directed me to examine literature specific to the history of Black women, African Americans and the education system, racism, discrimination, poverty, school segregation and integration, the busing of students, the impact of intracultural issues on education, resilience, spirituality and faith, and family and community, all quality of life issues.

Theorizing the data

Grounded theory breathes new life into the research process by advancing the analyst’s skill sets. “This approach emphasizes the discovery of concepts and theory through systematic analysis of data, rather than the logical deductive theoretical formulations of other approaches” (Calkins, 1972, p. 68). Developing and naming a theory truly grounded in emerging data is one of the most critical tasks for the grounded theory analyst.

The development of theory has been explained from various perspectives. The positivist view regards theory as a sign of relationship among abstract ideas that cover a broad range of empirical observations (Charmaz, 2006). According to this perspective the outcomes can be supported by statistics and the findings are predictable and can be generalized outside the population under study. Due to the linear nature of this model, it is often viewed as offering a limited and incomplete explanation of cause and effect of the phenomenon under study.

“The interpretive theorist seeks understanding rather than explanation” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 126). The focus of this theory is to demonstrate the relationships and associations found among the information gathered in the research. This view requires that the analyst
creatively demonstrate the interconnectedness of the various realities that emerge through the study.

The theory development in grounded theory arises out of “a set of well-developed concepts related through statements of relationships, which together constitute an integrated framework that can be used to explain or predict phenomena” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 15). Developing theory is a complex process that is accomplished by examining the data from many different angles and perspectives before formulating and conceptualizing theory. “The goal of grounded theory is to generate a theory that accounts for a pattern of behavior which is relevant and problematic for those involved” (Glaser, 1992, p. 75). Strauss and Corbin (1998) explain that a theory presents an explanation for a phenomenon and not just a description of the findings.

Grounded theory analysts must take a logical approach to developing theory. One must grapple with the research by continuously scrutinizing, questioning, analyzing, and comparing themes before hypothesizing and theorizing the findings. “Theorizing means stopping, pondering, and rethinking anew. We stop the flow of studied experience and take it apart” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 135). Naming new theories with the discovery of information takes the data to a greater height. “Grounded theory is transcending also in the sense that it conceptualizes the data, thus raising the level of thought about it to a higher level” (Glaser, 1978, p. 6). Budding grounded theorists are challenged to contribute innovative, forward-thinking, and groundbreaking theories to the literature thus allowing others to test the theory developed.

“Grounded theory have [sic] ‘grab’ and are interesting. The theory must have fit and relevance and it must work” (Glaser, 1978, p. 4). An example can be found in a study about
Charmaz (1983) theorized that the individuals in this study were experiencing what she coined the *grounded theory of loss of self*. The data continuously revealed that individuals who are chronically ill found a breakdown of their former self-images and were not able to replace them with ones of value equivalent to those being lost.

Calkins (1972) focused her energies on the dying patient’s family. This researcher looked at the burden shouldered by the family as they take on the responsibility of caring for a terminally ill loved one. She discovered that their task grows and becomes overwhelming as the patient nears the end of life, yet the families continued to carry out their perceived responsibility. After extensively interviewing 20 families and the social workers assigned to the families about their lived experiences, she conceptionalized their deep sense of commitment as the *grounded theory of unquestioned obligations*.

*Managing approachability* was yet another illustration of theorizing. This is what women alone in urban public places were experiencing according to one grounded theory analyst. This theme emerged after 19 women from a large metropolis shared their stories through interviews and another 50 participated in groups or informal conversations. The experiences of five men were also included in the study. Their information formed the basis from which the theory was grounded (Tokerud, 1975).

One grounded theory researcher observed his participants over two years and also utilized writings that tracked the women’s movement to ground his concept. Zuckerman (1973) theorized that women who confronted the status quo during the women’s movement and discovered their autonomous selfhood constituted *a grounded theory of breaking out*.

After 85 hours of intensive interviews with 62 persons, another analyst conceptualized that *friending* was a major behavior found in “stepfather families.”
Developing friendships between stepfathers and their stepchildren emerged from the data as a critical issue for the families involved in this study (Stern, 1978).

In this study, the voices of 27 African American women emerged through interviews, focus groups, observations, and two electronic interactions, participation in a chat room and e-mail exchanges. While the women reported adversities and hurdles both in the education system and in their families and communities, the women refused to be defeated in the pursuit of their educational goals. This resilience was consistent across the generations, which lead to the development of the grounded theory of learning resilience among African American women in the formal education environment.

**About Learning Resilience**

Learning resilience is conceptionalized as a participant’s educational attainment along with her ability to continually apply academic and life lessons in adverse situations arising both inside the formal educational environment and beyond classroom settings. This study revealed that, no matter how horrendous the situation became or how uncertain the outlook was, each participant found ways to continue moving forward in her educational endeavor without consistent help to smooth the hurdles or confront the barriers, thus demonstrating learning resilience among African American women. Newman (2002) defines resilience as it applies to adults as, “the ability to adapt in the face of trauma, adversity, tragedy or even significant ongoing stressors” (para. 1). Bryan (2005) describes educational resilience as the ability of children to succeed academically despite risk factors that make it difficult for them succeed (Bernard, 1991; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1997, 1998). Resilient children experience one or more difficult life
circumstances or traumatic events but somehow find the power to overcome their adverse impact. (para. 5)

Although Bryan describes learning resilience as a characteristic of children, this idea is important in this study because study participants talked about overcoming obstacles and hurdles in the educational environment both when they were children and, later, as adult learners.

African Americans have always known adversity and have learned to function under deplorable conditions in an effort to survive. To make this point, Thomas (2004) uses the words of the renown Maya Angelou who asserts, “Black women whose ancestors were brought to the United States beginning in 1619 have lived through conditions of cruelties so horrible, so bizarre, the women had to reinvent themselves” (p. 287). Being defeated in the formal education environment was not an option for the women in this study. All found ways to reinvent themselves in an effort to succeed in the academic setting, in their family system, and in their respective community environment. Wasonga, Christman, and Kilmer (2003) cite Wang, Haertel, and Walberg’s 1994 report that “resilience is the ‘capacity of individuals to overcome personal vulnerabilities and environmental adversities effectively or the ability to thrive physically and psychologically despite adverse circumstances’” (p. 63). Kitano and Lewis (2005) explain resilience as “the phenomenon of surviving and thriving in the face of adversity” (n.p.n.). Some participants sought support to help themselves overcome difficulties, while others isolated. Each woman made the best decision for herself based upon the situation.

Many of the participants had very positive experiences with the education system while others shared some heart wrenching, horrendous, and unbelievable occurrences. Four
quit school at either the high school or college level, took some needed recovery time and returned to complete their education. No matter what circumstances and struggles transpired, 98% found ways to successfully progress through the formal educational system. The two of 27 women who reported leaving school before graduating high school did so because of life obligations and not because they disliked their educational experience or felt defeated by the academic lessons taught at this level.

Although this chapter has focused on literature and theory, the following chapter addresses the methods used in this study. Specifically, the following chapter will describe grounded theory techniques and strategies and will show how they were employed to construct the grounded theory of learning resilience from the emerging voices of the participants.
CHAPTER 3

The Procedures for the Research

This chapter describes grounded theory and explains how I implemented grounded theory practices and discusses in some detail the procedures I used in this study which were: defining study participants, gathering and developing the data, and discussing methods utilized in conducting the research project described in this dissertation. This chapter also contains several charts that define and describe the participants, relay information about the three kinds of data coding, and exemplify memos and participant responses.

Describing Grounded Theory Constructs

There are several considerations and techniques involved in constructing a grounded theory. Among these are confidentiality and credibility, notes and memos, and attentive listening. These next sections discuss each area in detail.

Confidentiality and credibility

Confidentiality and credibility were, for me, overarching methodological considerations. I worked to ensure confidentiality, which I understand as creating and maintaining an environment where the participants could feel safe enough to share their stories. In addition to the systematic, formal ways of protecting participants, such as Institutional Review Board processes and careful study design, I addressed confidentiality issues such as how I planned to use the information, how I would keep their anonymity, and how I would ensure that each of their voices would emerge authentically and accurately representing their stories. I used reflective listening strategies in the meetings and allowed
the participants to verify that I was writing their truths. I followed research conventions in assigning a pseudonym for each participant.

In terms of credibility, I agree with Baum (2000), who describes credibility this way: “one issue of importance for any researcher is ensuring that his or her findings are plausible or have a high ‘truth value’” (p. 42). Given the historical challenges to qualitative approaches like grounded theory, the approach I used, throughout planning and implementation, I was always aware of the importance of ensuring that this study would be credible. Specifically, I followed the steps for conducting grounded theory research, which are discussed in detail below. It is worth mentioning here that, as a researcher and as an African American woman, I brought access to a community of African American women; an open mind in terms of how my experiences would be consistent with study participants’ experiences; a willingness to be challenged by my professors; and a willingness to take the time necessary to conduct a credible study. I sought to craft and report a study that would pay tribute to the participants’ stories in ways that they are entitled to have their stories honored.

To do all of this, I paid meticulous attention to detail, read, re-read, and read again my notes, memos, and journals. I took time to think, to grapple with, and ponder the stories I gathered. I took two full weeks to concentrate only on my findings and to write about what I found. In addition, I journaled, talked to other grounded theorists, and shared my work with study participants as a way of member checking. All or parts of drafts were submitted to participants and others for continuous feedback throughout the research project.

I observed the participants during our interviews, times that were occasionally emotional and intense. I observed participants as they interacted with subordinates; when
they were presenting to victims’ services professionals and to graduate-level social work
students; and as one participant was gathering the women of her faith community together to
strategize about and plan events for families and other members.

I conducted two focus groups and made every effort to facilitate communication
among the study participants. I sought to include a sufficient number of research
participants—grounded theory recommends between 25 and 35 participants—to ensure that
my study would be sufficiently grounded,” and I wrote up the research in several drafts, a
technique that helps analysts in the documentation process.

**Notes and memos**

Each participant had my full attention during the interviews because I chose to avoid
possible distractions from recording equipment in keeping with grounded theory that strongly
discourages the use of taping during interviews. Instead, I made general notes during each
interview and, before I pulled out of my parking space, I dictated other notes into a tape
recorder so I could recall what each participant had said. As soon as possible following the
conversation, I documented the entire conversation in a grounded theory technique known as
*memo writing*. Strauss and Corbin (1998) explain, “memos are written records of analysis”
(p. 217) and should be done immediately following an interview or conversation. B. Glaser
strongly encourages memo writing immediately after an interview and before the end of the
day. “Grounded theory analysts must include memo writing every night before bed. This
helps keep track of thoughts, concerns, and ideas for how to proceed with the research” (B.
Glaser, personal communication, May 23, 2006). Throughout this project I kept a tablet on
my nightstand that I used for journaling during evening and nighttime hours.
Attentive listening

I was drawn to grounded theory research because the method seems compatible with my professional activities and my personal skills complemented the research techniques I used throughout the study. As a professional social worker with more than 30 years of experience in counseling and supervising individuals, I have acquired active listening skills—what Glaser and others refer to as *attentive listening skills*—and use them on a daily basis. Despite being an experienced active listener, adopting the grounded theory methodology forced me to be conscious of the attentive listening skills I was employing in any given situation because I wanted the data to be the participant’s truth, not my interpretation of their experiences. Further, I recognized that it was essential that I bring to each contact with study participants the knowledge and awareness required to recognize patterns in their stories and other material that would be crucial to the study.

I did not tape my interactions with participants because I knew from initial contacts, a few women had voiced their concern about being taped particularly during some parts of their story that they considered shameful or private. Not taping interviews required that I give the participants my full attention and diligently follow grounded theory constructs.

Preparing for the Study

My interest in grounded theory was piqued in the summer of 2005 during an advanced research class offered by the Family and Consumer Sciences Education Leadership Academy. The class covered the basic applications of five qualitative traditions, including two that I was considering for my project, grounded theory and phenomenology, both research approaches that seemed appropriate for working with African American women.
After learning about both approaches, I decided that grounded theory would be the best fit for my research project for two reasons. First and most importantly, researchers who use the non-traditional grounded theory approach do not start with a theory and then gather data that fits into the theory. Instead, grounded theory researchers collect data first and then develop a theory that others can test. I was interested in learning to develop theory in this way. Second, like phenomenology, grounded theory privileges both the voices of the researcher and the participants. Expert grounded theorists, Glaser, Strauss, Corbin, and Charmaz, all agree that the researcher’s experiences are pertinent to the study and, therefore, are noteworthy. Acquiring and studying articles and books by Glaser and Strauss, developers of grounded theory, was part of the preparation phase of this research, as well as information from notable qualitative researchers such as Charmaz and Creswell.

**Grounded Theory Institute**

I joined the Grounded Theory Institute in early 2006, which allowed me complete access to their website (http://www.groundedtheory.org/) and the opportunity to attend the Grounded Theory Institute located in Mill Valley, CA. Members of the Grounded Theory Institute can read forums and poster boards to communicate with others about grounded theory issues, concerns, and questions (e.g., coding, sorting, conceptualizing, and theorizing).

In May 2006, I was able to attend a Grounded Theory Seminar and had direct access to Dr. Barney Glaser, the founder of the institute, because he conducted the two-and-a-half-day workshop for researchers from all over the world. During the seminar, I presented my research interests and addressed questions to Glaser and the other 12 seminar participants, including three students who had already successfully defended their grounded theory dissertation research projects. I participated in the seminar as a “troubleshooting,” when I
brought my ideas and research interests to the table for other participants to troubleshoot, to challenge, and carefully examine. I also was able to troubleshoot for other seminar participants. In one case, a researcher was holding onto a conclusion that we troubleshooters recognized as “her stuff,” an idea that didn’t follow from the data that her participants generated.

Also, while I was at the seminar, I met privately with Glaser to further discuss my research plans. His major piece of advice was to “just do it; you can if you practice” (personal communication, May 24, 2006), words that offered the assurance I needed to start the project.

**Meetings**

During the time I was developing my proposal, I had periodic meetings with my major professor and a member of my program of study committee who has expertise in the grounded theory approach. These meetings helped me process initial dilemmas and concerns, such as preparing the literature review, completing the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process, and preparing myself for defending my proposal. I also spent time sharing what I had learned about grounded theory and confirming that I was, in general, on the right methodological track.

Other program of study committee members contributed to this process by sharing their expertise in qualitative research approaches, discussing their research and publications having to do with African American women especially in terms of the trauma specific to that population, and sharing their experience with issues of diversity and relationships between cultures.

Over the course of the project, I also meet with my two outside readers, African American women who are familiar with my research and who can reflect on their
experiences, to help triangulate my findings. Finally, I have worked closely with a White woman who is my writing coach and who has related professional and academic experience and experience with diverse communities.

**The POS committee and IRB process**

Prior to conducting this study, I developed and submitted several documents to either or both of the Program of Study Committee (POS) and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for their approval (see Appendix A). The research proposal, which detailed the study was presented to and approved by my POS committee in May of 2006. Writing the *Invitation to Participate Letter* and the *Thank You for Participating Letter* was part of the process of gaining approval by the IRB. The *Invitation to Participate Letter* provided potential participants with details of the study, such as specific details about how the study would be carried out, the safety measures in place to protect participants as well as the risks and benefits of the study (see Appendix B). The *Thank You for Participating Letter* letter was sent to individuals who expressed an interest in participating in the study or who wanted to know more about the study. This letter provided my contact information and a potential date when I would contact her regarding the study (see Appendix C).

An informed consent and confidentiality form, a script for contacting possible participants (which was required by IRB, but not used), the questions for research participants, and follow-up questions for the participants were also part of the packet I submitted to the IRB for approval (see Appendices D, E, F, and G, respectively). Participating in the IRB process ensured that the study would be done in accordance with federal and university standards. In September 2006, the IRB approved the *Grounded theory of learning resilience among African American women in the formal education system* study.
The application to continue the study for another year was submitted to and approved by the IRB in September of 2007.

**Defining the Study Participants**

This part of the study involved selecting participants by invitation, processing responses to the invitation, and settling on the actual participant pool. These are addressed in the following sections.

**The invitation**

In July 2006, I sent the letter of invitation to the Department of Human Rights, Iowa Commission on the Status of African Americans (ICSAA) and they forwarded it to their statewide mailing list to invite women on the list to participate in my study. I decided to send the invitation to the ICSAA listserv because the program administrator knew that people from across Iowa and contiguous states participate in this listserv, which would help me build a participant pool with age, geographical, professional, educational, and socio-economical diversity. The ICSAA listserv is distributed to approximately 260 total participants, 180 of whom are women. The letter these women received described the project at length and invited African American women age 18 years of age or older to participate in a dissertation research project, with a special invitation to members of the same family who would be willing to share their experiences.

**The response**

Within the first week after the letter of invitation was distributed on the ICSAA listserv, I received most of the 35 total responses from women who were interested in participating in the study or who wanted to know more about what their part in the study
would entail, a response rate of approximately 19%. After preliminary email conversations with several women regarding the focus of the study, a snowball effect began. Some of the respondents who found out about the study directly from the ICSAA email invited family members and friends to participate, which meant that some of the participants found out about the study through the email invitation having been forwarded from ICSSA members, while others who did not have email access, found out about the study through word of mouth.

I had a plan for soliciting more study participants if this first effort didn’t generate a sufficiently large and/or diverse group of participants. However, when I compared the quantity and richness of the data gathered with grounded theory practices, I discerned that I had reached a saturation of the data.

In addition, I triangulated with others throughout this project. Specifically, two other African American women read my research-in-progress and offered outside points of view which sent me back to the data to reaffirm that I was making meaning of the stories and ensuring the authenticity of the women’s voices.

Make no mistake: All along the way I was challenged by nearly everyone in my path to ensure that I wasn’t simply confirming what I thought would be the case from my experiences as an African American woman. Simply put, I had to “put my stuff away” and focus on what my participants were telling me.

**The study participants**

At least 35 women expressed interest in the study, and of that number, 27 women actually participated. All 27 are African American women. Of the 27 participants, 9 are members of 4 families. One family is comprised of a great-grandmother, grandmother,
daughter, and granddaughter. Another family includes a grandmother, daughter, and granddaughter, while the third family includes a mother and daughter. The fourth family includes a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. Prior to beginning the research, the hope was that age and relationship links among the participants would create a multi-generational aspect for the study. Although many of the women in this study were not related by blood, the multi-generational aspect developed because of the age range of and relationships between the participants.

The 27 women who participated in the study ranged in age from 20 to 91, with lived experiences in the education system spanning from the time of Segregation through the Millennium, which lead to five generational groupings set according to the decade of the participants’ birth. The five generational groups include

- three *Traditionalists* (born in the 1910s–1920s);
- four *Pioneers of Integration* (born 1930s–mid 1940s);
- four *Baby Boomers* (born between 1945–1964);
- twelve *Generation Xers* (born 1965–1977); and
- four *Millennials* (born 1978 or after).

Table 3 shows ways of viewing the participants, comparing the generation identity descriptors, important societal factors, the participants’ decades of schooling, and their birth years.

**Table 3. Comparing participants’ generations, societal factors, school decades, and birth years**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>Societal factors</th>
<th>School decades</th>
<th>Birth years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditionalists</td>
<td>Segregation</td>
<td>1920–1940</td>
<td>1910–1929</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pioneers of Integration</td>
<td>Integration</td>
<td>1950–1960</td>
<td>1930–1945</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millennials</td>
<td>Hip Hop Culture</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>1978–present</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
At the time of the interactions with the participants, they all resided in the American Midwest. Six of the 27 participants were educated either completely or in part in schools located in states in the U.S. South, including Mississippi, Tennessee, Missouri, and Georgia. The other 21 completed their educations in states in the U.S. Midwest, including Iowa, Nebraska, Colorado, and Illinois.

Educational attainments varied greatly among participants. For example, when considering highest educational level achieved, one woman is a medical doctor, two hold doctoral degrees, four are educated at the masters level, five participants completed their bachelors degrees, five graduated with associates degrees, five completed high school, three of the women received their General Educational Degrees (GED), and two did not complete high school but feel that their educational experiences adequately prepared them to manage their homes. Several of the women without degrees from higher learning institutions completed course work at the college level. The socio-economic diversity of the group includes women whose incomes place them at the high end of the upper-middle-income bracket, middle-income earners, and ranges to individuals managing their lives on fixed, government assistance incomes.

Gathering Data

I gathered data between July 2006, when I distributed the invitation via the ICSAA listserv, and May 2007. Data gathering activities included preliminary interviews, follow-up interviews, and focus groups. I had two opportunities to observe participants in their roles as educators, first on December 15, 2006, when I observed a participant in her classroom and on April 25, 2007, when I observed three participants as they conducted an 8-hour training
event. Between October 2006 and May 2007 the women participated in an MSN Group chat room and email conversations. These activities are discussed in more detail below. Table 4 shows the timeline for gathering data.

**Table 4. Data gathering time line**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Data gathering activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October 27, 2006</td>
<td>Began conducting initial interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 16, 2007</td>
<td>Hosted the first focus group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 10, 2007</td>
<td>Completed 27 initial interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 10, 2007</td>
<td>Began conducting second interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 24, 2007</td>
<td>Hosted the second focus group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April &amp; May 2007</td>
<td>Completed 10 second interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2006</td>
<td>Observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 2007</td>
<td>Observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 2006–May 2007</td>
<td>MSN group and email conversations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Initial interviews**

Once the participants were identified, the data gathering process began with initial interviews with each of the 27 women lasting 1 to 1.5 hours. I met the participants at places where they felt comfortable talking, including at coffee shops, in participants’ homes, or at their workplaces. After spending a few minutes going over and signing consent forms and gathering general demographic information, I presented the two related, broad research questions: *What is your experience with the education system?* and *What impact has family and community had on your experience?* These broad questions invited participants to tell their story in the ways they desired and allowed for a freedom not available in more traditional research methods where responses are guided by a structured interview format. Using these broad, open-ended questions allowed me to identify areas that seemed to be important to the participants, to identify issues that concerned the participants, and to discover similarities and differences between participants’ experiences in formal education.
Charmaz (2006) explains the interviewing process in this way: “Interviewers use in-depth interviewing to explore, not to interrogate” (p. 29).

In this study, the broad, open-ended questions offered the participants the opportunity to tell their stories as their truths and to share openly about their experiences in whatever manner might feel most comfortable and appropriate for each. Any follow-up questions developed from the data and were asked for purpose of clarification on specific points that emerged.

**Member checking**

In keeping with the member-checking component of grounded theory methods, I returned to the field and conducted second interviews with ten participants in an effort to confirm their stories and complete the information gathering process. To prepare for these second interviews, I closely examined my notes from the initial interviews and transcripts of the meetings that I recorded immediately following each initial interview.

The research participants were selected for follow-up interviews based on several factors. First, I noticed that the oldest and youngest participants did not seem to share as much as some of the other participants. Second, I acted on my sense of not having been able to collect as much information from some participants as from others. In some cases, I did not think I had as complete a picture of some of the participants’ experiences, so I identified them for further contact to fill in what I discovered to be areas that warranted further investigation. Finally, during initial coding, I began to see a pattern based on the participants’ ages and life experiences, so I intentionally chose two follow-up participants from each of these five generations.
What became clear as I reviewed my preliminary data was that there seemed to be five distinct eras in which the participants were schooled and that returning to the field would allow me as the researcher to become clearer about the impact societal factors in each time period had on the generations. I chose to re-interview the women who had talked the least about the impact of the era on their educational experiences. I contacted two women from each era by phone or email requesting a second interview. Once I was granted permission for the follow-up interviews, I scheduled times that were most convenient for the participant. As with the preliminary interviews, these member-checking interviews were held in either a coffee shop or the participants’ homes.

During the follow-up conversations, I asked questions so I could understand what the participants had shared in earlier conversations and so the participants could expand on what they or others had said earlier. An example of this communication is reflected in this answer from Miss Martha, who was at the time, 91-years old. I asked, “Miss Martha can you help me understand what you meant when you said your community influenced your schooling?”

School was part of the community and the community was part of the school, everyone was together and everybody received the same message about education which was that going to school and doing well was not a choice. Back then young people were supposed to go to school and do what was expected. Getting an education was not a choice. We all knew education was our way out of no way.

(F-1)

Charmaz (2006) describes member checking as a technique used in grounded theory to verify that the documented content of initial conversations is complete and accurate.
Focus groups

I hosted two, one-and-a-half-hour focus groups. Both groups were held in the city where 21 of the 27 participants reside. Each of the women who completed an initial interview was invited to participate in one of the focus groups, but participation in a focus group was not required. I held one focus group with three participants in December 2006, at a local coffee shop, and the other in March 2007, with four participants in the home of a participant.

My role was to guide the discussion, take notes, and reflect on various points made in the discussion particularly when the women all agreed on having had a similar experience. The techniques of reflecting and summarizing the conversation were the member-checking strategies I used in the two focus groups. Both gatherings started with the same questions: *Since your initial interview, what thoughts have you had about your educational experience and the role of family and community? What of that would you share now?*

Observations

Observations are an important part of the information-gathering process in grounded theory. I observed four participants in an educational setting, one in a formal, school setting as she interacted with the grandmother of a child, and the other four in their positions as trainers during workshops pertaining to their fields of expertise.

In their role as educators I found the women to be compassionate, knowledgeable, and attentive to their audiences. Although I was not sure of what had transpired prior to the interaction I observed between one participant—Grace—and the grandmother of the student they were discussing, I was sure from what I could see that the grandmother was extremely worried about her grandchild—the student—and her daughter, the mother of this child.
Grace physically approached the grandmother and guided her to the other side of the room so that she could offer her as much privacy as possible given that I was in the room. At the beginning of their conversation, the grandmother was teary eyed, and appeared to be overwhelmed by what she feared as her daughter’s reaction to a matter. In a compassionate and low voice, Grace used a lot of reassuring words such as,

Please do not worry . . . I have got mom handled . . . let me take care of mom . . . you worry about your grandbaby . . . we will work this out together . . . I need you to trust me because I promise I will not do anything that will result in trouble between you and your daughter. (O-1)

After hearing Grace’s story about her experience with the education system I found her behavior during this interaction amazing, but not surprising. During our interview, she had revealed how she had not felt she had been listened to, that she felt discounted, and that she had been left alone by both her family and the education system to deal with her issues by herself (I-14). The actions she took with this grandmother were the opposite of what she herself had experienced. From what I observed, I would say that Grace is a compassionate educator who was connected to the grandmother, the mother, and the child, and that she helped them work together as a team that kept the child’s educational success the central focus of their efforts.

I observed four other participants, Shane, Tanya, Louise, and Bobbi, in their teaching roles during an 8-hour seminar for professional human service workers. Although each woman had her own teaching style, all four were extremely knowledgeable about the subject matter and connected with the audience on a very intimate level. They were all warm and friendly and appeared to be very comfortable standing before the workshop participants
giving instruction and answering questions. Like Grace, these four women are members of the two younger generations (Generation Xers and Millennials). As part of their professional responsibilities, they all are charged with community-based education. It was helpful for me to observe some of the participants in their professional roles because I was able to expand my understandings of the women’s experiences as students by witnessing them interact with students and families in their roles as educators.

**Facilitating electronic communications**

The research plan included a provision for an asynchronous chat room using the MSN Group chat room technology; this plan was implemented with three documents, a confidentiality agreement for participating in the MSN group chat room, an invitation to participate in the MSN group chat room, and MSN group chat room access instructions (see Appendices H, I, and J, respectively). Each woman was given access to the group room website after their initial interview. However, in practice, the MSN chat room proved to be unwieldy and difficult to use, so I offered to set up an email communication network for all of the participants.

In both the MSN group chat room and the email conversations, as the researcher, I took responsibility for monitoring the discussions and periodically posted questions to give the women yet another venue in which to share their respective experiences with each other and with me. Communicating electronically seemed to be particularly important for the women who had not participated in a follow-up interview or a focus group.

The women who participated in the chat room and the email conversations kept the conversations going by not only answering my questions, but also by posing and discussing questions they raised. Transcripts of the communications were copied and stored in a locked
file with other information collected during this research project. Data from the group room and email transcripts are shared in various places throughout this study.

**MSN group chat room**

The MSN group chat room was developed for two reasons, first, so the participants could communicate with one another despite their being geographically dispersed across the Midwest, and second so the women in the study who desired a chance to connect with other participants could do so. Thirteen women, nearly half of the participants actively used the MSN Group chat room.

**Email conversations**

Not all of the participants could access the MSN Group chat room website, so I set up a way for all of the participants to use group emails as another communication option if they chose to do so. Sixteen women actively participated in the group email communications.

Table 5 summarizes the data gathering activities in relation to each woman’s participation.
Table 5. Study participants and their data gathering activity participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Initial interview</th>
<th>Second interview</th>
<th>Focus group</th>
<th>Observation</th>
<th>MSN</th>
<th>e-mail</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Miss Martha</td>
<td>I-1</td>
<td>S-1</td>
<td>FG-2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss Harriet</td>
<td>I-2</td>
<td>S-2</td>
<td>FG-1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss Felicia</td>
<td>I-3</td>
<td>S-3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss Violet</td>
<td>I-4</td>
<td>FG-1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss Rosa</td>
<td>I-5</td>
<td>FG-2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss Maya</td>
<td>I-6</td>
<td>FG-2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss Diane</td>
<td>I-7</td>
<td>FG-1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perri</td>
<td>I-8</td>
<td>FG-1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>I-9</td>
<td>FG-1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angela</td>
<td>I-10</td>
<td>FG-1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peggy</td>
<td>I-11</td>
<td>FG-1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhonda</td>
<td>I-12</td>
<td>FG-1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>I-13</td>
<td>FG-1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>I-14</td>
<td>FG-2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shane</td>
<td>I-15</td>
<td>FG-2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barb</td>
<td>I-16</td>
<td>FG-2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karri</td>
<td>I-17</td>
<td>FG-2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katherine</td>
<td>I-18</td>
<td>FG-2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanya</td>
<td>I-19</td>
<td>FG-2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natasha</td>
<td>I-20</td>
<td>FG-2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicki</td>
<td>I-21</td>
<td>FG-2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candie</td>
<td>I-22</td>
<td>FG-2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louise</td>
<td>I-23</td>
<td>FG-2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ricki</td>
<td>I-24</td>
<td>FG-2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bobbi</td>
<td>I-25</td>
<td>FG-2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nieva</td>
<td>I-26</td>
<td>FG-2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>I-27</td>
<td>FG-2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Developing the Data

In grounded theory the duty of the analyst is to follow the direction of the data for the purpose of saturating categories. Saturation occurs at the point when no new data is emerging from the information being gathered. Grounded theory divides coding into three steps: initial, focus, and selective coding. These steps require that an analyst stop and interrogate the data that has been collected (Charmaz, 2006).

In each of these steps, I coded, sorted, and analyzed the data to narrow down the specific initial codes. In initial coding, I identified 16 initial categories. In focus coding, I identified common elements among the initial categories and grouped them into five themes.
Finally, in selective coding, the third step in the grounded theory coding process, I sought ways to combine the themes into major categories that represented all of the previously identified categories and that directly related to the broad research questions.

**Initial coding**

As I was collecting and recording the information in this study, I conducted a line-by-line search of transcripts and memos to identify similarities and differences among the data. I used these similarities and differences to set up a system of codes that I called categories of data. Sorting the data and assigning categories were the most detailed steps of initial coding. After I coded the 27 transcripts by hand, I developed 16 major categories that seemed relevant to all 27 participants. Also during this time through my close reading of transcripts and memos, I identified five major eras that corresponded with the times in which the women were schooled. Five distinct eras emerged, *Segregation, Integration, Busing, Crack Cocaine Crisis,* and *Hip Hop Culture.* Each time period maps identically and chronologically with the generational identities of the participants. While I was coding and sorting during this initial phase it became apparent that societal factors during the specific eras had a profound effect on both the education system and the participants’ experiences. My initial coding chart is included as Appendix K, the Initial Coding Chart.

I used Atlas.ti, a software program designed for coding qualitative data that was originally developed in 1989 at the Technical University of Berlin for institutional research projects. The program was further developed in 1993 so that individuals engaged in qualitative research would have a formalized way to catalog data (Legewie, 1989).

In this study, Atlas.ti served four purposes. I used it first to confirm my hand coding and second to triangulate codes and meanings. In the second case, another person joined me
in examining the initial coding process using Atlas.ti. Third, I used Atlas.ti to make sure that I had not overlooked an important category/code when I hand coded the data and that I had not over-emphasized or minimized certain data points. Finally, I wanted to make sure that I had not tainted or skewed the results based on my own experience with the education system.

My responsibility as an analyst was to follow the direction of the data for the purpose of saturating the categories. Line-by-line searches of the 27 memos lead to an initial sorting of the data into preliminary categories. Strauss and Corbin (1998) stress the importance of establishing categories this way:

> Phenomena are important analytic ideas that emerge from our data. They answer the question “what is going on here?” They depict the problems, issues, concerns, and matters that are important to those being studied. The name chosen for the category usually is the one that seems the most logical descriptor for what is going on.

(p. 114)

As I examined the data, I decided that, for purposes of this study, at least half of the participants must have described experiences that were similar enough to be labeled with a category identifier that described the experiences.

The 16 initial categories I identified during the first coding step are: Black Self-Sufficiency, Black Role Models, African American History, Racism and Oppression, Resources, the Education System, the Educational Environment, Participants as Educators, the African American Community, Spirituality, Morals and Values, Family, Mothers, Fathers, Children, and Intercultural Issues.
Focus coding

During focus coding the analyst searches the categories identified in the initial coding process for more solid links in the participants’ stories, which, in this study meant that I recognized how the participants’ age span would allow data to be grouped into distinct, generational time frames. I found that the participants’ ages and experiences served as factors to both connect and divide the data. For example, participants from a particular age group were linked by similar experiences with the education system, which were unlike the experiences of participants from other age groups. The five themes that emerged during focus coding represent the participants’ experiences with: the education system, the educational environment, family, community, and resources. Each participant’s socioeconomic circumstances, geographical area of schooling, and family and community influences had a bearing on how she experienced the themes that I viewed as having emerged from the data. In fact, participants within each age group reported both positive and negative experiences with the education system within each of the five themes that emerged in focus coding.

Selective coding

During selective coding, the final coding step in grounded theory research, the analyst condenses the themes developed during focus coding into major categories and demonstrates a direct link between the final major categories and the research questions. Baum (2000) says it this way, “during this process, the researcher brings the information back together and writes a narrative about the connection between the results and the research question” (p. 47). Strauss and Corbin (1998) describe selective coding as the “process of integrating and refining categories” (p. 143). Three themes emerged during the final coding phase of this
study, experiences with the education system, the role of family, and the impact of community.

Figure 1 summarizes the three kinds of coding and provides the initial categories, themes, and major categories identified during the coding steps. In chapter 4 the experiences of the women illustrate the categories and themes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial Coding:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sixteen Initial Categories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Self Sufficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Role Models</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racism and Oppression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants as Educators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirituality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morals and Values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fathers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercultural Issues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Coding:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Five Themes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selective Coding:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Three Major Categories</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Experience</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>System</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. Results of the initial, focus, and selective coding processes
Writing Memos

The memo writing I did after each interaction with study participants helped me organize the decades of lived experiences with the education environment. Engaging with the data through memo writing was an effective step in the process as it provided the insight needed to continue developing the data.

Charmaz (2006) reports that “memo-writing is the pivotal intermediate step between data collection and writing drafts of papers” (p. 72). Writing memos throughout the research process is one way grounded theorists stay focused on and engaged with the data. During memo writing the researcher is interacting with the data by questioning, analyzing, and comparing the thoughts and ideas—the phenomena—that the participants are trying to bring into being through their stories.

In keeping with grounded theory processes, I wrote memos and journal entries throughout the project. I carried a notebook at all times so I could record my thoughts about the project as they occurred. B. Glaser (2006) repeatedly reinforced the notion that memos, journal entries, charts, and other notes are devices for recording data, and that the analyst’s task is to record the material without concerning herself with correctness—punctuation, spelling, capitalization, and the like—or revisiting the data to change it by correcting it (B. Glaser, personal communication, May 23, 2006). The implications for this study are that examples taken from the data may not be technically correct because to “correct” takes away from the process of developing the data.

Memo writing was useful not only in helping me retain information but also in offering opportunities for me to think about the data in different ways. Figure 2 shows two
sample memos that started out as handwritten notes that I entered as Microsoft Word documents then examined with the Atlas.ti memo function.

**MEMO: ME - 10/30/06 [3] (0 Quotations) (Super, 07/30/07 08:14:03 PM)**

during the interviews with the elders of this group of wonderful women, i sensed that they were hesitant to share some of their experiences. i wasn't sure if it was the broadness of the questions or some trauma they had experienced or the fact that they grew up in a generation that really practiced the code of silence for survival purposes. again, all shared about their desire to learn and then discussed the experience of attending school during segregation. all these women had such close family ties and a huge amount of support from the family and the community. everything during these years seem to center around the children. that is so different from today. i wonder how we as a people lost our focus, how did we get to where we are today, more importantly i wonder if these stories will lead back to where we began – focused, driven – connected.  

Sandra

**MEMO: ME –12/8/06 [4] (0 Quotations) (Super, 07/30/07 09:10:58 PM)**

it is late december, early january and i hear alot of pain in the stories i am hearing now. pain about their treatment at school. these women suffered from being targeted by school educators and officials. it seems for some that no one invested in them or their education. some quit school and nobody stopped them. others stayed but did not feel adequately educated enough to go to college. still others had a great experience and felt prepared to enter the next phase of their education. all have been through so much in the system and one thing that really stands out is that they were successful academically even if they quit school and went back to finish.  

sandra

Figure 2. Sample memos

These two examples demonstrate how I kept with grounded theory techniques, especially in the ways Glaser (1978) suggests:

*Memos are the theorizing write-up of ideas about codes and their relationships as they strike the analyst while coding.* . . . Memoing is a constant process that begins when first coding data, and continues through reading memos or literature, sorting and writing papers . . . Memo-writing continually captures the “frontier of the analyst’s thinking” as [she] goes through either [her] data, codes, sorts or writes.  

(p. 83)
During the memo-writing process I began to think beyond the participants’ words and my words, concentrating on the feelings arising from the words. I could see distinct differences as the women from the five generations described their experiences with the education system. I could literally hear and connect with the pain, the struggles, and the suffering in the participants’ stories of their journeys.

In order to privilege the voices of all the women, I found it necessary to separate the data into five distinct eras that are notable to both the education system and the African American culture: segregation, integration, busing, the crack cocaine crisis, and the hip hop culture. Setting the stories in the context of the times offers a sense of the conditions endured by each respective generation of participants.

**Verifying Commonalties**

Although grounded theory research is not necessarily consistent for the larger population, it is verifiable and applicable to others who readily relate to the phenomenon under study. In fact, Glaser (1992) states, “generalizing to a larger population is a unit orientation that is not appropriate to grounded theory” (p. 106). In this study, the participants were exclusively African American women, which ensured that the participants would have verifiable commonalities because African American women share specific, common life circumstances, especially within the education system. For example, when the study participants engaged in conversations in the MSN Group chat room and/or in email communications, they demonstrated that they were able to relate to the matters brought forth whether a particular issue directly affected them or not. Tables 7 and 8 show examples of
how participants responded to two such issues, first, the question of what helped them with hurdles they faced and second, the role of family in their educational experiences.

**Table 6. Sample responses to a question about hurdles**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>You have all shared about your challenges during your years of schooling, how have you made it through the hurdles in your experiences with the education system?</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditionalists</td>
<td>“Faith and prayer have kept me” (Miss Martha, S-1).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pioneers of Integration</td>
<td>“Keeping God first keeps me balanced” (Miss Rosa, I-5).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby Boomers</td>
<td>“The Lord is the savior and leader. He has shown me when I’m out of order through his worthy...he promises to lead the way and never leave. I believe Him” (Diane, I-7).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generation Xers</td>
<td>“Friends and faith” (Grace, I-14).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millennials</td>
<td>“God and the power of prayer by the powerful women in my life” (April, S-10).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 7. Sample responses to a question about the influence of family**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>How has the role of family influenced your experience with the education system?</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditionalists</td>
<td>“My family had a strong influence on me and my education. They guided me every step of the way” (Miss Felicia, I-3).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pioneers of Integration</td>
<td>“My family was very involved in my schooling, they had a strong relationship with my teachers” (Miss Violet, I-4).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby Boomers</td>
<td>My family was involved with my decisions and choices I made about my education every step of the way” (Perri, I-8).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generation Xers</td>
<td>“My mother was not involved with my choices in the education system, she was not sure how to guide my decisions. She just did not have the information” (Candie, I-22).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millennials</td>
<td>“My granny had a strong influence on me. She took care of me and helped me in every way” (Bobbi, FG-2).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Theoretical Sampling**

Theoretical sampling means supporting already established categories of data that are taking shape. It is during this phase that the analyst returns to the field to gather more information from the same participants that will further develop the study. Indeed, Charmaz (2006) says that theoretical sampling really makes grounded theory special and is the major strength of grounded theory because theoretical sampling allows you to tighten what I call the
corkscrew or the hermeneutic spiral so that you end up with a theory that perfectly matches your data. (p. 101)

For example, in an effort to verify experiences that appeared to be related to the participants’ ages that seemed to be emerging from the data, I returned to the field and conducted an additional eight interviews with two women from each of the then identified age groups. (Note: As the study progressed, I identified distinct differences in the experiences of the eldest generation and subsequently separated what had been one generation into two generations, the Traditionalist and Pioneers of Integration.) I also held two focus groups where at least one woman from each age group was present. This allowed me to test whether or not participants of similar ages reported similar experiences with the education system. Theoretical sampling helped focus the data, which lead to the next step in grounded theory, conceptualizing the data to develop theory.

**Conceptualizing**

Conceptualizing is the step in grounded theory that leads to theory development. During this phase of the research the analyst works to make meaning from the data at a deeper level by comparing data from the participants’ stories in order to identify similarities and differences in their experiences. As Strauss and Corbin (1998) explain, “concepts share certain properties” (p. 103), so the commonalities must be categorized so that themes are evident. Also, Glaser (1978) emphasizes that part of conceptualizing is figuring out the relationship between the data and the theory.

In this study, for example, the 71-year age span between the youngest and the oldest of the 27 participants brought out both common themes and themes that were different, but
that could be understood by all of the participants. These different themes meant that an enormous amount of data about experiences with the education system that could be categorized according to two different concepts, first eras, and then the concepts that were common across and within the eras. This information is included as Appendix L, the Timeline of Eras.

The 71-year age span resolved into five major eras related to when the participants were schooled that I identify as Segregation, Integration, Busing, the Crack Cocaine Crisis, and the Hip Hop Culture. Once the five major areas were defined, themes within each generation became evident. The phase of conceptualizing helped link the relationships among the categories, which lead to the development of the *grounded theory of learning resilience among African American women in the formal education environment*. The voices of the 27 women who participated in this study emerge in Chapter 4.
CHAPTER 4

The Voices Emerging

Public schooling has become the “great inequalizer” in America because it tends to place white children in predominately white middle-class schools and black and latino children in predominately minority, heavily poor schools. Sheryll Cashin

This chapter offers the voices of the participants who responded to the two-part question that is the basis for this study: What are the lived experiences of African American women in the education system? and What influence have family and community had on these experiences? The following discussion is structured by the five generations, which correspond with the eras of schooling and birth years. Table 8 summarizes the relationships between the eras of schooling, the names assigned to these generations, and the years in which the participants of each generation were born.

Table 8. The eras of schooling, the generations, and the years when participants were born

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Era of Schooling</th>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>Birth Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Segregation 1920s–1954</td>
<td>Traditionalists</td>
<td>1910–1929</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration 1954–1960s</td>
<td>Pioneers of Integration</td>
<td>1930–1945</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Busing 1970s</td>
<td>Baby Boomers</td>
<td>1946–1964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hip Hop Culture 1990s–present</td>
<td>Millennials</td>
<td>1981–forward</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The broad topic of the following discussion is the lived experiences with the education system, which is one of the three themes that emerged during data analysis. The discussion calls out the other two themes—the role of family and the influence of community on the participants’ experiences—especially in the context of societal factors that influenced African American culture. A discussion of the issues that are pertinent to African American women today concludes the chapter.
Traditionalists: The Era of Segregation

The generation of the Traditionalists, who were 91, 84, and 80 years old at the time of the study, were reared in the South under legalized segregation. Falk (n.d.) contextualizes segregation like this:

More than 400 state laws, constitutional amendments, and city ordinances legalizing segregation and discrimination were passed in the United States between 1865 and 1967. These laws governed nearly every aspect of daily life, from education to public transportation, from health care and housing to the use of public facilities. African-American children got their first taste of racial discrimination when they found themselves barred from attending school with white children, and being sent, instead, to inferior facilities. (n.d.)

In the aftermath of slavery, laws were put in place that denied African Americans access to every system that would improve the quality of life, including the education system. Blacks were prohibited from being schooled alongside their White counterparts. Bell (2004) asserts that

the tree of segregation had deep roots, and public acceptance went beyond the South to encompass hundreds of communities across the nation . . . segregation was the name, but domination was the game. Intimidation, including often-random murder, was a means of enforcement. (pp. 12–13)

The Traditionalists identified segregation, the Great Depression, racism, and poverty as major societal factors that influenced their schooling. The Jim Crow laws, particularly those regarding the education system, mandated segregation and were strongly enforced by both the legislative and judiciary establishments. Williams (2006) reports, “[Blacks]
attended separate and inferior schools, ate separately, shopped separately, and often lived in fear and submission to the power of white racial domination” (p. 5). Miss Martha described her experience this way: “We just knew that we couldn’t go to school with the Whites even if we knew of them and their families. We just stayed separate and that was the way it was. You just got used to it and didn’t let it get to you” (I-1). Miss Harriet’s recollection was similar: “The Jim Crow laws of segregation ruled the south, they were powerful and scary and nobody bucked up against them less you wanted to die” (I-2). Falck (n.d.) reports, while the majority of Jim Crow laws discriminated specifically against African Americans, other groups also were frequently targeted. . . . Further testament that racism existed nationwide is evident in education laws. States outside the South enacted 23 percent of the laws that authorized segregated schools. (para. 3, 5).

Omi and Winant (1986) explain that “in the United States, the black/white color line has historically been rigidly defined and enforced. White is seen as a ‘pure’ category” (p. 15) and Blacks were considered impure and treated as less than human. Moore and Neal (2006) suggest, “African Americans sustained psychological and emotional injury as a direct result of slavery and continue to be injured by traumas caused by the larger society’s policies of inequality, racism and oppression” (p. 2). The women from this era experienced the dehumanizing treatment of Blacks that accompanied Segregation. Miss Felicia explained that the memories are never far away: “Some of the things from that time are best not talked about. I seen a man lynched for no reason at all. I was only 10 years old” (I-3).

The Great Depression affected everyone in the United States particularly African Americans who at that time were mostly employed as domestic workers and laborers.
The problems of the Great Depression affected virtually every group of Americans. No group was harder hit than African Americans, however. By 1932, approximately half of black Americans were out of work. In some Northern cities, whites called for blacks to be fired from any jobs as long as there were whites out of work. Racial violence again became more common, especially in the South. Lynching, which had declined to eight in 1932, surged to 28 in 1933. (Library of Congress, 2002, para. 1)

The families of the Traditionalists in this study were all landowners and some were small business owners, so the Great Depression created a hardship on the family livelihood. Miss Felicia remembers the 1940s when her father was a farmer and the family owned a small restaurant. “We served a lot of people, especially railroad workers. My mom was the cook and the nurturer, and she fed anyone who was hungry even if they could not pay, even though we had fallen on hard times ourselves” (I-3). During the decades of the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s many of the schools for Blacks were poverty stricken. Poverty and educational inequality were ways for Whites (who were poor themselves) to keep even more control of Blacks, denying them the skills needed to have a quality life.

This generation was born into a world that required them to deal with the forces of racism. All are southerners who describe the racism as blatant. For this report I use Wellman’s definition of racism because it best fits with the lived experiences of the research participants in this study. Wellman (cited in Tatum, 2007) defines racism as “a system of advantage based on race” (p. 126). In this country, Whites receive those advantages. Kivel (2002) asserts, “racism affects each and every aspect of our lives all the time, whether people of color are present or not” (p. 7). Miss Felicia, who was schooled in Missouri, experienced impoverished conditions that directly relate to a racist society.
I was educated under the “separate but equal premise,” although I do not believe that things were equal. I attended an all-Black school were resources were scarce. We shared desks and a sewing machine for sewing class. Our books were raggedy and out dated. Sometimes we did not have paper and pencils and other supplies needed for a good education. (I-3)

The ramifications of racism were profound for Miss Harriet, and she reported that the books we used were not real new. They were just regular books. Once kids passed into the 7th through 12th grade, they actually had to leave their families and move into town with other families because the schools were located in town. The White folks had the buses, and Blacks didn’t and this meant the kids couldn’t help with the farming because they were so far away. (S-2)

Ralston (1994) explains that “this strong value for education, to the point of sending children away from home during their adolescent years in order to receive advanced education, was not unusual in black families during the early 1900s” (p. 470). In 1932, Black parents understood that sending their children to school could put them in harms way, yet the value of education was so great that they felt it was worth the risk. When she was 12 years old, Miss Harriet moved to the rural South to live with her grandmother. The school system was different and because she was an older, more academically advanced student, she was expected to help the teacher by arriving early to get the classroom prepared. Staying late to clean up was also part of her duties. She recalled an incident that left her frantic.

I never liked walking to and from school alone. I tried to walk where it was safe and where I could not be seen. One day three White boys spotted me and ran me home. They were trying to rape and beat me. I had to run and hide all the way home. I was
very scared. During that time, Blacks knew to stay on their side of town and not venture out into White areas, but Whites could go wherever they wanted and do whatever they wanted to the Black people. (I-2)

The right to travel to and from the schoolhouse without being harmed or possibly killed simply because of the color of their skin was not a privilege the elders in this study experienced. Children in the segregated South knew that the simple act of walking to and from the schoolhouse through their own community could cost them their lives, yet they understood the sacrifice it took to move forward in life.

As each elder spoke, I sensed that there were many other deep seeded memories unspoken and locked in a private place. This generation learned to stay focused and to not let traumatic experiences hinder their efforts. A double bind exists for Black women speaking about experiences, particularly those related to trauma. The elder generation was reared under, and stayed loyal to, the code of silence embedded in the Black community: what goes on in our house, stays in our house. hooks (1989) explains, “so many black folks have been raised to believe that there is just so much that you should not talk about, not in private and not in public” (p. 2). Black women, particularly those from this generation, who speak about their personal experiences are going against the practices of their time, so sharing certain information may be difficult. I honor and respect the silent moments.

Despite horrendous challenges, positive educational experiences for this generation were abundant. Classrooms during this era were small, and students got the attention they needed. Everyone was treated the same. The children stayed together during the school day. Most of the schooling took place in small schoolhouses—often consisting of only one room—where students shared space with children at all grade levels. The Traditionalists
reaped the benefits of having the school system, the family unit, and the community all focused on their educational success. Unfortunately for the Black culture, this common focus was an attribute that would be lost with time.

**Family**

The family, community, and teachers of the Traditionalists had a strong partnership. Each entity rallied around the young people in an effort to dispel any thoughts of failure and ensure the success of every member of the Black culture. Paolucci, a pioneer in the home economics field, knew the strength of families. She “saw the family as the most significant setting for the development and well-being of individuals and essential for social and environmental well-being and stability” (Bubolz, 2002, p. 75). During this time, the homes of Black families provided the stability and protection children would need to survive in the world outside the home environment.

The family elders closely monitored the language used by educators and others outside the home for language that promoted a sense of hopelessness or failure. When the elders detected messages of hopelessness or failure, they countered with messages of certainty, hope, and success. Families worked with their children to ensure that they would succeed academically. Miss Felicia describes the tone of the times in which she was reared: “Education was not a choice. Everyone was expected to do well in school and graduate. There was no such word as can’t. The adults believed we could succeed, so we all believed we could succeed and we did” (I-3). Learning was a family experience. Each participant’s home had a “homework station” which was the area for learning. The children in the family spent time at the homework station every day except Sunday, learning reading, writing, and arithmetic.
Elders in the family and community taught Black history through traditional storytelling. These stories offered life lessons and provided crucial information young people needed to be resilient in their families, communities, and the education system. The stories, often spiritual in nature, offered messages about the trials and tribulations of our ancestors, but emphasized perseverance and the ancestors’ strengths. Strong spirituality and faith kept the African American culture focused on their purposes in life. The stories went beyond simple recounting and instilled in the children a sense of their place in the culture and their responsibilities for moving the culture forward. The narratives gave young people the hope they needed to prosper. Ladner (1998) explains, “embodied in these stories of old days were lessons about character-building, self-esteem, and in general, ways for us to survive and prosper and become better people” (p. 11).

Each of the Traditionalists was either an advanced or average student. Each got good grades and was expected to be a good role model for their younger brothers and sisters. Members of this generation often taught their parents how to read, because their mothers and fathers had grown up under laws that prohibited Blacks from going to school. Later, as adults and family matriarchs, the Traditionalists continued this tradition as they educated and guided members of the younger generations.

I interviewed the Traditionalists in their homes and, at each interview, a younger, female member of the family was present; these younger women also participated in the study, and their stories will be included later. In each case, the elder invited the younger woman to sit and listen to the interview. It was obvious that the younger women had heard these stories before, yet each sat contentedly and respectfully and, at times, prompted the
elder to add a piece of the story she may have forgotten to mention. Observing these interactions was a gift for this researcher.

**Community**

Not all experiences during segregation were negative. In fact, the elders in this study reported that they were grateful to have been schooled during a time when the Black culture functioned independently and when the culture was, in its own way, prosperous and able to fully attend to the well-being of its members. During Segregation, strong communities were regular features of the Black culture.

Everyone in a community knew everyone else, and they lived under the long practice of the “it takes a village to raise a child” creed. The education system worked in partnership with families to teach academic and life lessons that were crucial for resiliency and survival of individuals and the community. The success and well-being of all children was the major goal for African Americans. Learning was a priority and schools were student focused. Everyone in the system was accountable and was expected to work alongside parents toward the goal of educating the children. Bryan (2005) reports that “school-family-community partnerships are promoted as potential sources of the protective factors that foster educational resilience in children (Bernard, 1995; Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Epstein, 1995; Wang et al., 1997, 1998)” (para. 3).

The Traditionalists experienced a thriving Black community. Black self-sufficiency was the norm, and families worked to ensure success throughout the community. Wright (1998) explains,

We lived in the very heart of the local Black Belt. There were black churches and black preachers; there were black schools and black teachers; black groceries and
black clerks. In fact, everything was so solidly black that for a long time I did not even think of white folks. (p. 24)

Similar findings emerged among the Traditionalists in this study. Families were landowners, hairdressers, preachers, or small business owners. Miss Harriet, who was raised by her grandparents, recalled, “Papa Charlie and Momma Ola were well respected by both the Whites and the Blacks. We owned the biggest farm, and I remember going to town for business. Papa Charlie held his head high while dealing with White folks” (S-2). Black self-sufficiency was important—it was the driving factor behind the pride and high levels of hope Black people felt during that time. The elders in this study had grandparents or great-grandparents who had been slaves, who had been denied the right to own the land they worked, and who had been denied the right to own a business or have a profession. Despite this history of deprivation, all members of the Black community worked to ensure that the generations to come would understood the cost of freedom. Everybody in the culture knew this, everybody practiced it, everybody lived it: Black self-sufficiency was the order of the day for the African American culture.

Even in thriving communities, adversities were a way of life, and young people during this time were taught how to deal with circumstances in a way that kept them from harm and allowed them to move forward in life. Humility, respect, and appreciation were qualities instilled in students both by parents and by the school system. Values in the Black community were practiced and enforced by every generation; they guided the African American culture’s ways of thinking, believing, and behaving. During this era, it went without saying that everyone would act according to the cultural norms in every situation and every encounter. Ladner (1998) asserts,
traditional values gave us direction; we were clear about right and wrong. It forcefully reminds us that when our communities were serious about the survival of the race, certain critical values consistently enriched our churches, schools, and social, fraternal, and civic organizations. As a result children quickly developed a positive sense of community and identity. (p. xi)

Black children were shielded for their protection. They were well supervised by the entire community and taught respect, expectations were clear, and each knew how to abide by the rules of the family and the culture. Young people learned how to be in relation with one another, to walk in groups, and to attend activities together. This was both for their safeguard and to foster their sense of community.

Intracultural issues sometimes crept into the classroom environment and disrupted the learning process. Miss Martha, age 91, recalled the devastation of the skin tone controversy ingrained in the African American community. She was the victim of incessant teasing by a girl with lighter skin. She explained that, “after a while I just could not take it so we got into a fight and after that she left me alone. I just do not understand why she thought that having lighter skin made her better than me” (FG-2). Russell, Wilson, and Hall (1992) suggest that “initial awareness of race occurs early in a Black child’s life, surfacing sometime between the ages of three and five” (p. 63). They go on to explain that “a child’s awareness and appreciation of the value of different skin colors occurs some time after racial awareness has developed” (p. 65).

Shades of skin color have been attached to status and class in the Black community for generations. This phenomenon developed during slavery when the lighter complexioned Blacks were deemed more acceptable to work in the slave master’s house and the darker
skinned slaves were less valued and were made to work in the field. Hunter (2004) emphasizes, “skin tone politics have long plagued minority communities in the United States.

Lighter skinned African Americans earn more money and complete more years of education . . . skin color stratification is rooted in colonization and enslavement by Europeans” (p. 22).

Oppressive behaviors from within the culture had a devastating impact on the participants in this study because they grew up being taught and believing the lessons that Blacks were responsible for the well being of other members of the culture. Harmful actions by members of the culture—such as teasing about skin tone and hair texture—contradicted these lessons.

Even under adverse circumstances, the Traditionalists described their primary and secondary educational experiences as good or excellent. All of their educators were Black and resided in the their communities. The teachers nurtured the students, challenged the students, encouraged the students, held the students accountable, and had high expectations for academic success. Miss Harriet recalled with pride, “I was one of the advanced students, so I helped teach the other children. It felt good to have my abilities recognized and utilized by my teacher” (FG-2).

Two of the three Traditionalists completed high school, which had been the aspiration of their families. The third woman completed the eighth grade and went to work full time to ensure the family livelihood continued which was also an expectation of women during those times.
Pioneers of Integration: The Era of Integration

The Pioneers of Integration, ages 65–72, experienced an America their parents had never known and at times did not believe was possible. This generation witnessed the sit-ins and protest marches that challenged the Jim Crow laws, which had legalized segregation in formalized systems. Bell (1995) reports the words of a coalition of Black community groups in Boston reacting to segregation:

In the name of equity, we . . . seek dramatic improvement in the quality of the education available to our children. Any steps to achieve desegregation must be reviewed in light of the black community’s interest in improved pupil performance as the primary characteristic of educational equity. . . . We think it neither necessary, nor proper to endure the dislocations of desegregation without reasonable assurances that our children will instructionally profit. (p. 5)

Landmark legislation, prejudice, and oppression were societal factors that influenced the lives of the Pioneers of Integration. In the midst of such societal turmoil, these participants broke new ground and lead the way for Black women in this new era. They were the first generation to integrate all-White school systems in all-White neighborhoods in response to the landmark Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 347 U.S. 483 (1954). Bell (1995) explains that the Brown v. Board of Education decision struck down the long-standing Jim Crow laws and de-segregated school systems across America. Williams (2006) defines the Brown decision as “a signal moment in the twentieth-century American life that ignited the beginning of the end for legal, state-supported segregation in American life” (p. 5). Cashin (2004) shared what Chief Justice Warren recognized about the emotional trauma segregation created for Black students. He wrote,
To separate them from others of similar age and qualifications based solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone . . . separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. (p. 207)

According to some parents and legal scholars, such as Bell (1995), school integration was seen as the only way Black children could get an education equal to that of White children. To reap the promises of integration, many Black families sent their children into hostile environments and broke from the traditions of sending the children to segregated schools and, by so doing, sacrificed the solidarity that had been present in the communities and the Black culture for generations. Access to what had been all-White educational institutions was critical because Whites held and controlled the resources Black children needed to advance. During the decades of the 1950s and 1960s academic lessons were the same for Blacks as they were for Whites. Miss Violet believes that “the expectation to perform at the standards set by the school system was adhered to by all” (S-3).

The opportunities that accompanied attending integrated school systems often came with a price for the young Blacks who were too young to grasp the powerful meaning behind the changes in their lives, and who, at times, felt like participants in lab experiments for both their families and the education system. Institutionalized racism and isolation were the major issues for the Pioneers of Integration. In fact, Miss Diane, who was the only Black child in her third-grade class, reported her first experience with racism and isolation:

It was Valentines Day and I brought mine to give out. They all exchanged valentines, but I was the only child in the class who did not get a valentine. The kids said their
parents would not allow them to bring one for me. I knew at that time it was because I was Black. It still hurts to this day. (I-7)

As Miss Diane’s story illustrates, the influence of racism begins early in life. At a young age children become culturally conditioned through continuous race-based messages and images. Tatum (2007) explains that “because racism is so ingrained in the environment of American institutions, it is easily self-perpetuating. All that is required to maintain it is business as usual” (p. 128). Tatum also reports that

Prejudice is one of the inescapable consequences of living in a racist society. . . the cultural images and messages that affirm the assumed superiority of Whites and the assumed inferiority of people of color—is like smog in the air. Sometimes it is so thick it is visible, other times it is less apparent, but always day in and day out, we are breathing it in. (p. 125)

Nowhere in this country is racism more pervasive than in our education system where many of the inequities are race based. Kivel (2002) offers this:

Suburban schools with mostly White students receive twice the amount of money per student, as do schools serving predominately students of color. . . . In the United States 90% of the educators are White while 40% of the students are of color. . . . The curriculum is based on ideology and politics that are European/American focused. (p. 203–204)

In fact, all of the women in the study had observed resource inequities between predominantly Black and predominantly White schools. For decades the American education system was guilty of depriving students of color from access to all the tools research indicates are needed for academic success (Asimov, 2007). Despite the fact that the Pioneers
of Integration no longer attended schools with depleted resources, they continued to experience traumas because of their race.

Continuous incidents of racial trauma can change an individual. Messages of inferiority planted by the education system result in young people doubting their capabilities even when there is clear evidence—such as high grade point averages and academic accomplishments—that proves otherwise. One participant, Miss Rosa, who now holds a Ph.D., shared how horrifically shameful and helpless she felt during the beginning years of her education.

We were the first African American family to live in the community. When I was six years old in first grade, my teacher humiliated me in front of the class because I was Black, and that was a very traumatic experience and one of my first memories of school. I feel today that this incident is why I am good at reading and bad at math and science. My father was a pharmacist for the military, and he could see the playground from his office window. He shared with me that he was often broken hearted because he could see that I was all alone and isolated because the kids would not play with me. (I-5)

When young people, especially little girls, associate their traumatic experiences with an authority figure or a powerful system, their feelings are compounded and may hinder them from being able to distinguish individuals or parts of the system that are valuable and safe (Osofsky, 1999).

For some, experiences with institutionalized racism did not come until later. For example, Miss Maya, who now practices nursing in the schools explains,
There was not a lot of racism that I remember. I just did not like school, so I quit at the high school level and went to work. I returned to school in my 30s and got both my GED and my nursing degree. At this level, my academic lessons were equal to those of students not of color. My experiences with the education system were better, but there was racism and prejudice ingrained in the environment. (S-4)

For this generation racism and oppression were present at every level of the educational system.

On the other hand, some families made a conscious choice to remain in the Black community, as they believed the school systems continued to offer quality academics and an environment conducive to learning. Cashin (2004), in her book *The Failures of Integration*, explains that

for some Blacks, the choice to live in Black neighborhoods constitutes . . . a recognition that integration or assimilation is neither possible nor desirable and that a degree of independence and a welcoming personal life space are necessary, salutary, spirit-saving strategies. (p. 24)

**Family**

Like the generations before the Pioneers of Integration, families valued education and made it a priority. Ladner (1998) claims “children in traditional communities discovered sooner or later that their lives mattered to a lot of people . . . even the less-than-noble forces in the community pushed the young to strive” (p. 38). Similar findings emerged in this study. Miss Violet, a retired schoolteacher, emphasizes the role of each entity.

The teachers taught, the students learned, and the parents worked in partnership with the school system. Most of the kids in my neighborhood had stay-at-home mothers
who could come to school and take care of problems right away. It was common practice to see parents in the halls, in the classrooms, and at school events. My mother instilled in me how important education was. All the parents in my community gave the same message. Go to school, learn, act in an orderly manner, and do what you are told. (I-4)

Families of the Pioneers of Integration had high expectations and expected their children to be both model students and role models for younger children. Miss Rosa explains that we were expected to be the trailblazers. My family expected that I would act in a certain manner with dignity, character, and integrity. It was the way I was raised. I did not question my elders because I knew that they had my best interests at heart. I knew this because they had shown me by sacrificing for me. (I-5)

The families of this generation set high performance standards for the children. There were books in the house and every child was expected to read and to spend time each day at the homework station. Reading is a passion for Miss Rosa. “I read out of love and it was sometimes my way of escaping chores” (I-5). Reading was a family activity during that time. Miss Diane recalls, “after dinner and chores, the family gathered in one room. My parents read the newspaper and we children read books. We then talked with each other about what we had read. This was a real learning time for me” (I-7). Supporting educational success continues to be valued by Miss Rosa’s family. “We still gather to celebrate education in my family. My great niece and nephew just finished college and all the family attended the graduation. Celebrating education is a tradition and an expectation” (I-5).
Community

The Black community was still intact during the 1950s and 1960s and, like previous generations, valued education and made it a community priority. Miss Violet, whose children are now raising their children—a third generation—in the same Black community where she grew up and attended school, reminisced about the differences between her generation’s experiences and her grandchildren’s experiences in education.

Schools were different then; they were part of the community. Parents knew staff and teachers knew parents. Everyone was clear on the expectation, which was for the children to learn. Education was good. Teachers were stern and strict, and their expectations were clear. In fact one of my teachers lived in the community. He was an African American male, and all the children knew that they were going to learn something when they took his class. He cared enough to prepare us for the next level of education. (S-3)

Ladner (1998) explains, “the added role of the teachers was acceptable to our parents because they believed in the value of accepting mutual responsibility and cooperation, which is the foundation on which the idea of community is based” (p. 40). Miss Diane says her legacy is “I cared for somebody’s child,” which is reflective of her lived experiences as a child:

I was reared during the time of community parenting which meant that every child belong to the community. My community centered around the children. Everyone knew everyone’s children and everyone was involved with everyone’s children. All the adults were on the same page so all the children were in sync because they
received the same messages. I have family members who are doctors, lawyers, and educators mostly because our families and community invested in us. (I-7)

Those participants whose families integrated into White areas of town had the sense that these communities were not openly hostile, but were not welcoming either. Miss Rosa described her experience this way. “My parents did a lot of teaching of the community, particularly how we expected to be treated. They shielded us children from as much racism as possible. My father took on the powers-that-be so we could live on-base in decent housing” (I-5). According to the participants of this generation, when their families relocated to all-White areas, their new neighbors had little impact on their educational experiences. Miss Maya claims “the community had little impact on my education. I did not consider them as part of what I did” (FG-2). These families often returned to Black neighborhoods to worship, fellowship, and connect with family and long-time friends. This was their way to continue their connection with other Blacks who provided the hope, support, and reinforcement the relocated families needed to survive their new surroundings.

The Pioneers of Integration in this study demonstrated learning resilience—evidenced by two doctoral degrees, one bachelor of arts degrees, and an associate of science degree—which showed that, like their White counterparts, they could succeed even under the stressful conditions brought about by integration. These women brought a sense of pride to their parents who had suffered through the conditions of segregation. Their accomplishments represented hope for the next generation because they successfully broke ground into new academic territory for African American women.
**Baby Boomers: The Era of Busing**

The Baby Boomers consider themselves the test babies for the Civil Rights Legislation that implemented the busing of Black children out of the safety of their communities for the purpose of diversifying all-White schools. The Civil Rights Movement was budding and violence—especially violence against Blacks—erupted not only in the streets in the South but also in other communities across America. Dr. King, the leader of the movement, and President Kennedy were assassinated, events that marked the beginning of enormous change in this country that greatly influenced the educational experiences of the Baby Boomers. According to Harper and Reskin (2005),

In the 1960s and 1970s, policy makers responded to the Civil Rights movement and the pervasive race discrimination that had produced it by implementing programs to foster minorities’ inclusion in major U.S. institutions. In K-12 schools, these included court-ordered busing and magnet schools. (p. 357)

Bell (1995) asserts that busing came about because hundreds of school districts resisted, then failed to comply with the Supreme Court’s Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 347 U.S. 483 (1954) ruling. Disparities were observable by some children during their daily bus rides. Cashin (2004) describes the apparent inequities this way: “since the 1970s, both the poor and the affluent have become more isolated from everyone else, creating bastions of privilege and pockets of distress across America . . . economic separation has become so ingrained in the U.S.” (pp. 84–85).

Simply witnessing differences during the bus ride was painful, yet educational. Their parents told them about inequities between the races, but the busing experiences of the baby boomers in this study allowed them to see it first hand and experience it for themselves.
Rachel explains, “I both loved and hated the bus rides to school. I loved seeing nicer houses, bigger stores, and better parks but hated the treatment we got from the people living there and the teachers at school” (S-5). Busing was a devastating experience for even the brightest, most adaptable students in this study. As another example, 49-year-old Angela, now a mother and a grandmother herself, explains how it was for her.

In 5th grade I started being bused to an all-White school. This was not a good experience. The hostility I was greeted with in this new surrounding was devastating. My grades went from an A average to Cs and Ds. My new teacher constantly accused me of cheating. She told my mother I could not possibly make the kind of grades I did without looking at someone else’s paper. She refused to treat me fairly until my father confronted her, and after that my grades went back up to As. (FG-1).

Teachers and other school officials often targeted Black children without cause. Bell (2004) asserts, “in these white schools, black children all too often met naked racism and a curriculum blind to their needs” (p. 112). This resulted in students feeling unsafe and alone in an atmosphere that was both hostile and unwelcoming. Bryan (2005) reports, “racial and ethnic minority students . . . often feel powerless in a majority dominated school culture where language, class, and cultural differences are seen as deficits (Cummins, 1986; Noguera, 1996, 2001)” (para. 3).

Busing children into different schools where there was no established relationship between the Black community and the district where the children now went to school rendered Black parents powerless because they had no voice in decisions pertinent to education matters that directly affected their children. Bell (2004) suggests that Black parents, who often lived far from the schools where their children were sent, had no input
into the school policies and little opportunity to involve themselves in school life (p.112).

Miss Felicia, who is Angela’s mother, recalls her feelings.

I would watch the news and see the White parents picketing the school where my kids were being bused. I often wondered if I were doing the right thing because I did not feel I could protect them because I was so far away. (I-3).

Bryan (2005) describes the need for systems to work together on behalf of students. “School-family-community partnerships establish supportive relationships, such as parent-teacher support and involve family, school and community members in implementing programs that promote academic success for students” (para. 9).

Even when students had proven themselves academically and expected support it was absent in the system. Miss Diane recalls an experience that at times still troubles her today.

I got good grades and scored 30 on my ACT test, but my high school counselor told me not to be concerned with college because if I were to go to college, I could be nothing more than an elementary educator. I decided to go into the military, during the Viet Nam War, as a way of gaining money for college and learning other life lessons. I completed my service and entered college while the war was still going on. Learning was paramount in my family. I was taught to learn from every experience I had in life. I now have a doctoral degree and am helping other women of color be successful in higher learning institutions. I do not want them to have to have the same experience I had. (I-7)

One of the benefits of an integrated educational system was that it allowed skeptics to witness first hand the intellect, stamina, and talent of African Americans. This generation did extremely well in academia, yet the belief that Black students were as intellectually
capable as their White counterparts was not part of the American fabric. Peggy, now a practicing doctor of medicine remembers,

my educational experience was great for the most part. My father was in the military—he was killed in action during his second tour in Viet Nam—so we moved around. I attended both Black and White schools and overcame the challenges in both environments. For the most part, I loved my teachers and my teachers loved me, and all my life, I did extremely well academically. I attended an all-women’s college for my undergraduate learning, and it was the best time of my life. My first day of medical school I was scrambling because I had only received the acceptance notice two days before, but with no place to live and all my belongings in my car, I made it.

A fellow student told me “that I was in his friend’s seat.” I apologized and said I did not know the seat was taken. I found out later that this student was one of eight friends who had applied for medical school, and all but one had been admitted. They all felt I was there because of Affirmative Action. The more educated I got, the less racist behavior bothered me. (I-11)

Kennedy (1995) asserts that Affirmative Action, which was a part of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, was enacted so that individuals could have representation in systems that had power over their lives (p. 159). Peggy’s experience demonstrates that no matter how hard people work to prove themselves, Blacks must continuously fight institutional racism and the stereotypes embedded in the minds of others.

Even with the problems that accompanied integration, participants felt the schools offered a mostly positive experience. Each of the five Baby Boomers said they craved academics and found learning fulfilling. Most had at least one teacher who was invested in
them and encouraged them to do well. Classroom sizes were still small enough that students got the attention they needed to succeed. Extra-curricular activities were available and helped Black students to develop the leadership skills they could utilize both inside and outside the classroom and in their futures. Miss Diane expressed it this way:

I was involved in leadership activities both at school and at church. The children in my family were expected to be the best that we could be. My spirituality, my educational experience, and my extra curricular activities kept me focused and afforded me a well-rounded life. (I-7)

In retrospect, Bell (2004) suggests that many Black people during the 1980s began to think that busing was not effective in desegregating schools.

According to a Gallup poll conducted in 1981, half the black population in the United States believed that busing to achieve school integration had “caused more difficulties than it is worth.” Black children were shuffled in and out of predominantly white schools to take the places vacated by whites fleeing to outlying suburbs. (p. 112)

**Family**

Black families during the 1970s continued to value education, but suffered challenges that began to shift the focus away from the strong school-family-community partnerships that had been in place for decades. Dramatic increases in unemployment were among the challenges facing the Black community. Because new technology began to affect industry, Black men began to find themselves unemployed and unable to adequately provide for their families. Bowman, Muhammad, and Ifatunji (2004) found that “the impact of post-industrial economic restructuring tends to ripple within the African American family from ‘jobless fathers’ to ‘unmarried mothers’ to ‘children in poverty,’ all of whom must struggle to
maintain a livelihood in stressful urban ecologies” (p. 134). Black women went to work in large numbers to help support their families, which consumed the time and energy they had been investing in their children and their school success. Study participants described living this experience. Rachel recalled, “Mom did the best she could under the circumstances. She worked and took care of us. She was not available to come to school during the day because she was earning a living for the family” (FG-1).

Not only were Black women increasingly needed to work to contribute to the financial support of their family, other factors influenced Black families as well. For example, pregnancy was a factor for some of the women from this generation and their families. Cosby and Poussaint (2007) explain their findings on this matter: “Roughly 70 percent of black babies are born each year to single mothers. The mothers are not all teenagers either” (p. 14). Three of the four Baby Boomers in this study described how pregnancy at a young age had a profound impact on their educational experience. Perri, a graduate student at the time she became pregnant, recalls,

I became pregnant unexpectedly and had to return home. I found myself with a child and the main caretaker of my father because of the death of my mom, so I never got the opportunity to return and complete my education. I tried returning to school, but the structure of graduate school at the time was not non-traditional student friendly. (I-8)

Angela found herself in similar circumstances.

I got pregnant my first year of college. I had my child and stayed out of school for seven months. This was a good experience for me. The teachers had high expectations and I got good grades. I only had a semester left when I stopped going.
The load of motherhood, school, and work just became too much even though I had support from my family. (I-10)

Rachel was only 16-years-old when pregnancy interfered with her educational experience.

I got pregnant as a teenager and did not complete my education. If I had it to do all over again I would not stop for nothing. Education is extremely important. If you cannot read or write, you cannot do anything. I regret not finishing school. I quit school in the 11th grade, but I really liked academics and it was those lessons coupled with the teachings from my family that have carried me through all these years. I have been able to provide for my family. (FG-1)

The inability to balance youth, education, and motherhood was the biggest factor in these participant’s decisions to discontinue their education. Makela (2007) advises, “the need for balance in life is crucial, but how to achieve it is not part of routine teaching and learning—even though it may be the stated or unstated outcome of decision making, critical thinking, or prioritizing” (p. 6). When they were young, the women of this generation felt they lacked the experience to handle motherhood and education, and neither system provided the opportunities to learn how to balance their lives, so they felt that quitting school completely or taking a break were their only options. They also cited feelings of embarrassment about being pregnant at a young age as a factor in their decisions about their education, even though they had supportive families who had encouraged them not to give up.

Despite this encouragement, young baby boomers found themselves turning their backs on what had been the traditional values of Black families, which included a sense of
shame and blame about becoming pregnant at a young age, particularly for college women who had to phone home with bad news: “I’m in trouble.” Being “in trouble” meant that, in order to be afforded the protection, support, and preparation for motherhood and as a way to insulate the young mothers from society’s pervasive shame-and-blame mindset, women were hampered in their efforts to complete the schooling they so desired. Further, despite the fact that many Black families extended their personal support to their daughters, both secondary and post-secondary school systems did not provide parallel kinds of support for these women as students, although this institutional support would come later on for future generations.

Over time, factors of uncertain employment, the roles of women in the workforce, pregnancy, shifting family values, and the expectation that young people were to get an education that could carry them into the future combined to influence Black communities. Ladner (1998), a baby boomer who came of age in the midst of the civil rights movement, talks about the need for the long-established standards that once entrenched the Black community. She suggests “this was the first generation [baby boomers] of African Americans who had failed to pass our traditional values and standards on to their children with the same uniformity that our parents did when they entrusted the future to us” (p. 7).

**Community**

During the 1970s a shift in the role of community began to emerge for the study participants. Most of the Baby Boomers began to experience shrinking and fragmented Black neighborhoods. The suburbs drew resources out of the African American community as Black families that could afford the standard of living and yearned for the privileges that accompanied their new lifestyle moved away. Dunlap, Golub, and Johnson (2006) spoke of this flight from inner cities that “left behind higher concentrations of poverty” as one of the
unintended consequences of the civil rights movement toward integration and opportunity (pp. 117–118). Blackwell (2006) asserts that, “as central cities struggled with poverty, urban disinvestments, and an exodus of residents, services, and jobs, the surrounding suburbs reaped the benefit of this urban flight” (p. 100).

The close ties once experienced within the Black community began to disappear. The well-being of children, particularly in regards to educational success, no longer was valued in the same way. As Black families moved away, other people moved in, and with resulting changes to the community, support for young women who were pursuing education began to happen differently. Angela shared, “people were distant and would not even speak to me so I did not feel supported by my community where my education was concerned” (I-10). Rachel concurs, “my community did not get involved with my education. I do not remember any supportive behaviors on behalf of those living in close proximity” (FG-1).

Even in the midst of the struggles that accompanied busing, the plight of Blacks moving to suburbia, the problem of pregnancy at a young age, and the beginning signs of the breakdown of the traditional Black communities, the Baby Boomers in this study showed learning resilience. For example, one woman obtained her doctoral degree, two women earned bachelor of science degrees, and one woman did not complete high school but feels she gained what she needed from the education system to properly care for her family. By the end of this decade, with even higher levels of unemployment and poverty, inner cities became open territories for drug use and increased levels of crime, which had a grave impact on some of the participants from the next generation.
Generation Xers: The Era of the Crack Cocaine Crisis

The Generation Xers, ages 30s to their early 40s, inherited a culture plagued with trouble. Black pride, Black love, and Black unity had disappeared, and drug abuse and violence seemed to be a way of life. For example, Agar (2003) learned during his research on drugs that “across the country, crack has displayed remarkable consistency, taking root in those sectors of society least able to resist it,” and documented the assumption that crack cocaine is perceived as “a black drug,” which he attributes to the harsher penalties imposed by the criminal justice system on crack users (pp. 17–18). In the 1980s, crack cocaine addiction ripped through the Black community stripping it of its spirit of hope. Dunlap, Golub, and Johnson (2006) assert that, “for many, continual crack use became an obsession that dominated their lives. Many crack users organized their lives around their drug habits and their extended binges (Johnson, Golub & Dunlap, 2000; Ratner, 1992; Williams, 1992)” (p. 123). Dunlap, Golub, and Johnson further suggest that, “these growing crack markets were associated with increased levels of violence in the inner city” (p. 123). Crack cocaine, gangs, and Black-on-Black crime were the issues identified as having influenced Black students’ growing feelings of isolation in the education system and the shift to a diminished value of education both expressed by and experienced in some families and communities.

The traumas resulting from crack cocaine addiction were widespread and damaging, and, according to Grace, now an educator, the impact continues to linger.

Our spirituality is broken—crack cocaine left our community and our people as a shell—empty, stripped. Crack was the monster that destroyed the community—so many mothers lost sons and daughters, and children lost their parents to this horrific monster. This is the worst epidemic to hit the Black community—it was like an
atomic bomb. It stripped the Black culture of its dignity and character and worth. It killed the mother seed of the Black community and wiped out a generation of productive people. Education was not even at the forefront of our psyche. (I-14)

Crack cocaine addiction destroyed many families. Loving someone who was addicted to this drug meant that some women had to make hard decisions, critical choices that did not come easy. Rhonda, who was a non-traditional student in the process of completing her bachelor of science degree at the time of this study, shared this in an email exchange with other participants.

Crack cocaine was the beginning of the end to my first marriage and traditional family life as we knew it. I knew he was acting abnormal [sic] and his behavior was more than his usual marijuana high or alcohol high. This was very different. He became very violent and abusive towards me. He would be absent from the home for days on end. It was not unusual for me to come home from work and find our three children all under the age of six at home by themselves because he had left them home to get in the street [sic] in search for crack cocaine. Our relationship ended in divorce, because he had formed a new relationship with crack cocaine and crack cocaine users. I was left a single parent of three children. (I-12)

Neighborhoods and streets that once were homes for families became blocks of crack houses, places where, if they had the nerve, people like Rhonda could go and find mothers, fathers, friends, husbands, and brothers buying, selling, and smoking crack cocaine. Rhonda also wrote,

this was an all too familiar story for a lot of young African American couples in the mid- to late-1980s. [Crack] changed the landscape of the urban neighborhood. The
family composition had changed. Now you had many more single parent families, grandparents raising grandchildren on a permanent basis because the caregiver(s) were strung out on this terrible drug. (I-12)

This era was the turning point in the Black culture. Any clear partnership that had once existed between the education system, the family, and the community was disappearing, and Generation Xers were greatly affected by the lack of relationship between these systems. The traditional values of putting the well-being of children first seemed non-existent. Some of the women of this generation remembered finding themselves on their own with little support from the education system, the family, or the community as they tried to succeed in the education system. Grace describes the personal impact crack cocaine had on her. “By middle school I was in trouble, I was doing drugs, I had no support. I felt misunderstood and not listened to by the school or my family. No one tried to help me. They just kept putting me down” (I-14).

Candie divulges that she, too, found little help and support from the education system or others. She attended a predominately White high school that was labeled the worst in the city because it had the largest population of students of color.

The school system nor the school counselors prepared me for higher education. There was an assumption that I would just attend the local technical school, so there was no push for higher education. Once I got to college I felt under pressure to perform for all Blacks. Every question I got either from the teacher or fellow students always started with “Why do you people . . . ” (I-22)

Tanya also attended a school where she was in the minority and she also felt little encouragement from the system.
I attended a mostly White high school and felt so uncomfortable. I did not recognize anyone who looked like me. I was so isolated and not doing well. I decided to drop out because I felt I had no other choice. Not one teacher or counselor challenged my decision. They just said leave your student ID badge in the office on your way out. I got my GED from Job Corps, which was a much better experience for me. (I-19)

On the other hand, from the midst of this troubled culture, other participants from this generation seemed to emerge unscathed by the crack cocaine crisis and reported having experienced the education system in a very different manner. Karri recalls,

I grew up in East St. Louis and I remember how others referred to this place as one of the most violent places to live. This was just not my experience. I had mostly Black teachers and all my life they were encouraging. I was a shy kid, and they were welcoming and great examples for me. (I-17)

Vicki’s teachers identified her as an advanced student early in her education. “I remember being lost in a big school. My teacher found me in the library reading. I love to read. My third grade teacher said I was an advanced math student. School was such a good experience for me” (I-21). The key ingredient of these educational successes during a time of distress for some in the Black culture was the protection and support of parents and close family members.

**Family**

The women of this generation experienced the role of family on both extremes. Some families were extremely involved and did everything possible to support and ensure educational success, while others were uninvolved and perceived little value in education, which meant they failed to provide the support their children needed to succeed. As an
example of a supportive family environment, Katherine, whose mother was an educator, remembers her experience:

My mom’s philosophy was that the teacher could do no wrong. If my siblings or I were in trouble, as far as my mom was concerned, it was our fault. She was stern and had great expectations of me in academia. I loved school and graduated with honors. I went away to college and did not finish because mom was not there providing the structure I needed. I wish I could have taken her with me. (I-18)

Louise’s parents had a similar message regarding her education. “Mom was the Sergeant-at-arms, the enforcer. Whenever there was a problem at school mom took care of it. Dad provided the back-up she needed. Getting a good education was the law in our home” (I-23).

The expectation of getting a good education was also the standard in Vicki’s family. My parents believed that school was the number one priority. The message was that there was no excuse for not doing well and getting good grades. Because of busing my mom says her experience was traumatic. She said her grades went from good to failing. My dad only got a sixth-grade education and wanted and expected us to do better. (I-21)

Jenny’s experience was very different. “I dove into my education and studies as a way to escape my family struggles. My parents did not value education. They were not involved with my schooling and did not ever seem interested” (I-13).

In an email discussion, Barb talks about the impact crack cocaine and gangs had on her family and the families of her friends:
I would have to say Personally [sic] in my own immediate family we didn't have an [sic] issues in my family with crack cocaine or gangs, but I do know several of my peers or kids I went to school with did, and I would say crack was more [sic] issue then [sic] gangs. And the sad fact about crack is that people that I think weren’t really pre-disposed to an environment of drug or substance abuse got caught up in experimental drug use and got hooked on crack, and the devastating outcome was that many of those people still struggle with addiction to this day. Many of those who were those who you would have thought had potential to really do something with there live [sic] got stuck in the system, that is the penal system or the DHS system and this has not only effected [sic] their life but the lives of the children that were born into those parents of my age who got caught up. I can think of numerous instance [sic] how crack cocaine ruined people of my generations [sic] lives. (I-16) Some of the participants from this generation also faced pregnancy as an issue, which, at this time, forced the school system and families to work together. The young women of this era could attend separate high schools designed to meet the needs of young mothers and mothers-to-be, where the academic system helped them learn to integrate academics and parental responsibilities. The class size was smaller and, according to Rhonda who attended such a school, the environment was much more nurturing than the regular high school she attended. She described it this way.

Everyone stayed in their classroom and worked at their own pace. Not only did we learn about academics, we learned about how to think forward and plan for happenings outside the classroom. My mom and dad and siblings were against me quitting school so they favored what Booth had to offer. I formed some life long
relationships at this school and still stay in touch with a few of the young women.

Because of the opportunities provided at Booth and by the education system, I was able to return to my regular high school and graduate with my class. (I-12)

Natasha, who is a member of one of the multigenerational families participating in this study, recalls how strongly the women in her life valued education.

I was raised and influenced by strong Black women—without their backbone I do not know where I would be. My mom was very supportive—she valued education and working. I would have been stuck in a rut of being a single parent if I had not been taught to be so independent. My family really valued work and school. There was no jealousy. We did not try to hold each other down. Granny was the headquarters—I can call her anytime, for anything. My grandmother has been a big influence in my life. (I-20)

Community

This generation experienced an entire spectrum of community influence. Some Black communities became safe havens for gangs and the drug trade that wreaked havoc on the community in the forms of violence and drug trafficking and use. During this generation, the Black area of town was labeled the bad area of town. Ladner (1998) suggests, “crime and violence have torn many communities apart, undermining stable neighborhoods to such an extent that people now fear for their safety. And drugs have come to symbolize a modern-day plague, both in its seriousness and in its proportions” (p. 14). These sentiments were shared by some of the Generation Xers. In an email, Jenny describes her neighborhood,

Gang violence has altered my perception of young people. I have lived in my neighborhood all of my 40+ years and never have I gotten to the point where I was
fearful in my own neighborhood. Young kids tried to intimidate the older generation. In part they were successful. It was my husband and two other neighbors that stood their ground to ward off this (revolt of the neighborhood). I now understand why some Whites get the impression that we don’t care and do not want anything out of life. I am starting to have that same impression. I go to work, pay my taxes, try to raise a decent family, and you have young gang members trying to take over the neighborhood with such disrespect. (I-13)

More than twenty years after the crack cocaine crisis began, Johnson (2004) with USA Today reported that “the resurgence of gangs whose names became symbols of the turf wars over crack cocaine during the 1980s—the Crips, the Bloods, the Mexican Mafia, The Gangster Disciples and others is increasing the crime rates in cities across the nation” (n.p.n.). The decade of the 1980s was a pivotal time for the Black community. Some of the women of this era could not grasp the sense of community experienced by the generations before them. For some, even the research question about community support seemed odd. Tanya explains that

those I thought of as my community offered absolutely no support when I decided to drop out of school. I needed a mentor or someone to say NO, we are not going to let you do that. If someone would have said that and supported me just a little bit things would be different today. (I-19)

Jenny also felt troubled by her lack of support. “My community did not give me any support. They did not embrace education and viewed educated Blacks as uppity.” (I-13)
The participants whose families lived in mostly White areas also felt the same lack of support described by those whose families remained in mostly Black areas of town. Candie describes her circumstances this way:

There was no push from the community for African American kids to go on to higher education. These kids went to technical schools, work, or the armed forces. There was no push for Blacks to advance academically. I have family in the same school system I grew up in, and 18 years later Blacks are still not being encouraged or prepared for higher education by the education system or the community. (I-22)

Louise’s situation was similar. “I went to private school. We were the only Black family in the church, which was our community. People were nice and offered verbal support but we did not receive the hands-on support we witnessed other families receiving” (I-23).

On the other hand, at the other end of the spectrum, Katherine experienced her community totally differently. She grew up in the same neighborhood her family has lived in for several generations. Most of the residents have also made this neighborhood their home for decades. She reports, “my community was supportive. My community expected all children to go and finish school. There were very few dropouts, and no point in staying home because everyone else was at school” (I-18). Vicki reported that the members of her “community were my teachers, my mother’s friends, and my friends. They all encouraged me and consistently gave me positive and supportive messages” (I-21).

No matter where these women identified themselves on the spectrum of community, intracultural issues—crime, drugs, and even emerging, popular music that was hostile to women—were the issues of the day. Not only were these issues central for Generation Xers,
these factors seeped into the next generation, the Millenials, who cite these intracultural issues as among the biggest stumbling blocks for their generation.

**Millenials: The Era of the Hip Hop Culture**

The crisis in the Black culture continues for the Millenials in this study who were greatly influenced by the Hip Hop Culture during their educational years. All the participants were extremely successful in their educational endeavors, even though it has seemed that segments of the Black culture have continuously worked against their ambitions. Bobbi shared this,

Gang violence, the glorification of ghetto living, and Black girls and women willing to devalue themselves and one another, along with music and media so violent and degrading bled into our learning environment and resulted in what we call a *spirit of depleted self-worth* for some. African American women have extra baggage; the community should not shame or make restrictions on us that cannot be met; they do not understand our plight in the education system or otherwise. They should play a role in promoting and implementing successful endeavors. This is the only way to stop the generational curses we are living under. (S-9)

Leaders in Black communities who understand the consequences of the violent, negative messages directed at young Blacks use their influence to speak publicly about the damage created by violence and messages of violence imposed by Blacks on Blacks. For example, in a speech published by *Jet Magazine* (2007) marking the 12th anniversary of the Million Man March, a gathering of Black males organized for atonement to family and community, Farrakhan said this “I want to talk to my gang-banging family. You make it
difficult for me. In the 60s we knew who the enemy was. But in 2007 you are the enemy” (Waldrin, 2007, p. 12). The contempt for women expressed through music, videos, dress, and language is a huge part of the message found in Hip Hop, a tone that greatly influences the self-esteem of young women across this country.

African American women have the daily battle of keeping their self-esteem and self-worth intact, as they find themselves at the bottom of a hierarchy set up by the White American male power structure. Throughout this country’s history, Black women have been emotionally bruised and battered first by Whites in society and for the past two decades by members of their own culture. The stereotypes with which African American women live can have a huge impact on their self-worth by the time they are adolescents. Without strong support, love, and the shared knowledge and wisdom of others, the self-worth of Black adolescents suffers tremendously.

In 2000, DeFrancisco and Chatham-Carpenter conducted a study of 21 African American women’s views on self-esteem. The women relied heavily upon family, social support, friends, and community to help them in trying circumstances that challenged their self-worth. Because of the history and the continued oppressive behaviors toward African American women, it may be hard for some women to love themselves, to treat themselves in a positive manner, and to gain high self-esteem (pp. 73–92). African American women internalize negative messages and attitudes from external and intracultural forces, a sentiment that was echoed in my study. For example, April wrote in an email that,

Sadly to say Hip Hop helped shaped my self esteem and self image. From middle school through college, I saw myself worth [sic] by the standards in the videos. I wasn't light skinned with long hair, I didn't have the clothes or the fashion sense, so of
course I wasn’t pretty. I was well developed and received a lot of attention for that but that isn’t the attention I should have wanted. But in high school and middle school when your [sic] not getting what you want, you settle for less. Thankfully, my beliefs of relationship and love kept me from taking anything to far but I should have never thought myself worth [sic] came from my chest and figure. I should have known that men objectifying woman as things, trophies to decorate their videos, homes, and album covers was just wrong. I know that women are more vital to society than that. I knew the power they held in their strength to persevere beyond anything that stands in their way. But surrounded by the themes day in and day out, and watching the girls that fit that mold get the attention, you just want to fit in. You just want someone to pay attention to you. (I-27)

In another study, Kerpelman, Shoffner, and Ross-Griffin (2002) studied 22 mother/daughter pairs to investigate the impact of the relationships these young women have with their mothers, especially in terms of how the young women develop a strong sense of self and self-esteem or self-worth. Each adolescent reported having a close and positive relationship with her mother that influenced her decisions about future plans for education and careers. All the daughters valued and desired their mothers’ input about their futures. The young women reported that they are—and will continue to be—successful because of the strong support of their mothers, their networks of friends, and other significant individuals in their lives (pp. 289–302).

Bobbi indicated in an email that she understood the ramifications of the influence Hip Hop had on the culture.
I would say that hip hop had its affect on me when I hit my teenage years. That was the time when young men used the lines from those songs to refer to you and try to get your attention. It was a little degrading at times, but learning etiquette at home helped dissolve the connotations made. It did not affect my education one bit. The content of the songs was what I was working so hard not to become (chickenhead, skawly wag, b****, h**, etc.). (I-25)

Brookmeyer, Henrich, and Schwab-Stone (2005) explain that children who are exposed to frequent acts of violence are at risk to repeat violent behaviors unless they learn otherwise (pp. 917–929). Media violence has had a greatest impact on the Hip Hop Culture. Osofsky (1999) reported that, by the age of 18, the average child has been exposed to 16,000 simulated murders and 200,000 acts of violence, and the Surgeon General characterized violence in the United States as a “public health epidemic” (p. 34). Hira (1996) pointed to the role of television during this decade. She explained, “television plays a notable role in molding children’s attitude in today’s society. They learn that their lives should be as glamorous as those they see on television fiction” (p. 86). Bobbi wrote about the impact the violence and the messages of that violence had on the young people she loves.

I think that it [hip hop] bothered my siblings more than it did me. They all wanted to be “hard” and tough, which was not the way they were raised. They wanted the fast life, quick money and all the stereotypical names that was laced throughout hip hop songs (pimp, thug, shawty, ride or die b****, a vixen, etc.). I thank God that He answered prayers because they have all turned around for the better, but our community reflects the hip hop culture. Look at how the youth dress, speak to one another and refer to one another. (I-25)
Young people who witness and/or experience violence are left traumatized, devastated, and confused. Children also experience relationship problems because of their inability to trust some of the adults in their lives. Osofsky (1999) explains that “feelings of distrust expand to include teachers and other people in their communities who are probably safe adults” (p. 34). Children who witness violence early in life become vulnerable and are not always able to focus their energies in the life areas in which they are expected to participate, which is evident in the educational system where the behaviors created by the trauma are acted out. Wallach (2005) cites Craig (1992) who adds that “when children’s energies are drained because they are defending themselves against violence, they have difficulty learning in school” (n.p.n.). Teachers On-line (2005) also explain that children bring the effects of exposure to violence with them into the classroom. Letendre and Davis (2004) assert that violence, which has been deemed a public health epidemic, deprives many children of the opportunities to which they are entitled during childhood. Effective interventions and support systems “promote optimal development of children” (p. 367–387).

In the midst of turbulent times for the Black community, all four of the women from this generation managed to be successful in their educational endeavors. After studying more than 2,500 pages of written testimony Jones, Defrain, Ernst, and Defrain (2000) report that “human beings are capable of healing from horrendous emotional wounds” (p. 274). Sixty-eight percent of the individuals in the Jones, Defrain, Ernst, and Defrain study credited a special person or a school experience as helpful.

Privileges available to this generation should also be cited as reasons for educational successes. The Millennials had the world at their fingertips through technology, open access to educational opportunities, middle-class lives, and daily encounters with diverse cultures.
Each of the Millennials has earned a bachelors degree and is very proud, but all assert that their experiences with the education system were not without adversities and inequities.

Ricki explains,

grade school and junior high was nice and normal but in high school the teachers treated us different. I did not always feel the difference because I was a talented and gifted student and felt lead in the right direction. But when I got to college I noticed that the White kids had a lot more computer skills than I did. It was at that point I realized that the playing field was not level. (I-24)

Bobbi also found noticeable differences in treatment during her college years. She recalls that

college was my first case of culture shock. It was the first time I ever heard the term minority. African Americans were only 2% of the college population. I was the only Black in all my classes. I cried, called my mom and told her if she did not come get me I would find a way home. My mom told me to give things time to see if my feeling changed. Once I connected with the Black students through the TRIO program I felt better and was relieved to be connected with other students of color. (FG-2)

Nieva is attending a school that is classified as an Historical Black College and University (HBCU) where she receives a great academic program and the cultural information imperative to her identity and worth as an African American woman. She reports,

The white schools were all right academically but lacked the cultural information and environment needed for me to learn about my ancestors. At my HBCU it is good for
me to see teachers who look like me and students who look like me doing well academically. This is very encouraging, Black teachers explain subject matter in a different way. They make the lessons relevant for my culture and me. These lessons are really helping me to grow and change things about myself. (I-26)

On the other hand, April experienced what she described as unfair treatment. She explains,

my school was featured on an ABC News Prime Time special about student's behavior in the classrooms and the ability of the teachers to handle them. My class would forever be known as the prime time class. I HATED this label. I wasn’t even in the class that was videotaped but we were all lumped together. When watching the video, it was only a couple of students that were really causing the problems but they [rarely] attended school . . . so they needed a lot more help than the teacher could offer when the parents actually ensured that the students made it to class. (I-27)

**Family**

Although the Millennials in this study described the Hip Hop Culture as promoting the violence happening around them, the four of them felt insulated by their families and attribute their successes in the education system to this insulation. In a response to an article by Garbarino, Hira (1996) talked about children and families of the 1990s growing up in socially toxic environments. She asserts, “family and consumer sciences economists have shown that family influence is the most powerful influence on children. Parents have the capacity to act as a modifying force between media and other peer pressures (Moschis, 1985)” (p. 86). This same finding emerged among the Millennials of this study. Bobbi explains,
My granny wanted me to learn every chance I got. I entered her certified day care program when I was extremely young. She prepared me for school; she kept me learning. Our one-on-one time helped me be an advanced student all the way through school. She is 91 years old and I am very connected to her and to all the women in my life. They have been my greatest influence where education is concerned. (FG-2)

Ricki also reported family as the support she needed to move forward in her education.

My mother’s philosophy was that everyone must go to school, it was not an option. It did not matter if it was trade school, a certificate program, or even a two-year college but not attending and completing higher education was not an option I grew up with. I always knew I was going to college. (I-24)

Nieva credits her family for her educational successes.

My family had a great influence on my education. With them education was a priority. The message was and still is that I need a good education to succeed in life. I watched my mother return to school late in life as a non-traditional student to finish her masters degree. This makes me want to strive and do better. My mom is my role model. (I-26)

At the time of the study, April admitted she continues to feel the impact of Hip Hop, but shared how going to college helped her shed some of the feelings embedded by the negative messages coming from within the culture.

Today I still have some of these hang ups [low self-worth] but the best thing for me was going to college in North Carolina. When I got to school I still possessed the same thinking I had in high school. As I met new people, and exchanged ideas I learned that the Hip Hop themes didn't dominate everyone’s views of the world. I
learned that on the east coast people like what they like more for their own personal reasons than because it is in the music video. Brown skin females are just as beautiful as the light skinned females. The heavier females are just as sexy as the slimmer females. In this educational environment, they saw the hip hop music as a form of expression. And they choose their hip hop music by the message it was sending rather than the females in the video or the beat they shake their butts to. (I-27)

This phenomenal group of women lived through experiences that might be incomprehensible to many. With the help and support of their families, these young women demonstrate the grounded theory of learning resilience among African American women in the formal education environment. Their unwavering spirits and commitment to their educational goals are evidence of the strength of the human spirit and will live as a testament to African American women for generations to come.

**Community**

This generation also found the question about the impact of community rather odd. All live in areas of their cities that are either mostly White or very diverse. They may throw their hand up to neighbors and speak to them as they come and go to and from their homes, but a close-knit Black community is not the experience of the Millennials. The closest they came to the communities of the past was when they surrounded themselves with people outside their families who cared for and nurtured them. Bobbi shared this, “my mom, grandma, granny, and my friends are my community. I would identify some of my teachers as my community as well. These are the people who supported me through my education” (S-9). Ricki remembers that, “everything I did educationally was driven by the school and
not the community. I had mentors from the area that helped me, but I would not call that a community” (I-24).

Nieva compares the community where she grew up with her college community. She remarks that, “I grew up in a White community that had no impact on my education. The place I live in now makes me want to do better as I witness the poverty and lack of resources within the Black community” (I-26). April, who identified her community as Black and middle class, was concerned about the reactions of members of her community if she did not succeed in the formal education system. She explains,

I think my family and my community affected my education because I didn’t want to let them down. I know some of my side activities (ditching school, excessive partying, etc.) would not have elicited their congratulations but I knew what my priorities were. I knew that extracurricular activities were not a reason or an excuse for me to fail. I would have to put in the extra work to make up for any distraction that could slow me down. I know that may not sound like a monumental effect but for me, it was what I needed. Disappointment is a powerful thing. I have disappointed my mother before and that was the worst feeling. I think it only parallels losing her trust. As self-involved as this may sound, for a while I don’t think I believed that they would still love me or like me after the disappointment. I have learned that I was wrong, but I can’t say that it didn’t help me get the best out of my education. (I-27)
Beyond the Eras: The Voices Unite

This section focuses on how participants are engaged with the categories of data that are common across all five generations. The women shared their views as educators, in their family roles as mothers and grandmothers, and finally, they talk about their work within the community and speak frankly about their expectations of the culture as they look toward the future for both the education system and the Black community.

As Educators

Of the 27 participants, 10 are or have been educators in the formal education system, and all of the educators and many of the other participants cited two concerns. First, they are concerned about the diversity matters that continue to hinder the educational system at every level. Second, they are disheartened with the Black culture and its lack of partnership with the school system and the negative impact this continues to have on Black students. They feel that these two issues create the greatest barriers for Black students to be successful in the education system.

The importance of having access to Black teachers and professors was expressed by members of each of the five generations. For example, the Traditionalists in this study described being in the presence of Black professionals in the school system as their chief reward during Segregation. On the other hand, the current education system seems to be as segregated as it was in the early Twentieth Century. The noticeable difference is the absence of Black educators in today’s educational institutions. Kivel (2002) reports, “Today we have an education system that is nearly as racially segregated and unequal as it was before the Supreme Court’s Brown vs. Board of Education ruling outlawed intentional school segregation. This is institutional racism” (p. 173).
A study by Juanita Johnson-Bailey (1999) about the commonalities of eight African American women who were returning to school as non-traditional students reported that traumatic issues surrounding race and gender were shared concerns. The study also revealed that traumatic experiences during their early years in the educational system had a life-long impact (p. 660). The same findings emerged in this study. Miss Felicia, who as a child attended school during segregation, returned to college in the Midwest as a non-traditional student. She explains how her experience in her first college class mimicked her early years in school.

In my first class the teacher told us to write our observations of him down on a piece of paper and share it with our group. I wrote down exactly what I saw, which was he was walking around the classroom and looked unsure of what he was doing. He read it and put me out of class. I begged him to let me stay, but he refused. The institution did not help. They told me, “well you do not own a typewriter anyway, so his decision to make you leave was right.” I was so discouraged I never returned to higher education. (I-3)

Candie also returned to school as a non-traditional student. She too felt some of the same stressors she felt as a young student. She explains,

I was one of two African Americans in the program. I felt pressured to perform for all Black people. Whenever I was asked a question it was never just a question about me it always started with “Why do all Black people.” This kind of ignorance never ends, no matter the level of education. I had a 4.0 grade average and was still considered inferior to my White classmates. (I-22)
Miss Rosa deliberately moved to a community to help integrate the faculty. She describes the horrors she experienced as a professional.

The attitude was unwelcoming and I heard stereotypes like I had never heard before, such as “I did not know Blacks had freckles” or “I was told Blacks had tails, can you tell me about that.” The staff was cold; I was not allowed to teach certain courses. The environment made me so physically sick that I quit and eventually went back to school to further my own education. (I-5)

Miss Rosa spent her entire teaching career in schools where Blacks were always in the minority. In the formal education system, she taught Whites about children of color and issues that confront the Black community. She sometimes wondered what it would have been like if she had taught in all Black communities. She explains the frustrations she continues to feel toward the formal education system.

Black children are not being provided any models. The world has changed; corporate America has changed because they know they have to play to their market, but the school districts have not taken any steps to move forward in diversity. They are in real circular motion and nothing is changing. (I-5)

Black students feel a connection with professionals who look like them and have had some of the same experiences as they have. Sharing commonalities is important in building trust and developing relationships. Not having the opportunity to experience these relationships with professionals in the formal education system can have a devastating, long-term effect on some students.

Perri, who grew up in rural Iowa where she and her siblings were the only Blacks in the school system, talks about her need to experience her culture.
I left Iowa and went to Washington, D.C. I wanted to be in “chocolate city.” Howard University was a good experience for me even with the disparities I witnessed. It was the first time I had been in a place to experience both extremes, both extremely educated Blacks and undereducated Blacks. Up to that point in my education Whites had all the advantages, but this was different in D.C. I learned a lot about my culture and myself. This was something I did not get in the school system I grew up in. (I-8)

Miss Diane, who works at a major university in the Midwest, believes it is imperative to the psyche of Black students to have access to faculty who look like them and share some of the same life experiences. One of the ways she gives back to her community through her position is to ensure that the demographics of the faculty reflect the student body. She explains, “I feel that higher education underutilizes educated Black women and I work hard to make sure that the institution where I work hires Black women in positions in academia” (I-7).

Candie finds the issue of institutions not hiring qualified Blacks troubling. She has tried for several years to obtain a job in the formal education system. She talks about her experiences:

I feel it is difficult for Blacks to obtain full time teaching positions. I have aspired to teach in a formal educational setting. I answer ads for jobs that I know I am qualified for and get no responses back from my contacts. Once again I believe that Blacks have to work harder to prove they are qualified. I am capable of teaching, but I need the opportunity. It is hard when doors will not open. (I-22)

Peggy, an educator in the medical field, believes that
there is something powerful about sharing time and space with African American students even if it is only twice a year. Students are so busy they may not ask for help, for mentorship. I teach others in the medical profession not to wait for students to find them or to come and ask them for help or for mentoring, but to reach out to students. I believe it is the professional’s responsibility to check in with students and share in their experiences. (I-11)

Miss Rosa, a Pioneer of Integration reflects on how the lack of diversity in her teachers affected her when she was young.

I did not have any images reflecting me when I was growing up and that was traumatic. Growing up in the Northern school system I never really knew who I was. It is important to know who you are and where you are from. It has been as an adult woman through my Ph.D. program that I have come to know my Blackness and how it is reflected in the literature. I have a doctoral degree in literature with an emphasis on Black culture. (I-5)

The second issue the educators identified as a major concern is that the partnership between the school system, the family, and community has deteriorated over the years. Miss Violet, now retired from the formal education system, spent many years of her life teaching high school students. She watched the breakdown of the relationship between the school system and the Black community, which is now different than during her years as an educator. She attributes the problems to both sides but is frank about the Black community’s responsibility in rebuilding the partnership so that their children get the benefits they need that are obtained by a good education. She explains,
I wish parents would take on a new role and help their children understand that they cannot do anything without a good education. Our kids have lost their purpose. It has become a way of life to drop out of school and wander aimlessly. If I were 20 years younger, I would own my own school. I never knew a kid I could not teach something. I was firm, consistent, stable, and I loved my students. That is what they need today, teachers who will not back down and parents who will work with teachers for their good. Every Monday morning the African American students and teachers gathered in my classroom to talk about what they did in church and with their families over the weekend. It was important for me to know them as more than just my students and to become familiar with their families. (S-3)

Karri taught middle- and high-school students for many years. She certainly witnessed how things have changed for both students and the school system since she was in school. She cites a breakdown in the communication between the culture and the education system as the reason it is impossible for teachers who love the art of teaching to reach some students. She shared this experience.

I worked at a local high school and it was one of the worst experiences of my life. The students were disrespectful and there was no leadership. The principal, administrators, and teachers were afraid to confront the students; specifically they were afraid to enforce the dress code and other rules. I felt like the lone ranger. I made students cover up before coming into my class. Parents were more argumentative than students. There was a lack of communication at every level and the staff turnover was high. This environment made me physically sick and was part
of my decision to retire from the formal education system and start teaching in a small, Christian school. (S-8)

Jones, Defrain, Ernest, and Defrain (2000) maintain, “teachers are in an extremely important position to positively influence troubled young people. In some cases, as we have seen, teachers may be the only connection a child may have for receiving help and comfort” (p. 274).

During my interview with Grace I could see the partnership between the education system and family come to life. I observed her as she assisted the worried grandmother of one of her students. As the grandmother passed her office door, Grace yelled out “Hey Grandma, how are you doing?” The woman entered the office with a worried look on her face, they both smiled, and Grace got up to meet her half way. Grace asked how her daughter, the mother of the student they were discussing, took the letter she wrote. Grandma shared she was mad. Grace assured grandma that “it was all right for mom to be mad.” She told grandma, “let me worry about mom.” Grace went on to tell grandma that she expected mom to be mad and that she had a plan for that. She told grandma “I have mom covered; you just worry about your grandchild. I am going to buy her a small gift and take it to her so we can talk face-to-face about the issues. The letter was just to let her know what was coming.” The grandmother looked relieved as they embraced and looked each other in the eye. As they parted, Grace assured the grandmother that she was doing a great job with her grandchild, and that the child must remain the focus for all involved. (O-1)

This interaction in the formal education system was a phenomenal opportunity for me as a researcher because it allowed me to observe in action what my participants had been describing in interviews about the very subject of my research. As an educator, Grace is
truly facilitates the positive relationships and works to rebuild the partnership between Black families and the education institution where she is employed.

**As Mothers and Grandmothers**

Of the 27 participants, 25 are mothers, 8 are grandmothers, and 4 are great-grandmothers, and they all take their roles seriously. All are very involved with the educational experiences of their children and grandchildren and were very vocal about their common position on education: they value learning and believe that education is as important today as it was in generations past. This view is reflected in research. For example, Flouri (2006) emphasizes, “parental involvement and parents’ interest in children’s education is an important influence on children’s educational outcomes (Hill & Taylor, 2004)” (p. 42).

Findings from this longitudinal study showed that parental interest in children’s education could be directly linked with the educational attainment of daughters. Parental interest is a key element in what has been called the village concept, the idea from ancestors in the homeland that “it takes a village to raise a child.”

Some researchers claim that, despite its African roots, the village concept is absent from large segments of the African American community. For example, Ladner (1998) says that one of the challenges for the young people of today is that “there is ‘no village’ or ‘kitchen’ culture to fortify them with coherent, persistent, positive messages that seamlessly affirm their strong identities as good people, valuable individuals, and responsible members of their race” (pp. 25–26). This statement, however, rings false for some of the women in this study. These women specifically invested their time and provided the nurturing and role-modeling their children and grandchildren needed to develop the skills required for
success in education and in life. They worked alongside other adult community members to shape the village their children needed.

Miss Martha is proud that all her daughters are educated professionals. “I really value education and passed that mindset on to my children. Getting a good education strengthens one’s chances for a great life. I surrounded my babies and grandbabies with good people who helped to encourage their efforts” (S-1). Gordon (2006) makes it known that “education starts at home, in neighborhoods, and in communities. Reading to children, creating time and space for homework and demonstrating—through words and deeds that education is important and are the key first building blocks for high educational achievement” (p. 25). As a mother, Angela had the same educational expectations of her daughter as her mother had of her. She shares her thoughts this way:

I expected her to go to school, do well, graduate, and go to college. She had to come home with homework everyday no matter how old she was. My daughter was in the gifted and talented program. She was smart and got good grades. I was active in her education and I appreciated that the school pushed her academically and placed her in advanced classes. (S-6)

Katherine’s philosophy regarding education was also the same as her mother’s. She shared this about motherhood and education:

Like my mother I believe education is the key to success and children are still expected to attend school and do well. My 16-year-old thrives in school. My son has had some problems and the school system wanted to put him in special education. After talking with my mother who has expertise in special education, I fought that decision and transferred him to a different school. Now, he is doing very well. I
attribute this change to the fact that when the academic and behavioral expectations are higher, the curriculum is more challenging, and the rules are enforced on a consistent basis. (I-18)

In regards to education, Vicki began shaping the minds of her children early on. She explained it this way.

Both my husband and I are educators. I began reading to my children when they were still in the womb and now we read together. I taught each of them their A-B-Cs when they were only 18 months old. My children are being taught to pave the way for others. They clearly understand that they are responsible for reaching back to get others. My 10-year-old plays two instruments and will spend time studying in Japan this coming semester. They are expected to complete graduate school before they even make plans for marriage. (I-21)

In her research on mothers and daughters reading together Feret (2007) suggests that the reading practices of Vicki and her daughter are meaningful. Feret reports that mothers who take time to read, listen, and respond to their daughters as readers, they send a powerful message that girls’ thoughts and experiences are important. While these interactions can help bolster a girls’ self-esteem and help assuage the lack of equal treatment in the classroom, mothers report simply valuing the opportunity to spend time together and “to hear [our daughters’] in-depth thoughts on different subject matters” (Crevier, 2006). (p. 30)

Rachel, who did not graduate from high school because she became a mother early in life, talks about how much she values education.
As a mother I influenced my children to get a good education. I encouraged them to go to school and complete their educations. I believe in education and know that it is what it takes for one to get ahead, especially our Black babies. I encouraged my kids to go as far in school as they could go. My oldest daughter is studying to be a psychiatrist and I am so proud of her. I wanted them all to attend a higher education institution. My youngest daughter experienced so much negative peer pressure that she chose to eventually drop out of school, a decision I am not at all happy about, but she has plans to return next semester to finish her schooling. I would like to tell all African American women to complete school and not to stop for anything—face the challenges—education is extremely important. (S-5)

Tanya also considers education as the most imperative ingredient for a good future. She said it this way,

I believe education is absolute. I have ingrained in my children that they must have something to fall back on, and education has always been the way out of no way for our people. My daughter is currently in college in a small town in the Midwest and is feeling very discouraged about the cultural climate. I do all I can to encourage her to keep moving forward even in the midst of a negative educational environment. (I-19)

Other mothers in this study discussed their disappointments with the education system. Louise is disheartened by the fact that she has not seen much change in the cultural issues that arise in the schools today. She explains that teachers and administrators are still claiming they do not see color or an individual’s cultural circumstances. This just proves there is no forward movement. The women I work with who are returning to school need special support, and the system is not
educated about or responsive to the needs of special populations of students.

Personally I notice that the principal at my nephew’s school targets him. My nephew gets his attention for things that White students do not get a head turn for. On the other hand, my daughter feels she is invisible to the system. She gets ignored. Schools are just not equipped to deal with students who are outside the mainstream culture other than in a negative way. (I-23)

Candie’s son attends what she describes as the most progressive school in her city where the principal is a Black male. She feels that this factor has a positive impact on her son and the other Black males in the school. Candie reports,

- my son has the principal as a role model and this is extremely important. He is in the Black Scholars Club and takes all college preparation classes. He truly understands that attending college is not a choice, it is an expectation. I want him to be as prepared for this world as possible because he constantly fights the stereotypes held against young African American males. (I-22)

Even with Rachel’s positive attitude toward education, she worries at times about the way the education system views children from the lower socio-economic end of the scale. She went to school in the early 1970s and experienced the beginning of children from impoverished communities being targeted and labeled by the school system. She recalls,

When I went to school, receiving the free lunch program equaled being less intelligent. We were impoverished, but my mom worked everyday. She just could not afford everything. So I was seen as having lower intelligence, automatically at risk for behavioral problems because I was from a one-parent family and our income was less than others. Any help my mom got seem to come with a price, a label that
had negative connotations for me as a student. Now educational resources are only available for kids that are assessed and diagnosed with a behavior disorder. This too is negative. I just wonder if there is not a different way for the education system to help kids who are struggling. The labels follow individuals through every system, all their lives. (FG-1)

Loewen (1995) explains the unfortunate position children from families with incomes on the low end of the economic scale face in the educational system. He shares his findings in this way,

even when poor children are fortunate enough to attend the same school as rich children, they encounter teachers who expect only children of affluent families to know the right answers. Social science research shows that teachers are often surprised and even distressed when poor children excel. (p. 204)

Jenny’s big issue with the school system has been with her son who is a child with special needs. He started showing signs of learning difficulty at an early age. She reached out for assistance right away, but reports that she had to fight the education system on every matter concerning his educational well-being. She explains that

the AEA misdiagnosed him. As a mother I could see his potential and possibilities and I spent years trying to get the education system to recognize and acknowledge his abilities. He wanted to play sports but they said no, so we fought about that and we won. He wanted to run track, but the system did not know how to deal with a special needs child on a track team so they said no. But we fought that and won. My son graduated as a child with special needs at the top 10% of his class and with assistance now lives successfully on his own and is helping others with special needs. (I-13)
As Community Members

One issue that all the participants felt strongly about was the plight of the African American community. The changes they have witnessed, particularly in the areas of education, family, and community, have sparked in them a deep-seated level of concern. They spoke candidly about what they see happening. Each of them felt passionately that the Black culture is responsible for resolving the intracultural issues now devastating the community. Given the idea of the Black community taking responsibility for itself, the women are all active members in their respective communities in efforts to address the issues facing the culture. Actively participating in both formal and grassroots initiatives is their way to give back to the culture so that others will benefit and have the genuine opportunities to positively move forward in their lives.

Blackwell (2006), one of the authors in *The Covenant with Black America*, offers this perspective about the decline of the community.

On the heels of the civil rights movement, whites—fearful of school integration—continued their outward march, this time to the suburbs; and middle-class African Americans embraced newly opened opportunities to find housing outside of the traditional black community. The ripple effect of these changes left abandoned inner-city neighborhoods of extreme poverty characterized by failing schools, few businesses to provide jobs, high crime and tense relationships with police, and declining retail presence, such as supermarkets and drug stores. (p. 100)

Communities are responsible for contributing to the welfare of their young people. Children are the spirit of their communities, and their needs must be a priority if they are to become healthy and responsible adults. Williams (2006) expounds on the state of the Black
community: “We are facing a series of crises in the black community today. A century’s worth of progress seems suddenly in peril. The lessons and values that carried an oppressed people from slavery to freedom seem in danger of being forgotten” (p. 24). For example, violence, which has been deemed a public health epidemic, deprives many children of the opportunities to which they are entitled during childhood. Sabol, Coulton, and Korbin (2004) report that a community’s ability to prevent violence varies and is dependent upon available resources, the amount of cohesion among residents, and the levels of interactions and trust among the people (pp. 322–345).

Miss Violet talks candidly about her disappointment with the community in which she has continued to reside, raise her children, and assist with raising her grandchildren.

The African American community is not doing our children any favors by letting them run rampant. We are not teaching them to be successful outside the home. With my children I never wanted to be anything but the momma—parents today want to be their children’s friends—the boundaries in that type of relationship are problematic. I wish parents would reclaim their roles as parents and help kids understand that children cannot do anything if they do not stay in school. Our kids have lost their purpose. (I-4)

Blackwell (2006) echoes this sentiment and reports that throughout America’s urban centers, an entire generation of young people has grown up isolated from the opportunities that stable, mixed-income neighborhoods can provide, while many older African Americans have been disheartened to watch their vibrant, nurturing childhood communities slide into blight and decline. (p. 102)
Miss Diane worries about the way Blacks continue to distance themselves from one another. She grew up at time when the community was a thriving body where people belonged and felt close to one another. She explains,

I feel that Blacks are disengaged from one another. We are too isolated. We have to find a way to reconnect with one another because isolation is an enemy especially to the African American female whose family is not involved with the issues that matter to her. I contribute some of this isolation to integration. We are spread out, busy trying to live life, and then, when we age, we discover we are alone and without our families. It is crucial to stay close to one another. (I-7)

As an educator who helped hundreds of children along the way, Miss Rosa is perplexed about the current condition of the Black community, specifically in regards to education. She cannot understand how things have gotten so out of control. She expresses her beliefs:

The message from my family was always that I had to do 130% because I was Black and Blacks have to do more to prove themselves—it is a given. The Black community has lost that push and that drive to move forward and pull others along. The Black community has lost the expectation that our people are to become successful. The community, family, and the individual are better off if there is a nuclear family in place. I cannot imagine what it would be like not to have a mother and father in the same home loving and caring for the children. Ensuring our children and community were successful used to be our focus. I have had ENOUGH from our community. We are in trouble. (I-5)
Miss Martha was self-employed and owned a business that was important to the parents and children in her community.

I operated my own day care learning center for several decades. As an educator of kids, I wanted them to learn. I used books to teach them, and when there was a question we went to the book to find the answer. I influenced at least three generations of children—more than 200 kids went through my day care center. I still see them or hear from many of them today, and that is how I know I made a difference. (S-1)

Vicki is a recruiter and educator for a local corporation. She is learning that her gift is to educate others on how to do well in the interviewing process. Helping people turn their negative self-messages into positive messages is her goal. She teaches others how to tap into their strengths and how to bring that into the interviewing process. Vicki is passionate about helping others, particularly Black women. She reports,

I denounce the messages of inferiority that I see so many Black women struggling to overcome. I have a responsibility to the culture. I believe that we are each other’s keepers. My purpose it to help others see their full potential so that they can be better people, better family members, and better members of their community. (I-21)

Additionally, Vicki, her husband, and several friends started a Saturday school for children needing extra help. This grassroots initiative, called African American Student Awareness (AASA), lasted for several years and touched the lives of children throughout their community.

Jenny and her husband started a nonprofit agency to teach other African American parents of children with special needs how to advocate for their children in the school
system. The program was in place for several years and was successful in helping parents learn the art of advocacy. (I-13)

Rhonda’s words reflect the concerns about the Black community that were expressed by all of the participants.

I wonder where the dream has gone, where the pillars of the Black community have gone. We are walking on the backs of our ancestors. People who are now in their 40s and 50s had a cause and were willing to fight for it. We were willing to lose our jobs, to go to jail and protest injustices. Now the injustices against our people are by our people. The only thing Black people are concerned about is individualism. We need to be willing to rise up and fight for what is right, even if that means going against segments of our own culture. We have to do it for the children and for the good of the whole race. (I-12)

About Spirituality and Faith

A study of African Americans would not be complete or accurate without some discussion of spirituality and faith, because spirituality and faith are central to the Black culture. During this research project, the women shared openly about the ways in which spirituality and faith contributed to their resilience in the formal educational environment and beyond and about how their beliefs and practices remain a strong force in their lives.

The understanding that spirituality and faith have been sustaining forces in the African American culture is reflected in the literature. For example, Hodge (2001) reports “spirituality is defined as a relationship with God, or whatever is held to be the Ultimate . . . that fosters a sense of meaning, purpose, and mission in life” (p. 204). Williams and Quinton (2003) assert that
In America’s battle with itself over slavery, legal segregation, and civil rights laws, the power of faith has been the cornerstone of efforts to save a nation’s soul. . . .

“Faith is the most powerful force in the world,” in the words of African American theologian James Cone. “It is the one thing. It is the light people can’t put out.” (p. 2–3).

From the time African Americans arrived on the continent, religious and spiritual practices have been lifelines for their communities. Our deep, personal relationships with God grew out of faith and hope for a savior who would bring freedom from the horrendous traumas that accompanied slavery. Prayer, song, fellowship, praise, devotion, and the Bible are the tools and the foundations of worship that sustain the women in this study. These practices extend from the church into the community and into the daily lives of families and individuals. Utilizing these tools has helped African American women overcome obstacles in the formal education system, gain a greater sense of peace and understanding, strengthen their spirit, and nurture others.

African American women have used faith and spirituality to positively confront circumstances beyond their control and to develop new boundaries and skills that will serve them well in future situations. Mastering the ability to deal with trauma is imperative for African American women and girls because, unfortunately, problems and barriers that contribute to trauma are widespread.

This project offered an opportunity for the study participants to interact with one another through focus groups and email communications. During these interactions the women were encouraged to ask questions of one another to seek feedback and input that would be helpful to their educational endeavors. In one email exchange, Rhonda who was
working full time, attending school full time, taking care of her children, and assisting with her grandchildren wondered if the other participants had full lives like she had, and, if so, how they managed. Rhonda posed these questions.

How have you persevered given your responsibility for work, family, and other life obligations? How have you made it through the hurdles? How do you keep climbing? Where do you get your strength? How do you keep going when you cannot see the light at the end of the tunnel? (I-12)

April responded this way.

This is a good question and very pertinent to my current thought process and events in my life. I know I am the youngest amongst the group but I have reached my quarter-life crisis. I know, I know, I have heard that it really doesn’t exist but that seems to be the best thing to explain this position in my life currently. I started my master’s in business January of 2006 and by December of the same year, I wasn’t sure if I wanted that degree versus another degree, if I wanted to continue my education, or if I just wanted to give up all together. The pressures of being a younger single mother have gotten to me in the way of, am I being a good mother to my child and am I taking my frustrations out on my child? I also asked if I am using my child as an excuse for not completing hurdles in my life that I am afraid I will fail? I question why my relationships aren’t working the way I expected? What are my true values? And what am I willing to accept in my life? As I asked these questions, more questions come up. I only know that my faith in God will help see me through all of the dilemmas in my life, including this one. (I-27)
Bobbi looks to her peers, God, and her elders when she is dealing with issues she finds distressing. She talked about it this way.

The way I have started to answer or clarify these questions and issues is by consulting the women in my life. I look to my peers and others in my age bracket for comfort, it is always easier to look at my situation in a realistic manner with the help of friends that can hold up a mirror to my actions and choices as well as share our feelings of being in similar situations. I also look to God and the older women in my life that have experienced this time of confusion, growth, and development into who I am, what I am about, and who I would like to become. I treasure their words of advice, because I know these women have been there, and done that. Granted I may still need to make the mistakes myself to get the full lesson I need to learn but when their words of advice ring true, they are still there to help me through. (I-25)

Louise also describes the power of spirituality and faith in her life. She shared, first and foremost that

with God, all things are possible, and without Him I can do nothing. So I first recognize that He is my source and strength. I thank God that he too has surrounded me with a Cloud of Witnesses who encourage and show us to keep pressing even when you can’t see the how or the why of it at the time. Plus I must remember God has my back, and if I look to him for guidance and direction he will see me through. (I-23)

Peggy credits God for helping her through every situation she has faced. Her spirituality is evident in every aspect of her life. She responded in this way.
Persevered is a great word. I think of it as determination on steroids. I haven't always had my obligations and responsibilities in the correct order nor have I had the correct mixture of responsibilities. The Lord is my savior and leader. He has shown me when I’m out of order through His word. He sends messages about His desires for me through other believers who share their life stories. God will use a willing person. If He chooses to use someone, He provides everything. He promises to lead the way and never leave. I believe Him. I depend on His promises. It has been my experience that God uses circumstances and people to accomplish His will. He is the master orchestra director. (I-11)

Candie emphasizes the enormous role faith has continuously played in her life when she says,

simply put, faith and Divine grace. I believe that I was designed and delivered with purpose. Even when I didn’t understand the journey unfolding before my eyes, the barriers that became stepping-stones and the childhood environment that became armor and tools for life all were predetermined. I keep climbing and hurdling because I believe that I can and it is important for me to be an example and create a legacy for my son and women who unknowingly watch my walk and talk. My strength comes from past experiences that at one time seemed impossible to overcome, my strength comes from black women in the past who made it possible for me to be free, independent and worthy. I keep going just by the mere fact that I KNOW there is light at the end of the tunnel. I have been through many tunnels in my young life and each time through divine guidance I always reach the light. (I-22)
Tanya shares about her faith in her family and how she depends on their strength to help her parent her daughter in a positive manner. She describes how she keeps going in this way:

Despite this time of confusion in my life, I do keep climbing. I keep climbing first for myself. I know that this is a season in life; there is a lesson to be learned from it and it will pass as all seasons do. But I keep climbing most for my daughter. I know her family is whole as it is, but with her father such a wild card I feel it is vital for me to show her that she can persevere, no matter what. That her limits are her imagination and what ever she dreams is possible. I think if I have that instilled in her at a young age, it will empower her to dream big. I feel like with everything and every decision I am making I am trying to make up for her father and his ways. I know I don’t need to because with the support system my family has set up for her, she will be just fine. (I-19)

Shane continues to reflect on how far her faith has brought her in her life. She continues to stay focused on God to help her through life circumstances. She explained it this way.

I think the biggest thing that is keeping me going is my faith in God. It has wavered before and I am not proud of that, but when I look back at when I have overcome, I can see his hand on me and my life. So when I don’t know what to do, I am learning to just trust that God’s plan is better than mine and if I trust in him everything will work out for the best. (I-15)

Miss Diane also uses her faith to confront the adversities in her path. She shared her feelings about moving forward in life this way.
Well I must echo others in that my spirituality and my connection to the Divine have ordered my steps all of my life whether or not I’ve been aware of it. In recent years however, I have become more aware of my connection to the Divine and my place and connection in the universe, this has allowed me to excel and breeze through hurdles with little effort on my part and all of the work being done by God. It does not, however, mean that I don’t experience the fear that comes with facing the hurdles; it simply means that I know that I’m supported by the ultimate Divine force and, no matter what, I will get through and persevere. I keep climbing because that’s all I’ve ever done and know how to do. I know that I must rely on my supports in order to climb higher and sometimes just to move at all. This is where my network of family, cohorts and most of all my African American sisters (none of us blood related) plays a major role for me. Every time I look around it seems I see a sister in the shadows cheering me on. I also take every opportunity to do the same. I even feel the support through this email as I look upon the list of names above. I feel we could have another network of support growing right here. My strength comes from listening to my inner voice which I now know is spirit (God) speaking directly to me. In addition, as others have expressed I also watch for clues and know that nothing is a coincidence and people are put into my life for a reason as God uses anyone willing to send the message that will allow his work to be done. When I cannot see the light at the end of the tunnel, I keep taking one step at a time, knowing that as long as I’m lead by the spirit, I’m heading in the right direction and it all makes sense in His Divine plan. I may never see the entire scope of the plan but I have blind faith that
the outcome is good. When I cannot see light, it’s blind faith that propels me through. (I-7)

Angela talked about her faith with certainty. She calls upon God for everything. She describes her spiritual journey this way,

WHEW!! And sometimes . . . I KNOW that I KNOW that the only reason I have survived is because of God. He is the ONLY reason. And when my mind stops…and I feel as if I can’t do anymore . . . I have to do just the mundane, over and over, one-step-in-front-of-the-next stuff, the kind of stuff where it takes no thinking ability. There have been so many times that I have been on auto pilot and doing what I need without thinking. And this is bad, but sometimes even driving myself to work. One time really scared me because (this has been a while), but I don’t remember leaving the house, I don’t remember driving to work, I don’t remember logging on at work. I just remember being on the phone with a customer and I was talking. I have no idea what the customer had said. That was scary.

But I think when I just do the same thing day in and day out because my brain/heart can’t take anymore, God just covers my mind from the outside pain so I can concentrate on the little things—like walking to the door. (I-10)

As these excerpts show, all of the participants responded in ways that reflect how spirituality and faith are ingrained in their lives, no matter their ages or the eras in which they were schooled. For years African American women have sought refuge in God, their faith, and the church from the ugliness of the world. These women often struggled with the expectation that Black women are strong and can overcome any obstacles, a myth that is detrimental to our self-esteem. At times Black women are expected to transcend human
limitations. Thomas (2004) asserts “no other group has been victimized by hegemonic domination and location within the hierarchical power structure as Black women in American society” (p. 286). Williams (2006) reminds us that Cosby places some of the responsibility for the trauma Black women experience squarely on the shoulders of Black men: “You can’t blame white people for everything wrong in your life. . . What white man made you write a record calling black women bitches and whores?” (p. 21).

All of the women in this study have experienced the pressures of having to be superhuman in their responsibilities to the education system, within their family units, and as community members. No one can dispute that African American women have the strength and courage needed to survive and thrive in this world because this has been demonstrated time and again. However, this myth does a disservice to Black women in that it exploits our right to attend to our personal wounds and traumas.

The spirituality and faith described by these women were the forces behind their attending to their personal needs and being resilient in both the formal education environment and in other life situations. In fact, spirituality and faith were important components of my experiences as a student and as a researcher.

Adding the Researcher’s Voice

In keeping with grounded theory protocols, I sought to bring my authentic, researcher’s voice to demonstrate connections between the participants’ experiences and my encounters with the formal education system. As an African American woman who grew up as one of the very youngest Baby Boomers, I was old enough to be aware of the struggles my culture faced but too young to participate in the protest and sit-ins like my older siblings. So I spent most of my young life quietly sitting on the sidelines. I grew up in a working class
community that was considered diverse by the standards of the day. My family valued 
education and pushed me to perform well in school. My love for learning began as a young 
child; I hungered for the information offered in the formal school setting.

Like the women in the study I faced many unwarranted hurdles from the time I was a 
young girl in school. This obstacle course began in the first grade. I was so excited—today 
was the day I would learn to read. This was my big chance to discover how to let my 
imagination be carried away with the characters in books. Given the traumas I was 
experiencing in my personal life I knew that escaping through reading was just what I 
needed.

The first book my teacher put before me was *Little Black Sambo*. Before the end of 
the reading lesson one of the children pointed at the three Black children in the class and 
yelled, “Oh look! We have our own little Black Sambos.” The name stayed with me for the 
remainder of the year. Somehow the teacher did a better job than I at ignoring the horrific 
teasing; needless to say my enthusiasm for reading books with the class dwindled.

In the third grade, I witnessed a young Black girl being relentlessly beaten by a White 
teacher during square dance time because she did not want to join in the lesson. The teacher 
beat her so hard that the wooden stick she was using broke in half; she then doubled it up and 
beat her some more. At the end of the beating the girl lay limp on the floor. The teacher 
turned toward the area where I was sitting with other Black children and said, “You will all 
learn what is being taught to you no matter what you feel.” The two other White teachers in 
the room looked on in silence.

My White, seventh-grade science teacher pulled me and another Black female 
classmate out into the hallway one day and promised that he would ride us so hard that we
would not make it through his class. He said if we told anyone it would not be good. The piercing and angry look in his eyes assured us he was serious. The other student and I were both scared, but we never talked to each other or anybody else about what we had experienced. I made it through the class with a D.

In a 10th grade history class, my White teacher told the class on several occasions that Negroes had not really contributed to this country and that slaves were not really treated badly. I felt helpless and unable to defend myself as I realized that I had not learned anything of value about my culture up to that moment in my formal educational experience.

In my senior year as graduation neared, I became excited about the possibility of attending college. I finally mustered up enough courage to talk to my guidance counselor who was, I thought, supposed to assist me. I walked into his office and told him I wanted to go to college and that I had a plan I wanted to share with him. Before I could begin to explain my plan, he told me in a very matter-of-fact way that I was not college material and that I should get a job as a file clerk or in a factory. When I persisted in seeking his help, he said he would not use his time on me. I returned to class doubtful, discouraged, and hurt, and feeling ashamed and defeated.

Although I graduated from high school a semester early with decent grades, my educational experiences left me feeling dispirited, humiliated, and wounded. I tightly locked away any belief that I could be successful in college, and the shame I felt deep inside kept me from pursuing higher education. Eventually I figured out through life experience—and the support of my family and community—that the messages he gave me were wrong. Recognizing hurdles and adversity and working to overcome them is one of the main ways I connect with the women in this study.
It took me almost two decades to find the strength and the courage to walk through the doors of a college to pursue a degree. My apprehension and anxiety made the walk to my first class long and agonizing. I was so sick to my stomach I barely made it to the bathroom. In the bathroom I met another African American women, who also was sick to her stomach for the same reasons. We walked to class together and became study buddies for my first year of higher education.

My experiences in higher education have been mostly positive. I found most of the professors to be encouraging and fair-minded, but I also experienced some educators who entered the classroom with biases toward students of color, but like Peggy (I-11) from this study, the more I achieved academically the less I allowed the negative behavior of professors to affect me. I had finally discovered that the only force that could keep me from moving forward in higher education was myself. Now I recognize that the experiences leading up to being a Ph.D. candidate have been the best experiences I’ve had in the formal education system for many reasons. Most important among these reasons is that all of the professors in this discipline are women who bring extremely high standards, great knowledge, and significant contributions both to the literature and the practice of the profession. The learning environment has been one of compassion tempered with high expectations which sets the tone for students to achieve, reach their potential, and be successful in educational endeavors.

Like the women in this study, I discovered personal strength and endurance and the ability to continue learning and growing in the face of adversities in the formal education environment. Until I conducted this study, I was not able to—in fact, could not allow myself
to—recognize the magnitude of learning resilience among African American women in the formal educational environment.
CHAPTER 5

Conclusions, Recommendations, and Implications

In this study, the voices of 27 African American women emerged through interviews, focus groups, observations, and two electronic interactions, participation in a chat room and e-mail exchanges. Although the women reported adversities and hurdles both in the education system and in their families and communities, the women refused to be defeated in the pursuit of their educational goals. This resilience was consistent across the generations, which lead to the development of the grounded theory of learning resilience among African American women in the formal education environment which is summarized in this chapter.

After a brief discussion of the ways this study contributes to the Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) discipline, this chapter offers two kinds of recommendations, recommendations for the practices of the FCS education system and recommendations for research in the discipline. The chapter closes with an examination of the implications of this research.

Conclusions

This study focuses on the experiences of individual women who are unsung s/heroes, the everyday African American women who make a difference not only in their own lives, but also in the lives of others, even though their efforts may go unnoticed. The women responded to the two-part question that is the basis of this study: What are the lived experiences of African American women in the education system? and What influence have family and community had on these experiences?
Chapter 1 addressed the problems related to the messages regarding African Americans and education that are mostly negative and are constantly being paraded in the face of the Black community despite the fact that women like the participants in this study are making good things happen in communities all over the country. These women are active in and on behalf of their communities and education systems, and they use their voices as educators, mothers, grandmothers, and community members to motivate, inspire, nurture, and support others in their endeavors to succeed academically. A consistent theme that emerged from these women’s voices was that of resilience, particularly resilience in learning, in the face of adversities in the formal education system, within family systems, and in their communities. This common narrative is not the one presented in the media as often or with the same emphasis that negative stories receive on a daily basis.

Researchers who explore issues of race, class, and gender in society at large and in the media specifically support the argument that there is the appearance of a double standard when it comes to portraying African Americans. For example, Omi and Winant (1986) point to the media for their role in levying negative messages against Blacks:

Film and television are notorious in disseminating images of racial minorities which establish for audiences what people from these groups look like, how they behave, and “who they are.” The power of the media lies not only in their ability to reflect the dominant racial ideology, but in their capacity to shape that ideology in the first place. (p. 17)

The first purpose of this study is to offer hope to other African American women by helping them value their efforts in the formal educational system. Teachers and professors could use the narratives presented here to have a positive effect on African American
women. The study’s second purpose is to share the stories of five generations of African American women that reveal both the adversities they faced and their successes with the education system at every level from primary grades to doctoral programs, stories that can influence others in similar situations. These stories directly contradict the pervasive, negative messages about African Americans in general and African American women specifically.

**Findings**

Several important findings emerged from this study. First, I argue for using alternative research approaches—such as grounded theory—to more fully explore and more accurately describe experiences within systems. In short, I suggest that statistics alone misrepresent outcomes particularly when exploring African American women’s experiences with the education system. For example, five of the women in this study quit high school, but, of this number, three returned to complete their primary education and went on to obtain either an associates or a bachelors degree. Four of the participants dropped out of college, but later completed degrees in higher education. In a study based on statistics alone, these successes may not have been counted. In fact, what has happened in the past has often meant that the women’s decisions to quit high school or drop out of college were highlighted in ways that signaled failure instead of true outcomes. Incorporating the life stories of research participants—especially positioning these narratives as central to the research—brings clarity and depth of understanding to the relationships within the phenomenon under examination, as in this case, the participants’ experiences in the education system.

A similar finding is that societal factors and intracultural phenomenon not only affect the way members of the African American community experience the education system, but
also affect how the system experiences the African American culture and its students. For example, segregation shaped education in the decades of 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s; integration had its impact during the decades of the 1950s and 1960s; busing made its mark during the 1970s; the crack cocaine crisis created major devastation in the African American community during the 1980s; and hip hop strongly influenced both the culture and the education system during the 1990s.

Further, the participants’ ages emerged as an important factor. Twenty-seven African American women from five generations, ranging in age from 20 to 91 participated in the research. In coding and analyzing the data, it became clear that one useful way of looking at the data was to group the participants into age-related generations because women of similar ages had similar experiences with the education system. Table 9 summarizes the relationships between the generations, the eras, and the time spans of each (see also Appendix L).

### Table 9. Ways of viewing the study participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Five Decades of Schooling</th>
<th>Five Generations of Participants</th>
<th>Birth Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Segregation 1930–1940s</td>
<td>Traditionalists</td>
<td>1910–1929</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration 1950–1960s</td>
<td>Pioneers of Integration</td>
<td>1930–1945</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Busing 1970s</td>
<td>Baby Boomers</td>
<td>1946–1964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hip hop culture 1990s–present</td>
<td>Millennials</td>
<td>1982–forward</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additionally, this study concluded that the participants’ experiences with the education system, their communities, and their families are accurately reflected as a continuum that goes beyond a simplistic dichotomy of adversity and benefit. Although each woman in this study described specific adversities as well as rewards and benefits from their years of schooling, many common themes emerged that encompassed high and low points at every level of the formal education system. For instance, the women schooled during
segregation described the horrors that accompanied the racist practices of society that bled into the classroom. On the other hand, in part *because* of segregation, they had access to African American educators both in the educational system and in their communities. They also benefited by learning the positive history of their culture through the curriculum and classroom lessons. On the other hand, the youngest participants pointed to technology and access to the colleges of choice, notably historically Black universities and colleges, as benefits within the education system. Conversely, the negative messages from the hip hop culture played a role in the way the youngest participants believed young women were to behave, which, in turn, affected how they fit into their peer groups at school.

Finally, the women in this study proved to be successful in their educational endeavors with or without the support of either family or community. However, some participants with intact support systems—which means close family members, friends, and neighbors—experienced a sense of protection that sustained them. Other participants reported missing this element in their lives. Further, although many of the participants had the unwavering support of their fathers, it was their mothers’ support that was the most influential throughout their years of schooling.

Williams (2006) explains the creed Black people lived under regarding education. Black people took a risk to get an education. Education was a radical tool of liberation for black people so recently enslaved and purposely denied the chance to learn. To be able to read and write was a sign of self-determination, of strength. A man or woman who could read was a cut above, clearly focused on leaving cultural and educational capital for their children, even if they had no monetary wealth to pass
on. “Educate! Educate! Educate! Get all the knowledge within reach and then use it for the good of the race,” J. Max Barber, a black journalist, wrote in 1905. (p. 88)

This same philosophy was described by many of the families of the women across the generations. For example, Louise, a member of the Generation Xers, shared, “I grew up believing everyone went to college. This was the law in my family . . . mom was the enforcer and dad provided the back up. Not getting a good education was not an option” (I-23). Bobbi, one of the youngest women in the study, explains, “my family strongly encouraged me to do better in life and stressed that getting a good education would place me in a position to be competitive and have a better life” (I-25). These findings are consistent with Ladner’s (1998) assertion that “returning to our traditional African American values is the best way for us to put aside our fears about the future” (p. xiii).

**Methods, Limitations, and Procedures**

Grounded theory, the research methodology used for this study, looks at what is going on in the matter being explored, in this case the experiences of African American women in the formal education environment and the influence of family and community on those experiences. Glaser and Strauss developed grounded theory in 1967, with the philosophy that all data, including the experience of the researcher, must be considered and utilized as much as possible.

One of the limitations of this study is common to all qualitative research, that grounded theory research can’t be taken whole cloth and generalized to the larger population. “Generalizing to a larger population is a unit orientation that is not appropriate to grounded theory” (Glaser, 1992, p. 106). Although this study cannot be directly replicated, it can be used as a basis for other research because other Black women are likely to have similar
experiences so they may relate to the phenomenon under study. Other possible limitations might include study participants’ unconscious desire for positive self disclosure. As with any study based on present recall of past events, there is a possibility that the topical focus and research process might influence recall in that participants may more readily interpret their memories in light of the topic.

Between July 2006 and April 2007, I conducted preliminary interviews, follow-up interviews and focus groups, and facilitated an MSN group room website and group email communications to gather the data for this study. In addition to these scheduled activities, I had two opportunities to observe participants in their roles as educators.

The Participants

Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to provide anonymity and confidentiality. The indicators, I = initial interview, S = second interview, FG = focus group, and O = observation, represent the categories of the procedures completed during the project. I include Table 10 here as a reminder of the research process as well as a reminder of the participants’ characteristics (see also Appendix K for initial coding information about the participants and their experiences). The women are arranged according to their particular generational age group.
Table 10. Study participants by age and data-gathering participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Initial interview</th>
<th>Second interview</th>
<th>Focus group</th>
<th>Observation</th>
<th>MSN</th>
<th>e-mail</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Miss Martha</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>I-1</td>
<td>S-1</td>
<td>FG-2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss Harriet</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>I-2</td>
<td>S-2</td>
<td>FG-1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss Felicia</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>I-3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss Violet</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>I-4</td>
<td>S-3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss Rosa</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>I-5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss Maya</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>I-6</td>
<td>S-4</td>
<td>FG-2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss Diane</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>I-7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perri</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>I-8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>I-9</td>
<td>S-5</td>
<td>FG-1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angela</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>I-10</td>
<td>S-6</td>
<td>FG-1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peggy</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>I-11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhonda</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>I-12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>I-13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>I-14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>O-1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shane</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>I-15</td>
<td>S-7</td>
<td></td>
<td>O-2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barb</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>I-16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karri</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>I-17</td>
<td>S-8</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katherine</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>I-18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanya</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>I-19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>O-3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natasha</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>I-20</td>
<td></td>
<td>FG-2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicki</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>I-21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candie</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>I-22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louise</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>I-23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>O-4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ricki</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>I-24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bobbi</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>I-25</td>
<td>S-9</td>
<td>FG-2</td>
<td>O-5</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nieva</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>I-26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>I-27</td>
<td>S-10</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Contributions to the Literature

This study makes several contributions to the literature of the FCS discipline. First, it offers 71 consecutive years worth of information regarding the education system, the family, and the community, all systems needed to enhance a quality life, which is the mission of family and consumer sciences. A multi-generational view of the broad range of experiences African American women encountered at every level of the formal education system benefits educators and administrators as they work to create inclusive environments, appropriate curriculum, and culturally competent programming for all students.
This study demonstrates the complex issues Black women live with on a daily basis and how they persevere with or without the support of family or community. The women in this study shared a wide variety of experiences with the education system from their perspectives as students, educators, mothers, and grandmothers, leading to a collective wisdom. This collective wisdom goes beyond the experiences of one woman’s age. Instead the collective wisdom can be represented as the blended experiences of all of the participants—an astonishing 1,307 years of life experience—within the systems of education, family, and community.

In spite of the adversities faced by these 27 women, 100% of them are steadfast advocates for the formal education system, a factor that is not always reflected in the literature. It is important to note the passion for learning expressed by each of the study participants. This was the vehicle that drove them to continue their path to success in the formal education environment even in the midst of traumas and adversities. Exploring one’s feelings about learning may help educators and school counselors encourage Black women to work through their troubles and stay the course in their educational endeavors. Learning institutions developing supportive programming for African American women can also benefit from this knowledge.

**Recommendations for Practice in FCS Education**

Several recommendations can be made as a result of this study. In this section, I offer a few practical suggestions for FCS Education.

The profession should continue strengthening the social systems people need for a good quality of life by developing curriculum and providing accessible, community-based
programming through university extension services that directly address current issues and conditions that suggest a call to action. These vital issues—racism, oppression, crack cocaine addiction, Black-on-Black crime, gang violence, and pervasive messages that are degrading to women and incite violence and hopelessness—contribute to the fragmentation and brokenness experienced by Black families.

Supporting the resurrection of strong Black families and communities is another area that warrants attention from FCS professionals. Members of the two youngest generations of women in this study reported that they have not experienced the intact Black family or the experience of a thriving Black community—similar to what we refer to today as the village concept—that existed for their parents or grandparents. These women have had to reinvent these entities. For example, for some of the Generation Xers and Millennials, family may now consist of a circle of friends not related by blood, and their communities may be those same people, plus the parents and grandparents of their friends. These young women indicated that multi-generational influences are still important to them. The elders in their families of choice mimic the traditional Black family experience by facilitating the transmission of wisdom and knowledge and by providing a nurturing environment complete with positive messages and culturally specific, historical lessons that only elders can provide. This is not to say that families of choice are the only viable options, but instead reflects a shift toward inclusive families and communities made up of both friends and relatives.

FCS educators can encourage all students to value the benefits derived from their families and communities. As educators, we must also credit the students for acknowledging the importance of, then deliberately surrounding themselves with, folks who can provide the guidance they need to progress in the education system. Further, the profession should
establish itself as a vital part of the support circle needed for African American women to be successful in the formal education system by helping to remove barriers that hinder the development of strong relationships within families and communities.

Additionally, FCS educators can recognize the situations, circumstances, and demands facing our women students and work to privilege their voices and ensure that their experiences are not minimized in the formal education environment. FCS educators can adapt their lessons so they are representative as well as inclusive of the wide range of life experiences, age, and ethnicities of their students. In keeping with the discipline’s “Sound Bite: Empowering Individuals, Strengthening Families, Enabling Communities,” FCS education ought to convey the importance of personal and community accountability, parental responsibilities, and family values by promoting powerful and positive messages that Black women need (Kappa Omicron Nu, n.d.). Black women especially need to be encouraged to reject any notion that they are not worthy and that they somehow have failed if they need to put their education on hold for a period of time. FCS educators should be charged with consistently and continuously helping Black women explore their options as students, so they can determine the best path to follow.

Given the responses of the participants in this study, we need to hold fast to the fact that FCS is a powerful discipline that has been developed and created mostly by the hands of women, for women. Educators in the profession must continue to value and promote the work of women at every level of the discipline and insist that FCS education can play critical roles in ensuring practical and relevant lessons for students facing complex issues.
Recommendations for Education Across the Disciplines

Beyond the boundaries of FCS education, formal educational institutions across all disciplines and at all levels must continue to take measures to increase the diversity of the faculty, for example, by hiring more Black women. Although hiring African American men would certainly meet diversity requirements, hiring Black women is especially important because of our passion for education and our love of learning that is embodied in our experiences as students, teachers, mothers, and community leaders.

The education system must continue to partner with local, privately funded organizations (e.g., agencies like the United Way and other organizations, community centers, and churches) that serve African American families because programs run by these groups can—and to some extent, already do—provide the mentoring and individual attention many students need. These partnerships also would engage young people and their parents with systems that consistently promote the value of education. These are examples of ways to disseminate positive messages to members of the African American community that can counter the negative messages perpetuated by today’s media.

Finally, educators in higher learning institutions should proactively reach out to African American students and provide support rather than waiting to be asked to do so. The data in this study indicate that African American women, particularly those attending predominately White colleges and universities, benefit from the support of educators.

The next two recommendations have to do with the roles Black Greek organizations can play as partners with the education system through scholarships and other activities. The first of these recommendations has to do with strengthening partnerships that already are in place that promote and support formal education. The most influential forces for this mission...
are the Black Greek organizations whose entire reason for being is to strengthen Black culture and to promote education. Bennett (2008) explains that, “more than one million members representing nine Black sororities and fraternities . . . play a central role in contemporary American and global issues” (p. 104). These organizations together raise millions of dollars every year in scholarship money for members of the Black culture. All members of these organizations are college-educated individuals who engage in public service to increase the quality of life for African Americans. These organizations host programs and events that are educational and that support young Black men and women who aspire to be successful in formal educational institutions.

The second way Black Greek organizations can influence the education system is by holding that system accountable through membership on search, admissions, and diversity committees. These entities would also provide a method of accountability of the hiring practices of learning institutions across the nation. Working in partnership with Black organizations would provide educational institutions greater access to a continuous pool of qualified and experienced candidates who can be groomed to take on leadership roles.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Although there is value in analyzing information from across a spread of generations, it might be useful to concentrate research efforts on one generation to help educators develop strategies to meet the needs of future students. It logically follows that the children of the youngest generation in this study are the future of the African American community. By focusing on the experiences of the youngest generation in this study whose schooling years were heavily influenced by changing and developing technology and the hip hop culture,
educators can prepare for the next generation of African American women entering learning institutions.

Further, research on the revitalization of inner-city communities could provide crucial information about who now resides in these areas and about how those residents might join in efforts to rebuild the local schools and to help the students who live in the community. Blackwell (2006) claims,

we are witnessing a revival of urban life, as young professionals and suburban residents return to central-city neighborhoods, drawn to the convenience, bustling sidewalks, and cultural amenities many revitalized downtown areas now offer. Even some of the most blighted neighborhoods have experienced rapid, stunning reinvestment and rejuvenation over the past several years. (p. 102)

This study only scratched the surface of the rich field for research into the lives and experiences of African American women. I suggest that more researchers take advantage of the powerful shifts within the Black community by conducting studies that focus on young African American families who value education even though they did not experience the traditional Black values system. This kind of study would provide insight for educators and stakeholders to reach out to African Americans who, for many reasons, may not view education as significant.

Finally, I strongly urge future FCS researchers to consider using grounded theory, particularly in studies that focus on the experiences of African Americans and other marginalized groups, for three reasons. First, the issues emerge from the data—the stories of the participants—which is a departure from more traditional approaches that go to the field to support certain claims. Second, because the data gathering process comes before the
literature review, grounded theory analysts are less subject to preconceived notions about the populations under study, which is especially important when working with vulnerable populations. The third reason I support grounded theory is based on my experience of keeping the human tendency to stereotype in check. Minimizing stereotypes is crucial if a researcher is to fully connect and build trust with study participants.

**Oh! The Possibilities**

The belief among a segment of the African American culture that education is no longer needed for a quality life is an issue that members of the community must stand against and fight to change, one family at a time. The women in this study stand as representatives of the fact that, no matter the adversities they face or personal circumstances people bear, people can rise above trauma, succeed academically, and have a better quality life—a life full of possibilities.

Like much research, as this study ends, more questions emerge, questions such as *Are there more African American women with similar stories? Where can we find other everyday women making a difference in their lives and the lives of others? How can we ensure that their stories are told?* These questions, these possibilities, deserve to be explored and new stories are worthy of taking their places in the literature alongside the voices of these participants.

For me, the next possibility is to take the stories gathered here and find forums for sharing the stories and the hope they represent. I am exploring the possibility of working with a playwright and song writer to give voice to the stories in ways that will carry the messages that will inspire action, especially action that builds hope in the world.
Twenty-seven great women—women of passion, wisdom, and action—have been the heart and soul of this study. I believe that when the Maya Angelou (1983), poet, author, educator, and orator, declared *Still I Rise*, she spoke of these phenomenal women.

You may write me down in history With your bitter twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt But still, like dust, I’ll rise.
Does my sassiness upset you? Why are you beset with gloom?
‘Cause I walk like I’ve got oil wells pumping in my living room.
Just like moons and like suns, With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high, Still I’ll Rise.
Did you want to see me broken? Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Shoulders falling down like teardrops, Weakened by my soulful cries.
Does my haughtiness offend you? Don’t you take it awful hard
‘Cause I laugh like I’ve got gold mines Diggin’ in my own backyard.
You may shoot me with your words, You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness, But still, like air, I’ll rise.
Does my sexiness upset you? Does it come as a surprise
That I dance like I’ve got diamonds At the meeting of my thighs?
Out of the huts of history’s shame I rise, Up from a past that’s rooted in pain,
I rise, I’m a black ocean, leaping and wide, welling and swelling I bear in the tide.
Leaving behind nights of terror and fear, I rise, Into a daybreak that’s wondrously clear; I rise, Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave. I am the hope and the dream of the slave. I rise, I rise, I rise.
Without a doubt Maya Angelou’s words genuinely describe the experiences of the spirited African American women featured in this study whose lives demonstrate that they are genuine contenders in the world, true soldiers toiling on the battlefield to ensure the academic survival of the Black culture. Their accomplishments are proof that the learning resilience among African American women in the formal education environment is grounded in truth.
References


The%20Microsoft%20Network


List of Appendices

APPENDIX A
Institutional Review Board Forms

APPENDIX B
The Research Letter to Participants

APPENDIX C
Thank You for Participating Letter

APPENDIX D
Informed Consent and Confidentiality Form

APPENDIX E
Telephone Script for Research Participants

APPENDIX F
Questions for Research Participants

APPENDIX G
Follow-Up Questions for Research Participants

APPENDIX H
Statement of Confidentiality for MSN group room

APPENDIX I
MSN group room Members Communication

APPENDIX J
MSN group room Access Instructions

APPENDIX K
Initial Coding Chart

APPENDIX L
Timeline of Eras
APPENDIX A
Institutional Review Board Forms
DATE: September 21, 2006

TO: Sandra L. McGee
    3201 East 42nd Court, Des Moines, IA 50314

CC: Dr. Cheryl Hausafus
    30 E MacKay Hall

FROM: Jan Canny, IRB Administrator
    Office of Research Assurances

SUBJECT: IRB ID 06-413

Approval Date: 20 September 2006
Date for Continuing Review: 19 September 2007

The Co-Chair of the Institutional Review Board of Iowa State University has reviewed and approved the protocol entitled: "Let the Voices Emerge: The Lived Experience of African American Women, a Multi-generation Phenomenon." The protocol has been assigned the following ID Number: 06-413. Please refer to this number in all correspondence regarding the protocol.

Your study has been approved from September 20, 2006 to September 19, 2007. The continuing review date for this study is no later than September 19, 2007. Federal regulations require continuing review of ongoing projects. Please submit the form with sufficient time (i.e., three to four weeks) for the IRB to review and approve continuation of the study, prior to the continuing review date.

Failure to complete and submit the continuing review form will result in expiration of IRB approval on the continuing review date and the file will be administratively closed. All research related activities involving the participants must stop on the continuing review date, until approval can be re-established, except when necessary to eliminate immediate hazard to research participants. As a courtesy to you, we will send a reminder of the approaching review prior to this date.

Please remember that any changes in the protocol or consent form may not be implemented without prior IRB review and approval, using the "Continuing Review and/or Modification" form. Research investigators are expected to comply with the principles of the Belmont Report, and state and federal regulations regarding the involvement of humans in research. These documents are located on the Office of Research Assurances website or available by calling (515) 294-4556, www.compliance.iastate.edu.

You must promptly report any of the following to the IRB: (1) all serious and/or unexpected adverse experiences involving risks to subjects or others; and (2) any other unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.

Upon completion of the project, please submit a Project Closure Form to the Office of Research Assurances, 1138 Pearson Hall, to officially close the project.
ISU NEW HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW FORM

SECTION I: GENERAL INFORMATION

Principal Investigator (PI): Sandra L. McGee
Phone: 515-284-1553  Fax: 515-285-2032
Degrees: PhD Candidate  Correspondence Address: 3201 East 42nd Court, Des Moines, Iowa 50314
Department: Apparel, Educational Studies and Hospitality Management  Email Address: McS1.54@mchsi.com
Center/Institute: College: Human Sciences
PI Level: ☐ Faculty ☐ Staff ☐ Postdoctoral ☒ Graduate Student ☐ Undergraduate Student

Title of Project: Let the Voices Emerge: The Lived Experiences of African American Women, A Multi-generation Phenomenon
Project Period (Include Start and End Date): [mm/dd/yy][09/30/06] to [mm/dd/yy][09/30/07]

FOR STUDENT PROJECTS

Name of Major Professor/Supervising Faculty: Cheryl O. Hausfas
Phone: 515-294-5307
Department: Apparel, Educational Studies and Hospitality Management
Email Address: haus@iastate.edu

Type of Project: (check all that apply)
☐ Research  ☐ Thesis  ☒ Dissertation  ☐ Class project  ☐ Independent Study (490, 590, Honors project)  ☐ Other. Please specify: __________

KEY PERSONNEL.

List all members and relevant experience of the project personnel. This information is intended to inform the committee of the training and background related to the specific procedures that the each person will perform on the project.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME &amp; DEGREE(S)</th>
<th>SPECIFIC DUTIES ON PROJECT</th>
<th>TRAINING &amp; EXPERIENCE RELATED TO PROCEDURES PERFORMED, DATE OF TRAINING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sandra L. McGee</td>
<td>Project Research Analyst-interview participants, host gathering, conduct follow-up interviews, develop and monitor MSN grouproom website, document, code, sort, analyze data</td>
<td>ISU IRB #2 03-673 Exempt Date: September 9, 2003; - FCEDS 626 Advanced Research Methods - July 2005; - Grounded Theory Institute - Mills Valley CA - Certificate of Attendance - 2006; Member of Grounded Theory Research Institute April 2006</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Assurances 12/01/2005
Dr. Cheryl Haussafus | Major Professor - will provide guidance, feedback, and input on the research project. | COHs Training 9-19-2002

| Present | 9/19/02 |

**FUNDING INFORMATION**

- Internally funded, please provide account number: NA
- Externally funded, please provide funding source and account number: NA
- Funding is pending please provide OSPA Record ID on GoldSheet: NA
- Title on GoldSheet if Different Than Above: NA
- Other: e.g., funding will be applied for later: NA

**SCIENTIFIC REVIEW**

Although the assurance committees are not intended to conduct peer review of research proposals, the federal regulations include language such as “consistent with sound research design,” “rationale for involving animals or humans” and “scientifically valuable research,” which requires that the committees consider in their review the general scientific relevance of a research study. Proposals that do not meet these basic tests are not justifiable and cannot be approved. If an assurance review committee(s) has concerns about the scientific merit of a project and the project was not competitively funded by peer review or was funded by corporate sponsors, the project may be referred to a scientific review committee. The scientific review committee will be ad hoc and will consist of your ISU peers and outside experts as needed. If this situation arises, the PI will be contacted and given the option of agreeing that a consultant may be contacted or withdrawing the proposal from consideration.

- Yes ☒ No Has or will this project receive peer review?

If the answer is “yes,” please indicate who did or will conduct the review:

If a review was conducted, please indicate the outcome of the review:

**NOTE: RESPONSE CELLS WILL EXPAND AS YOU TYPE AND PROVIDE SUFFICIENT SPACE FOR YOUR RESPONSE.**

**COLLECTION OR RECEIPT OF SAMPLES**

Will you be: (Please check all that apply.)

- ☒ Yes No Receiving samples from outside of ISU? See examples below.
- ☒ Yes No Sending samples outside of ISU? See examples below.

Examples include: genetically modified organisms, body fluids, tissue samples, blood samples, pathogens.

If you will be receiving samples from or sending samples outside of ISU, please identify the name of the outside organization(s) and the identity of the samples you will be sending or receiving outside of ISU:

Research Assurances 12/01/2005
Please note that some samples may require a USDA Animal Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) permit, a USPHS Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Import Permit for Etiologic Agents, a Registration for Select Agents, High Consequence Livestock Pathogens and Toxins or Listed Plant Pathogens, or a Material Transfer Agreement (MTA) (http://www.wisconsin.edu/epph).}

SECTION II: APPLICATION FOR INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB) APPROVAL

☑ Yes □ No Does this project involve human research participants? If the answer "no" is checked, you will automatically move to a question regarding the involvement of radiation producing devices in your project.

SECTION III: ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AND SAFETY INFORMATION (EH&S)

☑ Yes ☐ No Does this project involve laboratory chemicals, human cell lines or tissue culture (primary OR immortalized), or human blood components, body fluid or tissues? If the answer is "no" is checked you will automatically move to a question regarding the involvement of human research participants in your project.

ASSURANCE

- I certify that the information provided in this application is complete and accurate and consistent with any proposal(s) submitted to external funding agencies.
- I agree to provide proper surveillance of this project to ensure that the rights and welfare of the human subject or welfare of animal subjects are protected. I will report any problems to the appropriate assurance review committee(s).
- I agree that I will not begin this project until receipt of official approval from all appropriate committee(s).
- I agree that modifications to the originally approved project will not take place without prior review and approval by the appropriate committee(s), and that all activities will be performed in accordance with all applicable federal, state, local and Iowa State University policies.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

A conflict of interest can be defined as a set of conditions in which an investigator's or key personnel's judgment regarding a project (including human or animal subject welfare, integrity of the research) may be influenced by a secondary interest (e.g., the proposed project and/or a relationship with the sponsor). ISU's Conflict of Interest Policy requires that investigators and key personnel disclose any significant financial interests or relationships that may present an actual or potential conflict of interest. By signing this form below, you are certifying that all members of the research team, including yourself, have read and understand ISU's Conflict of Interest policy as addressed by the ISU Faculty Handbook (http://www.policies.iastate.edu) and have made all required disclosures.

☑ Yes ☐ No Do you or any member of your research team have an actual or potential conflict of interest?

☑ Yes ☐ No If yes, have the appropriate disclosure form(s) been completed?

SIGNATURES

[Signature of Principal Investigator]

[Signature of Department Chair]

Date

Date

Research Assurances 12/01/2005
PLEASE NOTE: Any changes to an approved protocol must be submitted to the appropriate committee(s) before the changes may be implemented.

Please proceed to SECTION II.
SECTION II: IRB SECTION - STUDY SPECIFIC INFORMATION

STUDY OBJECTIVES

Briefly explain in language understandable to a layperson the specific aim(s) of the study.

To discover the experiences African American women have had with the education system and the impact family and community had on these occurrences. This study will encompass the views of women from three generations. Some of the participants are grandmothers, mothers, and daughters (18 years or older), mothers and daughters, grandmothers and granddaughters, aunts and nieces, siblings and other extended family members.

BENEFIT

Explain in language understandable to a layperson how the information gained in this study will benefit participants or the advancement of knowledge, and/or serve the good of society.

This research will be utilized to influence and bring hope to other African American women who have lived some of the same experiences and may, for many reasons, have put their education on-hold and need strength, support, and encouragement to begin again. It will also be useful for educators designing curriculum and classroom activities as well as community leaders, and directors of programming who desire to effectively serve African American women.

PART A: PROJECT INVOLVEMENT

1) ☐ Yes ☒ No Is this project part of a Training, Center, Program Project Grant?
   Director Name: Overall IRB ID:

2) ☐ Yes ☒ No Is the purpose of this project to develop survey instruments?

3) ☐ Yes ☒ No Does this project involve an investigational new drug (IND)? Number:

4) ☐ Yes ☒ No Does this project involve an investigational device exemption (IDE)? Number:

5) ☐ Yes ☒ No Does this project involve existing data or records?

6) ☐ Yes ☒ No Does this project involve secondary analysis?

7) ☐ Yes ☒ No Does this project involve pathology or diagnostic specimens?

8) ☐ Yes ☒ No Does this project require approval from another institution? Please attach letters of approval.

9) ☐ Yes ☒ No Does this project involve DEXA/CT scans or X-rays?

PART B: MEDICAL HEALTH INFORMATION OR RECORDS

1) ☐ Yes ☒ No Does your project require the use of a health care provider’s records concerning past, present, or future physical, dental, or mental health information about a subject? The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act established the conditions under which protected health information may be used or disclosed for research purposes. If your project will involve the use of any past or present clinical information about someone, or if you will add clinical information to someone’s treatment record (electronic or paper) during the study you must complete and submit the Application for Use of Protected Health Information.

PART C: ANTICIPATED ENROLLMENT

Research Assurances 12/01/2005
PART D: SUBJECT SELECTION

Please use additional space as necessary to adequately answer each question.

11. Explain the procedures for selecting subjects including any inclusion/exclusion criteria (i.e., *Where will the names come from? Will a sample be purchased, will ads, fliers, word of mouth, email list, etc. be used?*).

A Letter of Invitation will be sent out state wide by the The Division of Human Rights, Iowa Commission on the Status of African Americans (ICSAA) to their various mailing lists. The ICSAA mailing list recipients receiving the letter will forward it to their respective community or professional circles. Others may learn by word of mouth from individuals who have agreed to participate. A copy of the ICSAA lists is not available to the public. Specific questions regarding the list can be directed to Kim Cheeks, Program Assistant at 871-3274. A letter of support from Ms. Cheeks is attached.

12. Attach a copy of any recruitment telephone scripts or materials such as ad, fliers, e-mail messages, etc. Recruitment materials must include a statement of the voluntary and confidential nature of the research. Do not include the amount of compensation, (e.g., compensation available).

**Note:** Please answer each question. If the question does not pertain to this study, please type not applicable (N/A).

PART E: RESEARCH PLAN

Include sufficient detail for IRB review of this project independent of the grant, protocol, or other documents.

13. Describe the flow of events used in this research protocol. Include information from the first contact with the volunteers to the end of the study. Use a diagram or flow chart if appropriate. Also, include a description of the study procedures or tasks that participants will be exposed to or asked to complete. This information is intended to inform the committee of the procedures used in the study and their potential risk. Please do not respond with “see attached” or “not applicable.”

The potential participant will receive the letter of invitation via her email from The Division of Human Rights, Iowa Commission on the Status of African Americans. They may also find out by word of mouth. Individuals will respond to the invitation by email or telephoning the researcher. The researcher will connect with the individual and briefly explain the research process (see attached telephone script). The individual’s name will then be added to a list. The researcher will then be asked for more information such as name, contact information, age, etc.
and whether or not they have a family member who is planning to participate.

Once the target population is finalized, each research participant will be asked to participate in an initial interview lasting 60 - 90 minutes. There will be 1 to 2 subsequent follow-up interviews that will last 30 to 45 minutes each. I will utilize grounded theory research methodology which discourages taping interviews and encourages the researcher to become a skilled listener. I will document the conversation immediately following the interview. As a trained social worker I provide counseling sessions weekly where this very skill is required. The participant will be shown the documentation in the follow up interview to verify that the content is true and accurate.

I also plan to host 3 gatherings between August 2006 and May 2007. Participants will be asked to attend a gathering of their choosing. I will set up a MSN grouproom website for the participants to communicate with one another since the women involved in the study will live in various areas across Iowa, Illinois, and Nebraska. Each woman will be given access to the grouproom website after their initial interview. I will be responsible for monitoring the grouproom discussions. I plan to periodically post questions for the participants to respond to and/or dialogue about.

14. For studies involving pathology/diagnostic specimens, indicate whether specimens will be collected prospectively and/or already exist “on the shelf” at the time of submission of this review form. If prospective, describe specimen procurement procedures; indicate whether any additional medical information about the subject is being gathered, and whether specimens are linked at any time by code number to the subject’s identity. If this question is not applicable, please type N/A in the response cell.

NA

15. For studies involving deception, please justify the deception and indicate the debriefing procedure, including the timing and information to be presented to subjects. If this question is not applicable, please type N/A in the response cell.

NA

PART F: CONSENT PROCESS

16. Describe the consent process for participants who are age 18 and older. If the consent process does not include documented consent, a waiver of documentation of consent must be requested.

I will develop a consent form for each woman to sign before the initial interview. I will allow time for the participant to read the form, ask questions, and either sign or decline to participate. The form will invite her to participate, give the intentions of the study, and describe the benefits/risk. It will also include a statement of confidentiality and that participants have the right to discontinue participating at any time. Each time I meet with the participants I will go over the statement and make sure they want to continue participating before proceeding. I will also post a copy of the consent form on the MSN grouproom website.

17. If your study involves minors, please explain how parental consent will be obtained prior to enrollment of the minor(s).

NA

18. Please explain how assent will be obtained from minors (younger than 18 years of age), prior to their enrollment.

Also, please explain if the assent process will be documented (e.g., a simplified version of the consent form, combined with the parental informed consent document). According to the federal regulations assent “…means a child’s
affirmative agreement to participate in research. Mere failure to object should not, absent affirmative agreement, be construed as assent."

NA

PART G: DATA ANALYSIS

19. Describe how the data will be analyzed (e.g. statistical methodology, statistical evaluation, statistical measures used to evaluate results)

This is a qualitative study utilizing the Grounded Theory. The information provided by the participants provides the data which is then sorted, coded, grouped, analyzed, and documented.

20. If applicable, please indicate the anticipated date that identifiers will be removed from completed survey instruments and/or audio or visual tapes will be erased:

NA Month/Day/Year

PART H: BENEFITS

21. Describe the benefit to the volunteer from participating in this study, if any, and the benefit to society that will be gained from the study. Please note that monetary compensation is not considered a benefit.

The research will benefit the participant by giving them a venue to speak about their experience with the education system. It allows the participant in some cases to deal with issues that may have been suppressed. It also offers them the comfort of knowing that they are not alone in their experiences.

The study is beneficial to society by being a guidepost for educators, community leaders, and social service program directors attempting to serve African American women in a culturally competent and effective manner. It will also assist in opening the lines of communication between the individuals outside the population and the African American community.

PART I: RISKS

The concept of risk goes beyond physical risk and includes risks to subjects' dignity and self-respect as well as psychological, emotional, legal, social or financial risk.

22. ☐ Yes ☒ No Is the probability of the harm or discomfort anticipated in the proposed research greater than that encountered ordinarily in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests?

23. ☐ Yes ☒ No Is the magnitude of the harm or discomfort greater than that encountered ordinarily in daily life, or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests?

24. Describe any risks or discomforts to the subjects and how they will be minimized and precautions taken. Do not respond with N/A. If you believe that there will not be risk or discomfort to subjects you must explain why.

Participants could become uncomfortable with some of the memories of their experiences with the educational system if those encounters were negative. As the researcher I plan to pay close attention to both verbal and non-
verbal messages that indicate that a participant may be struggling. I plan to check in with research participant periodically during the interview to find out how they are emotionally. If a participant indicates they are struggling I will stop the interview and spend as much time as needed to discuss the participants feelings. I will remind her that she can discontinue participating in the research at any time. I will also contact any named support persons the individual would like contacted as well as locate a professional counselor of her choosing to help her through the process should that be her desire.

25. If this study involves vulnerable populations, including minors, pregnant women, prisoners, educationally or economically disadvantaged, what additional protections will be provided to minimize risks?

I will follow the same process as indicated in the answer to question 24 with all the research participants in this project.

PART J: COMPENSATION

26. ☐ Yes ☒ No Will subjects receive compensation for their participation? If yes, please explain.

Do not make the payment an inducement, only a compensation for expenses and inconvenience. If a person is to receive money or another token of appreciation for their participation, explain when it will be given and any conditions of full or partial payment (E.g., volunteers will receive $5.00 for each of the five visits in the study or a total of $25.00 if he/she completes the study. If a participant withdraws from participation, they will receive $5.00 for each of the visits completed.) It is considered undue influence to make completion of the study the basis for compensation.

PART K: CONFIDENTIALITY

27. Describe below the methods that will be used to ensure the confidentiality of data obtained. For example, who has access to the data, where the data will be stored, security measures for web-based surveys and computer storage, how long data (specimens) will be retained, etc.)

The data will be stored in a file cabinet in the home office of the researcher. No one but the researcher will have access to the data. There are no video or audio tapes being made for this project. All the documentation is done by the researcher. The computer utilized to compile data is also located in the home office of the researcher. All documentation gathered for this project will be maintained until 2012 at which time they will either be given to ISU or destroyed appropriately by the researcher.

Regarding the precautions for MSN grouproom website only the participants will be allowed in to the site because it is a private grouproom. There will be a statement of confidentiality signed by each participant before they allowed access to the MSN grouproom website. This statement will also be posted on the website. At the conclusion of my research (approximately September, 2007) I will transfer examples of interactions to a word document to accompany my final dissertation research project and then delete the entire MSN grouproom website.

PART L: REGISTRY PROJECTS

To be considered a registry; (1) the individuals must have a common condition or demonstrate common responses to questions; (2) the individuals in the registry might be contacted in the future; and (3) the names/data of the individuals in the registry might be used by investigators other than the one maintaining the registry.

☐ Yes ☒ No Does this project establish a registry?

Research Assurances 12/01/2005
If "yes," please provide the registry name below.

Checklist for Attachments

The following are attached (please check ones that are applicable):

☑ A copy of the informed consent document OR ☐ Letter of introduction to subjects containing the elements of consent
☐ A copy of the assent form if minors will be enrolled
☐ Letter of approval from cooperating organizations or institutions allowing you to conduct research at their facility
☐ Data-gathering instruments (including surveys)
☐ Recruitment fliers, phone scripts, or any other documents or materials the subjects will see

Two sets of materials should be submitted for each project—the original signed copy of the application form and one copy and two sets of accompanying materials. **Federal regulations require that one copy of the grant application or proposal be submitted for comparison with the application for approval.**

FOR IRB USE ONLY:

Initial action by the Institutional Review Board (IRB):

☑ Project approved. Date: 20 September 2004
☐ Pending further review. Date: 
☐ Project not approved. Date: 

Follow-up action by the IRB:

IRB Approval Signature ______________________ Date 20 September 2004

SECTION III: ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AND SAFETY INFORMATION

☐ Yes ☐ No Does this project involve human cell or tissue cultures (primary OR immortalized), or human blood components, body fluids or tissues? If the answer is "no," please proceed to SECTION III: APPLICATION FOR IRB APPROVAL. If the answer is "yes," please proceed to Part A: Human Cell Lines.

PART A: HUMAN CELL LINES

☐ Yes ☐ No Does this project involve human cell or tissue cultures (primary OR immortalized cell lines/strains) that have been documented to be free of bloodborne pathogens? If the answer is "yes," please attach copies of the documentation. If the answer is "no," please answer question 1 below.

1) Please list the specific cell lines/strains to be used, their source and description of use.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CELL LINE</th>
<th>SOURCE</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION OF USE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Research Assurances 12/01/2005
2) Please refer to the ISU “Bloodborne Pathogens Manual,” which contains the requirements of the OSHA Bloodborne Pathogens Standard. Please list the specific precautions to be followed for this project below (e.g., retractable needles used for blood draws):


Anyone working with human cell lines/strains that have not been documented to be free of bloodborne pathogens is required to have Bloodborne Pathogen Training annually. Current Bloodborne Pathogen Training dates must be listed in Section I for all Key Personnel. Please contact Environmental Health and Safety (294-5359) if you need to sign up for training and/or to get a copy of the Bloodborne Pathogens Manual.

PART B: HUMAN BLOOD COMPONENTS, BODY FLUIDS OR TISSUES

- Yes ☑ No Does this project involve human blood components, body fluids or tissues? If “yes”, please answer all of the questions in the “Human Blood Components, Body Fluids or Tissues” section.

1) Please list the specific human substances used, their source, amount and description of use.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUBSTANCE</th>
<th>SOURCE</th>
<th>AMOUNT</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION OF USE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E.g., Blood</td>
<td>Normal healthy volunteers</td>
<td>2 ml</td>
<td>Approximate quantity, assays to be done.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2) Please refer to the ISU “Bloodborne Pathogens Manual,” which contains the requirements of the OSHA Bloodborne Pathogens Standard. Specific sections to be followed for this project are:


Anyone working with human blood components, body fluids or tissues is required to have Bloodborne Pathogen Training annually. Current Bloodborne Pathogen Training dates must be listed in Section I for all Key Personnel. Please contact Environmental Health and Safety (294-5359) if you need to sign up for training and/or to get a copy of the Bloodborne Pathogens Manual.

FOR ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AND SAFETY USE ONLY

Research Assurances 12/01/2005
DATE: 29 August 2007
TO: Sandra L. McGee
3201 E. 42nd Court, Des Moines, IA 50314
CC: Dr. Cheryl Hausafus
30 E MacKay Hall
FROM: Jan Canny, IRB Administrator
Office of Research Assurances
IRB ID: 06-413

Approval Date: 29 August 2007  Date for Continuing Review: 19 September 2008

The Co-Chair of Institutional Review Board of Iowa State University has conducted the annual continuing review of the protocol entitled: "Let the Voices Emerge: The Lived Experiences of African American Women, a Multi-generation Phenomenon." Your study has been approved for a period of one year. The continuing review date for this study is no later than 19 September 2008.

Based on the information you provided in Section II of the documents submitted for continuing review, we have coded this study in our database as being permanently closed to the enrollment of new subjects, where all subjects have completed all research related activities and the study remains open only for data analysis. To open enrollment or initiate research-related interaction with subjects you must submit a modification and receive IRB approval prior to contacting subjects.

Even though enrollment of subjects has ended, federal regulations require continuing review of ongoing projects. Please submit the form with sufficient time (i.e. three to four weeks) for the IRB to review and approve continuation of the study, prior to the continuing review date.

Failure to complete and submit the continuing review form will result in expiration of IRB approval on the continuing review date and the file will be administratively closed. As a courtesy to you, we will send a reminder of the approaching review prior to this date.

Any changes in the protocol or consent form should not be implemented without prior IRB review and approval, using the "Continuing Review and/or Modification" form. These documents are located on the Office of Research Assurances website or available by calling (515) 294-4566, www.compliance.iastate.edu.

You must promptly report any of the following to the IRB: (1) all serious and/or unexpected adverse experiences involving risks to subjects or others, and (2) any other unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.

Upon completion of the project, please submit a Project Closure Form to the Office of Research Assurances, 1138 Pearson Hall, to officially close the project.

ORA 06/07
For IRB Use Only  
Modification Approval Date  
Continuing Review Approval Date  
Approval Expiration Date  
AUG 07 2007

ISU HUMAN SUBJECTS CONTINUING REVIEW AND/OR MODIFICATION FORM

TYPE OF SUBMISSION:  
☑ Continuing Review  □ Modification  □ Continuing Review and Modification

Principal Investigator: Sandra L. McGee  
Phone: 515-264-1553

Degree: Ph.D Candidate  
Correspondence Address: 3201 East 42nd Court, Des Moines, Iowa 50314

Department: AESHM-Family and Consumer Science Education  
E-mail Address: Mcrl54@mchsi.com

Project Title: Let The Voices Emerge: The Lived Experiences of African American Women, a Multi-generation Phenomenon

IRB ID: 06-413  
Date of Last Continuing Review: This is the first continuing review

IF STUDENT PROJECT:

Name of Major Professor: Dr. Cheryl Hausanus  
Phone: 515-294-5307

Department: Family and Consumer Sciences Education  
Campus Address: 30 E MacKay Hall, Ames, Iowa 50011-1121

E-mail Address: Haus@iastate.edu

FUNDING INFORMATION:

☐ External Grant/Contract  ☐ Internal Support (no specific funding source) or Internal Grant (indicate name below)

Name of Funding Source:  
OSPA Record ID on Gold Sheet:

☐ Part of Training, Center, Program Project Grant – Director:  
Overall IRB ID No:

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The proposed project or relationship with the sponsor require the disclosure of significant financial interests that present an actual or potential conflict of interest for investigators involved with this project. By signing this form, all investigators certify that they have read and understand ISU's Conflict of Interest policy as addressed by the ISU Faculty Handbook and made all disclosures required by it.

Do you or any member of your research team have a conflict of interest?  
☑ Yes  ☐ No

If yes, has the appropriate disclosure form been completed?  
☑ Yes  ☐ No

ASSURANCE

I certify that the information provided in this application is complete and accurate and consistent with proposal(s) submitted to external funding agencies. I agree to provide proper surveillance of this project to insure that the rights and welfare of the human subjects are protected. I will report any adverse reactions to the IRB for review. I agree that modifications to the originally approved project will not take place without prior review and approval by the Institutional Review Board, and that all activities will be performed in accordance with state and federal regulations and the Iowa State University Federal Wide Assurance.

Signature of Principal Investigator

Date 8-3-07

Student Projects: Faculty signature indicates that this application has been reviewed and is recommended for IRB review.

Signature of Supervising Faculty

Date 3-6-07  
IRB Approval Signature  
Date 29-2-07

For  
EXPEDITED per 45 CFR 46.110(b)  
Category 8  
Letter O, C

IRB  
STUDY REMAINS EXEMPT per 45 CFR 46.101(b)

Use  
WAIVER of SIGNED CONSENT per 45 CFR 46.117(c)

Only  
WAIVER of ELEMENTS of Consent per 45 CFR 46.116

VULNERABLE POPULATION per 45 CFR 46.
Please answer each question. If the question does not pertain to this study, please type not applicable (N/A).

SECTION I: KEY PERSONNEL

☐ Yes ☒ No  Have there been any personnel/staff changes since the last IRB approval was granted?
If yes, complete the following sections (Additions/Deletions) as appropriate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Add</th>
<th>Delete</th>
<th>Last Name</th>
<th>First Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

List all members and relevant experiences of the project personnel. This information is intended to inform the committee of the training and background of the investigators and key personnel.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME &amp; DEGREE(S)</th>
<th>POSITION AT ISU &amp; ROLE ON PROJECT</th>
<th>TRAINING &amp; DATE OF TRAINING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sandra L. McGee, Ph.D Candidate</td>
<td>Project Research Analyst - interview participants, host gathering, conduct follow-up interviews, develop and monitor MSN grouproom website, document, code, sort, analyze data. Work with POS committee throughout the research project to ensure I am conducting good quality research that meets ISU standards</td>
<td>ISU IRB #2 03-673 EXEMPT Date: September 9, 2003Advanced Research - Iowa State University - July 2005Grounded Theory Institute - Mills Valley, California - Certificate of Attendance - 2006Member of Grounded Theory Research Institute April 2006 - present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Cheryl Hausafus</td>
<td>Major Professor - will provide guidance, feedback, and input on the research project.</td>
<td>COHs Training 9-19-2002</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SECTION II: CONTINUING REVIEW

In addition to completing Section I: Key Personnel, please complete Section II if this is an application for Continuing Review. If this is an application for continuing review and you will be modifying your project in the future, please complete all sections of the form. If this application is only to request approval for a modification or change to your study, please complete Section I: Key Personnel and Section III: Proposed Modifications or Changes.

1. ☒ Yes ☐ No  Is the research permanently closed to the enrollment of new subjects?
2. ☐ Yes ☒ No  Have all subjects completed all research-related interventions?
3. ☒ Yes ☒ No  Does research remain active only for long-term follow-up of subjects?
4. ☒ Yes ☐ No  Are the remaining research activities limited to data analysis?
5. ☒ Yes ☒ No  Subject enrollment has not begun and no additional risks have been identified.

Part A: Enrollment Status

Number of Subjects Approved by IRB: 25 - 35  Number of Subjects Consented to Date: 27

ORI 03/23/07
Number of Subjects Consented Since Last Continuing Review: Total: 27
Number of Subjects Screened: 27

Check if any enrolled subjects are:
- [ ] Minors (under 18)
- [ ] Age Range of Minors:
- [ ] Pregnant Women/Fetuses
- [ ] Cognitively Impaired
- [ ] Prisoners

Number of Subjects Lost to Follow-up: 0

Check below if this project involves either:
- [ ] Existing Data/Records
- [ ] Secondary Analysis
- [ ] Pathology/Diagnostic Specimens

List Estimated Percent of the Total Enrolled That Are Minorities Below:

- [ ] American Indians: Alaskan Native:
- [ ] Asian or Pacific Islander: African American:
- [ ] Black (Not of Hispanic Origin): Hispanic:

1. [ ] Yes [ ] No Have any subjects withdrawn or have you asked any subjects to withdraw from the study?

List number for each and reason for withdrawal:

---

Part B: Protocol Summary – Please use the amount of space needed to adequately address the questions.

1. Please provide a concise summary of the purpose and main procedures of the study.

   The participants received a letter of invitation via her email from The Division of Human Rights, Iowa Commission on the Status of African Americans. They also find out by word of mouth. Individuals responded to the invitation by email or telephoning the researcher. The researcher connected with the individual and briefly explained the research process (example of telephone script sent with original form). The individual's name was then added to a list. The researcher sent a short personalized email or letter thanking her for her interest (example of thank you note sent with original form). The individual was asked for more information such as name, contact information, age, and whether or not they have a family member who is planning to participate. Once the target population was finalized, each research participant was asked to participate in an initial interview lasting 90 – 90 minutes. There were 1 to 2 subsequent follow-up interviews that lasted 30 to 45 minutes each with 7 of the 27 participants. I utilized Grounded theory research methodology which discourages taping interviews and encourages the researcher to become a skilled listener. I documented the conversation immediately following the interview. As a trained social worker I provide counseling sessions weekly where this very skill is required. The 7 participants were shown the documentation in the follow up interview to verify that the content was true and accurate. All 7 agreed that the documentation accurately reflected our initial interview dialogue. Grounded theory only requires that the researcher conduct a few follow up sessions as a way of member checking, which adds credibility to the research process. I hosted 2 gatherings, one in December 2006 and another in February 2007. Participants were invited to attend a gathering of their choosing. Only 13 participants choose to attend a gathering. I set up a MSN grouproom website for the participants to communicate with one another since the women involved in the study will live in various areas across Iowa, Illinois, and Nebraska. Each woman was given access to the grouproom website after their initial interview. I continue to monitor grouproom discussions. I periodically posted questions for the participants to respond to and/or dialogue about.

2. Please provide a summary of how the study is progressing (e.g., progress to date in terms of the overall study plan, success or problems encountered, reasons enrollment has not begun, etc.)

   The Let the Voices Emerge Research project is progressing rather well. As I explained above I have completed all 27 initial interviews and 7 follow-up interviews. I am currently examining and analyzing my findings and have gathered a great deal of literature. I am also writing my dissertation and am hoping to complete this project by the deadlines required for the Fall 2007 semester.

   All data collection is complete – per EE email 8/1/07 (E)
3. Is there any new information (positive or negative) from this study (e.g., interim analysis) or elsewhere (e.g., current literature) that might affect someone’s willingness to enroll or continue in the study. It is especially important for the investigator to notify the IRB of literature or information that’s relevant to the risks participants in the study.

   No

4. Please provide a summary of amendments or modifications since last IRB review.

   NA

Part C: Adverse Events and Unforeseen Problems

1. ☐ Yes ☒ No Have there been any adverse events or unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or other people?

   If yes, please give them numbers and describe.

   [Blank space]

   If yes, was it reported to the IRB? Date reported

   If report was not submitted, please explain why.

   [Blank space]

2. ☐ Yes ☒ No Have there been any subject complaints?

   If yes, please describe.

   [Blank space]

   Attach any reports submitted to NIH or a Data and Safety Monitoring Board. ☐ Attached ☐ N/A

Part D: Informed Consent

1. ☒ Yes ☐ No If a signed Informed Consent Form was required, was Informed Consent obtained from all subjects?

   If no, please explain.

   [Blank space]

2. ☒ Yes ☐ No Are all signed Informed Consent Forms on file with the PI?

   If no, please explain.

   [Blank space]

3. ☒ Attached ☐ N/A Submit copy of currently approved Informed Consent Form and an original unstamped copy (if stamped). If changes have been made please submit the original, a copy with the highlighted changes, and a copy to be stamped with IRB approval.

   ☐ Attached ☐ N/A Submit currently approved informational letter.
SECTION III: PROPOSED MODIFICATIONS OR CHANGES

If this application is to request approval for modification or changes to your project, please complete Section I: Key Personnel and Section III.

The submission of a modification form is required whenever changes are made to an approved project. This includes but is not limited to a title change, changes in investigators, resubmission of a grant proposal involving changes to the original proposal, changes in the funding source, changes of an instrument, advertisements, reports from a data safety and monitoring board, addition of a test instrument, etc. NOTE: All changes must be submitted and approved by the IRB prior to their implementation, unless the change is necessary to protect the safety of subjects.

1. Does your project require approval from another institution, please attach letters of approval?
   □ Yes  □ No

2. The following modification(s) are being made (check all that apply):
   □ Change in protocol.
   □ Change in type or total number of subjects. New anticipated total: 
   □ Change in informed consent document.
   □ Change in co-investigator(s). New co-PI name: 
     Signature of new Co-PI: 
   □ Change in funding source/sponsor. Please attach copy of grant proposal sent to new funding agency.
   □ Other (e.g., change in project title, adding new materials, adding advertisement, etc.)

   NOTE: If the change involves a new Principal Investigator, a new Human Subjects Review form must be submitted.

3. Describe the modification(s) indicated above in sufficient detail for evaluation independent of any other documents. When submitting revised documents please submit one clean copy of the new document and a copy with the changes highlighted.
APPENDIX B
Invitation to Participate Letter
July 2006

Dear Potential Participant:

My name is Sandra L. McGee. I am a doctoral student at Iowa State University in the Family and Consumer Sciences Education Leadership Academy. I would like to invite you to participate in my dissertation research project. You would be making an important contribution to research literature as well as the community.

The focus of the study will be the "lived experiences of African American women with the education system". As a Black woman, I have learned that no one can tell our story but us and sharing such experiences can be liberating. This research will be utilized to influence and bring hope to other African American women who have lived some of the same experiences and may, for many reasons, have put their education on-hold and need strength, support, and encouragement to begin again. It will also be useful for educators, community leaders, and directors of programming who desire to effectively serve African American women.

This study will have an intergenerational or possibly a multi-generational perspective. Therefore, I invite mothers and daughters, or grandmothers, daughters, and granddaughters, or aunts and nieces, or older and younger cousins, and/or any significant extended family relationship that involves women from various generations. Study participants must be 18 years or older.

As a research participant you will have input throughout each step of the process. The information you share will be stored in a locked file cabinet in my home office. I am the only person who will access the data. For the sake of anonymity and confidentiality, I will use a pseudonym that we will agree on for identification purposes for the final dissertation research project. You have the right to stop participating at any point in the study.

I am hopeful you will agree to participate with me in such a crucial community service project. My plan is to start the research in September of 2006. I can be contacted by telephone at 515-254-1553. You can also reach me at McSL54@mchsi.com and place the words "research project" on the subject line. Please leave me your name, age, contact information, and whether or not you have a family member willing to participate in the study. You will be contacted with further details of the study.

Thank you so much for your willingness to read my letter. I truly look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Sandra L. McGee, Ph.D Candidate
APPENDIX C
Thank You for Participating Letter
September 2006

Dear First Name of Participant:

Thank you for your interest in my research project exploring the lived experiences of African American women with the education system. The research will also focus on the impact your family and community had on these occurrences. The study will begin September of 2006 and continue for several months.

I am asking that you participate in an initial interview that will last 60 – 90 minutes. There will be 1 to 2 subsequent follow up interview lasting 30 – 45 minutes each. An MSN group room website will be developed to allow all the participants the opportunity to meet, dialogue with one another, and respond to questions pertinent to the research. You may participate in the group room conversation as much or as little as you choose.

There will also be three gatherings hosted. You may choose to attend one gathering of your choice. These groups will be hosted in different areas of the state in an effort to accommodate all the women in the study. Dates, places, and times will be posted on the MSN group room website.

The methodology I am utilizing for this study is grounded theory. Drs. Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss developed this theory in 1967. Its most distinctive feature is that the key information emerges from data. There are no preconceptions about the target population or the findings. The research problem, hypothesis, and theory emerge through the critical facts provided by the participant’s stories.

There are no tape or video recording equipment used. I will document each of our conversations following our visits. You are allowed to read the memos to verify that they accurately reflect what you shared. A pseudonym will be used to ensure your confidentiality. These documents will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my home office and turned over to the university with the final dissertation project.

I am truly looking forward to learning from you. I will be sending you an informed consent and confidentiality form, which we will discuss and sign in our first visit. Again, thank you for your interest in this project. Should you have further questions please feel free to contact me at 515-264-1553 or McSL54@mchsi.com.

Sincerely,

Sandra L. McGee, Ph.D Candidate
APPENDIX D

Informed Consent and Confidentiality Form
Let The Voices Emerge:
Lived Experiences of African American Women With the Education System
Dissertation Research Study
Informed Consent and Confidentiality Form

Purpose of the Study
The intention of this study is to discover the experiences African American women have had with the education system and the impact family and community had on these occurrences.

This research will be utilized to influence and bring hope to other African American women who have lived some of the same experiences and may, for many reasons, have put their education on-hold and need strength, support, and encouragement to begin again. It will also be useful for educators designing curriculum and classroom activities as well as community leaders, and directors of programming who desire to serve African American women in an effective and culturally competent manner.

Research Process
As a participant you are being asked to participate in an initial interview lasting 60 to 90 minutes. There will also be 1 to 2 subsequent follow-up interviews that will last 30 to 45 minutes each.

The researcher will host 3 gatherings between September 2006 and September 2007. You may attend a gathering of your choosing.

Additionally, a MSN Grouproom website is also being set up for the participants to communicate with one another. You will be given access to the grouproom website after your initial interview and may utilize it as much as you wish during the research period.

Benefits achieved by the Study
This research will benefit the participant by providing a venue to speak about her experience with the education system. It allows the participant in some cases to deal with issues that may have been suppressed. It also offers participants the comfort of knowing that they are not alone in their experiences.
The study is beneficial to society by being a guidepost for educators, community leaders, and social service program directors attempting to serve African American women in a culturally competent and effective manner. It will also assist in opening the lines of communication between individuals outside and within the African American community.

Possible Risks that could be associated with the Study

A participant could become uncomfortable with some of the memories of her experiences with the educational system if those encounters were negative.

Also, other participants will be privileged to personal information divulged when shared in the group settings. All participants must sign a confidentiality statement before entering the study and are obligated to keep the confidences of others.

Safety of Information

The information shared by participant will be stored in a file cabinet in the home office of the researcher. No one but the researcher and the researcher's technical assistant will have access to the data. There will not be any video or audio tapes made for this project. All the documentation is created and maintained by the researcher. The computer utilized to compile data is also located in the home office of the researcher.

Only the participants, researcher, and technical assistant will be allowed in to the MSN Grouproom website because it is a private grouproom. The researcher and technical assistant will be responsible for monitoring the grouproom discussions. The researcher will transfer examples of grouproom interactions to a word document to accompany her final dissertation research project. The entire MSN grouproom website discussions will be deleted no later than September 31, 2007.

For the sake of anonymity and confidentiality, the researcher will not share any personal information about the research participants. A pseudonym agreed upon by researcher and the participant will be used for identification purposes for the final dissertation research project.

At the end of the research project the information will be documented and submitted to the researcher's Program of Study Committee at Iowa State University. The final study will be handled in accordance with the university standards as they pertain to dissertation research projects.

For information regarding this study please contact Cheryl Hausafus, Pd.D, my major professor and supervisor of this project, at 1-800-262-0015 ext 45307 or Haus@iastate.edu.

If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, jcs1959@iastate.edu, or the Director, Office of Research Assurances (515) 294-3115, damen@iastate.edu.

A copy of the informed consent document shall be given to the person signing the form.
Statement of Rights and Confidentiality

As a participant I understand that my participation in this research study is voluntary and I have the right to discontinue my involvement at any time. My refusal to participate or discontinue participating in this study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.

I further agree that all individual/group discussions and MSN group room interactions are to be held confidential. In addition, any documentation, group room postings, and/or conversations with researcher written and/or verbal, is subject to the same level of privacy.

Any breech of confidentiality could result in my immediate removal from the research project.

Research Participant ___________________________  Date ___________________________

Researcher ___________________________  Date ___________________________
APPENDIX E

Telephone Script for Research Participants
The Lived Experiences of African American Women With The Education System
Telephone Script

My name is Sandra L. McGee. I am a doctoral student at Iowa State University in the Family and Consumer Sciences Education Leadership Academy. Thank you for your interest in my research project exploring the lived experiences of African American women with the education system. The research will also focus on the impact your family and community had on these occurrences. The study will begin September of 2006 and continue for several months.

I am asking that you participate in an initial interview that will last 60 – 90 minutes. There will be 1 to 2 subsequent follow up interview lasting 30 – 45 minutes each. An MSN group room website will be developed to allow all the participants the opportunity to meet, dialogue with one another, and respond to questions pertinent to the research. You may participate in the group room conversation as much or as little as you choose.

There will also be three gatherings hosted. You may choose to attend one gathering of your choice. These groups will be hosted in different areas of the state in an effort to accommodate all the women in the study. Dates, places, and times will be posted on the MSN group room website.

The methodology I am utilizing for this study is grounded theory. Drs. Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss developed this theory in 1967. Its most distinctive feature is that the key information emerges from data. There are no preconceptions about the target population or the findings. The research problem, hypothesis, and theory emerge through the critical facts provided by the participant’s stories.

There are no tape or video recording equipment used. I will document each of our conversations following our visits. You are allowed to read the memos to verify that they accurately reflect what you shared. A pseudonym will be used to ensure your confidentiality. These documents will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my home office and turned over to the university with the final dissertation project.

I am truly looking forward to learning from you. Do you have any questions? I will be sending you an informed consent and confidentiality form, which we will discuss and sign in our first visit.

Again, thank you for your interest in this project. Should you have further questions please feel free to contact me at 515-264-1553 or McSL54@mchsi.com.
APPENDIX F

Questions for Research Participants
The Lived Experiences of African American Women With The Education System
Initial Questions for Research Participants
Sandra L. McGee, Ph.D Candidate

1. Please tell me about your experiences with the education system as a student.

2. In what state did you receive your education?

3. What impact did your family have on these occurrences?

4. What role did your community play and what effect did this have on your experiences?

5. Talk about your experiences with the education system as an educator, administrator, or employee if this is applicable to you.

6. What other issues pertaining to this matter would you like to share?
APPENDIX G
Follow-Up Questions for Research Participants
Follow-up Questions
Grounded Theory
Sandra L. McGee

The questions for the second and third interview will develop from the first meeting with each participant. The researcher would be asking for further clarification and/or reflection on a particular experience, thought, or idea shared previously by the participant. Specific examples of questions may include the following:

1. In our first interview you stated.... would you help me understand that better by offering further clarification about this issue/concern?
2. In our first meeting you shared... would you reflect further on that statement?
3. In our first meeting you commented on.... is there anything else you would like to offer regarding that matter?
APPENDIX H
Statement of Confidentiality for MSN group room
Statement of Confidentiality for MSN Group Room
Posted September 2006

Statement of Rights and Confidentiality
As a participant I understand that my participation in this research study is voluntary and I have the right to discontinue my involvement at any time.

I further agree that all individual/group discussions, and MSN group room interactions are to be held confidential. In addition, any documentation, group room postings, and/or conversations with researcher written and/or verbal, is subject to the same level of privacy.

Any breach of confidentiality could result in my immediate removal from the research project.

Before participating in any MSN group room interactions you must have read, agreed, and signed the consent form provided by the researcher. If you have not you must stop immediately and contact Sandra L. McGee at 515-286-2027 or McSL54@mchsi.com.
APPENDIX I
Invitation to Participate in the MSN Group Chat Room
Hello everyone. Thank you for the valuable information each of you offered during the individual interviews. This is the invitation to the Lived Experiences Group Room. A separate email has been sent with instructions on how to get started in the group room.

Once you have access to the group room, please take a minute to review the confidentiality statement. This is located in the documents link on the left hand side of the screen. As we all know, Iowa has a very small African American community. During our interactions as a group you may discover that you are acquainted with one or more of the other participants. I ask that you please respect the other group members’ anonymity.

Please also note that there is a question posted under the messages link, which can be found on the left hand side of the screen as well.

Again, welcome to the group room and I truly thank you for your willingness to participate. Please feel free to dialogue and post questions as they come to you. If you need any assistance with any of this, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,
Sandra
APPENDIX J

MSN Group Chat Room Access Instructions
LIVED EXPERIENCES GROUP ROOM ACCESS INSTRUCTIONS

Once your initial interview has been completed, I will send you an email invitation to join the Lived Experiences Group Room. When the invitation appears in your email box, it will look like this.

1. Double Click the “Join Now” toggle button to begin the process.
This action will bring you to the Lived Experiences Group Application Screen.

2. Create a MSN Nickname. This name will be the name other participants know you by in the group.

3. Add your email address. Make sure you select whether you desire other group members to know your email address.

4. Decide how you want to read group messages. They can either come directly into your personal email address, or you can read them when you log on to the grouproom. I suggest the last option.

5. You can send a message to me if you so choose.

6. You must accept the Code of Conduct by clicking in the white box and double click on the "Join Now button."
LIVED EXPERIENCES GROUP ROOM ACCESS INSTRUCTIONS

You will then be taken to the Lived Experiences Group Room. You will be able to read new postings, view the calendar for upcoming events, read any documents posted and have real-time chat with other participants and myself.

Welcome and thank you for participating!
APPENDIX K

Initial Coding Chart
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation of Participants</th>
<th>Societal Factors</th>
<th>African American Culture and the Education System</th>
<th>Educational Environment</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Traditionalists (80's & 90s) | Segregation     | School was student focused      | Cooperation partnership between educators, students, and community—very connected | Family involved and completely supportive | Community was a part of the school and the school was a part of the community | Scares  
Books raggedy  
Kids shared desk, books, supplies, sewing machines |
| Born 1910–1929                | The Great       | Learning was priority           |                                      |        |           |          |
| Depression                   | Clear expectations and consequences |                                      |                                      |        |           |          |
|                             | Accountability for everyone in the system |                                      |                                      |        |           |          |
|                             | Loved learning  |                                  |                                      |        |           |          |
|                             |                 |                                  |                                      |        |           |          |
| Pioneers of Integration (60s & 70s) | Early years of integration—Brown v. Board of Education—tremendous racial issues in the school system | Everyone had the same goal          | Racism  
Isolation  
Targeted  
Stereotyped | Valued education  
Worked together  
Felt integrated schools would be better for the children  
Mothers at home—involved in school | Black Community in tact for the most part  
Everyone still working together toward success in all systems  
Movement toward integration  
Many families integrated to all White communities | Better school buildings  
Had needed supplies |
<p>| Born 1930–1944               |                 | Education was not a choice—all worked hard | Lessons were the same for Blacks and Whites |        |           |          |
| Years of schooling: 1950s–1960s |                 | Expectations were clear         |                                      |        |           |          |
|                             |                 | Prepared for each level of schooling |                                      |        |           |          |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation of Participants</th>
<th>Societal Factors</th>
<th>African American Culture and the Education System</th>
<th>Educational Environment</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baby Boomers (mid 40s–late 50s)</td>
<td>Civil Rights Movement Drugs–alcoholism Watergate Bussing–Blacks are guinea pigs for the system–answer to integration Drugs–alcoholism Reaganomics</td>
<td>Experienced racism at young age Accused of not being intelligent–cheating Treated different than White students Treated well by system in younger grades</td>
<td>Family support Families splitting but still supportive of education Focused on children Many mothers still at home and many working School a priority for many</td>
<td>Communities beginning to change Less involved with children Community becoming very disengaged with Systems Children trying to find their own way</td>
<td>Resources good in White school–not good in inner city schools Technology available to students Better technology and teachers in White schools Clear differences in quality of resources</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generation of Participants</td>
<td>Societal Factors</td>
<td>African American Culture and the Education System</td>
<td>Educational Environment</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generation Xers</td>
<td>Crack cocaine</td>
<td>Good experience</td>
<td>Treated very well</td>
<td>Supportive</td>
<td>No community involvement</td>
<td>Technology available and changing and moving forward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(mid 20s–late 30s)</td>
<td>crisis</td>
<td>with system</td>
<td>by some teachers</td>
<td>Families involved</td>
<td>involvement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born 1964–1978</td>
<td>Violence</td>
<td>Loved learning–exelled</td>
<td>Treated well by system</td>
<td>with school system</td>
<td>Re-defined community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of schooling: 1980s</td>
<td>Self serving</td>
<td>Some average students</td>
<td>in younger grades</td>
<td>Two women got</td>
<td>Minorities labeled and separated</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>culture</td>
<td>Disconnected</td>
<td>Invisible</td>
<td>no support,</td>
<td>and separated</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The fast, quick</td>
<td>Lessons not equal between races</td>
<td>Targeted</td>
<td>involvement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and easy culture</td>
<td></td>
<td>Stereotyped</td>
<td>or encouragement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The now and me</td>
<td>Trying to manage education alone</td>
<td>De-valued</td>
<td>from family</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>generation</td>
<td>Not a lot of investment from teachers</td>
<td>Minority</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>War</td>
<td>Disparities in education experienced and</td>
<td>Students labeled and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>noticeable</td>
<td>separated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Technology available and changing and moving forward
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation of Participants</th>
<th>Societal Factors</th>
<th>African American Culture and the Education System</th>
<th>Educational Environment</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Millennials (0–early 20s)</td>
<td>Hip hop culture</td>
<td>Loved learning</td>
<td>Only Black students</td>
<td>Family involvement in lessons and school system</td>
<td>No support from community</td>
<td>Lots of resources available in the school system - special programming for kids labeled at-risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born 1979–forward</td>
<td>Culture of Violence</td>
<td>Excelled</td>
<td>Disconnected from some professionals in the system</td>
<td>Very supportive</td>
<td>Re-defined Black community—now means poor–crime ridden–un attended to by Blacks and other society members</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of schooling:</td>
<td>Women Devalued</td>
<td>No lessons on Black culture in Northern schools</td>
<td>Isolated</td>
<td>Family uninvolved</td>
<td>Community mostly white or very integrated</td>
<td>High population of Black children labeled at-risk by education system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990s–Present</td>
<td>Sense of Entitlement</td>
<td>No role models -</td>
<td>Misunderstood</td>
<td>Had to reinvent family to fit needs</td>
<td></td>
<td>advanced technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>War</td>
<td></td>
<td>Judged</td>
<td>Single parent homes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bush Administration</td>
<td></td>
<td>Targeted</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Students labeled and separated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX L
Timeline of the Eras
Timeline of Eras

- Traditionalists began schooling
- Traditionalists Segregation
- Pioneers of Integration Legislation
- Baby Boomers Busing years
- Gen. Xers Crack cocaine crisis
- Millennials Hip hop culture

1920s – Mid 1950s: Segregation
1954: Brown v. Board of Education
1970s: Busing
1980: Crack cocaine crisis - 1980s & Hip hop culture - 1990s-Forward