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PERSISTENCE TO DOCTORAL COMPLETION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN AT
PREDOMINATELY WHITE UNIVERSITIES IN ONE MID-ATLANTIC STATE

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

Kimberly Ann Matthews
Bachelor of Arts, George Mason University, 1999
Masters of Education, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2004

Director: Susan Dana Leone, Ed.D.
Professor Emeritus, School of Education

Virginia Commonwealth University
Richmond, Virginia
May, 2012

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Abstract

PERSISTENCE TO DOCTORAL COMPLETION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN AT PREDOMINATELY WHITE UNIVERSITIES IN ONE MID-ATLANTIC STATE

By Kimberly Ann Matthews, Ph.D.

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2012

Major Director: Susan Dana Leone, Ed.D.
Professor Emeritus, School of Education

This qualitative study examined the experiences of 20 African American men who graduated from predominately White institutions in one mid-Atlantic state between the years of 2001 and 2011 with doctoral degrees in Education or in a Humanities and Sciences field. Interviews were conducted to gather the lived experiences of the African American men in their own voices. The study addressed the following research questions:

1. Why do African American men persist to doctoral degree completion?
2. How do African American men perceive their doctoral student experience?

A descriptive model that presents the internal and external factors revealed in the study is provided. Five main internal factors that contribute to the persistence of African American men in doctoral programs: personal refinement, academic refinement, professional refinement, motivation, and effective coping mechanisms were revealed. Three major

external factors, support systems, positive relationships with the advisor/chair and committee, and financial support. In addition, the impact of the participants' racial identity was explored and yielded both negative and positive effects on the doctoral student experience.

Based upon the results, recommendations are offered for universities and departments, advisors and faculty, and future and current African American male doctoral students to aid them in persistence to degree completion.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Historical Context

Carter G. Woodson, in his 1933 book, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, states “the thought of the inferiority of the Negro is drilled into him in almost every class he enters and in almost every book he studies. [The Negro is taught] that he has no worth-while past, that his race has done nothing significant since the beginning of time, and that there is no evidence that he will ever achieve anything great. [However], if you teach the Negro that he has accomplished as much good as any other race, he will achieve and aspire to equality and justice without regard to race” (Woodson, 1933/1990, p. 2 & 192).

African Americans have contended with many challenges: the evils of slavery; racial discrimination; the destruction of their customs, culture, and identity; and educational inequality, since their forced migration to America. The disenfranchisement of African Americans in the United States began during slavery when African Americans were sentenced to a lifetime of servitude; they were unable to marry legally; they were unable to vote; they were denied the opportunity to learn to read and write English; and they were not considered complete human beings, for instance the U.S. Constitution’s three-fifths clause. Before the abolition of slavery, this clause allowed southern states to count slaves as three-fifths of a person with the purpose to receive additional representation in the House of Representatives and the Electoral College (Jenkins, 2006; Woodson, 1919). The very essence of this clause is antithetical to the idea that was and is America. The emancipation ended slavery in 1863, but the legacy of it continued with racist laws, policies, and procedures, such as the racial caste system of Jim Crow laws that were ingrained into society. Ostensibly, African Americans were afforded the opportunity to

receive an education. However, this opportunity was masked because of the unequal distribution of resources for the African American schools (for example, the lack of textbooks for each student and the often poorly constructed schools). To further certify the unequal treatment, the United States Supreme Court decision in the 1896 Plessy v. Ferguson case supported the notion that separate but equal was constitutional in all areas of society including education. This idea of separate but equal was flawed because things were not equal. Forty years after the Plessy v. Ferguson, Jim Crow laws were challenged in the courts, with a focus on education. In Gaines v. Canada (1938) the University of Missouri, denied an African American man admission into its law school based on race, yet the university agreed to pay his tuition for an out-of-state law school. The United States Supreme Court ruled that every state had to either build a separate and equal graduate school for African Americans or integrate. Sixteen years later in 1954, the United States Supreme Court in Brown v. the Board of Education, Topeka, Kansas, declared segregation in education unconstitutional. As a result of the forced desegregation, some White schools elected to close. Within the schools that did integrate, segregation based on academic ability began to surface in the late 1960s. African Americans, particularly males, were placed in remedial or special education classes, even if the placement was not warranted, while Whites were placed in advanced classes. This type of segregation still exists, especially in its application to male African American students. According to Fries-Britt (1997) historically “the images created of Black men in our society often confine them to environments shaped by drugs, crime, athletics, and academic failure” (p. 65). Harper (2009) asserts African American men constantly endure the ever present negative perceptions of being regarded as criminals, drug addicts, rapists, and intellectually inferior, which lead to the assumption by some that this population is not worthy of an appropriate, well-rounded education. W. E. B. DuBois in his

1903 tome, *The Souls of Black Folk*, opined “the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line” (p. 16) and even now in the 21st century, the color-line remains problematic.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of African American men who have successfully completed doctoral degrees in order to build a descriptive model for African American male success. As a consequence of the ever widening achievement gap in education and the systematic disappearance of minority males from the educational process there are few African American men who reach the doctoral level. Therefore, research that examines successful doctoral student experiences within this population is vital. The purpose of the study was to explore also the factors that support doctoral student persistence, such as a positive faculty/student relationship, positive mentoring relationships, and institutional financial assistance, in general and specifically for African Americans. This research focused on the development of replicable problem-solving techniques/plans to effect tangible and sustainable changes in doctoral education that could have larger implications for education at every level. It is hoped that this study will also encourage universities to acknowledge and to reflect on their practices for unintentional bias.

Overview of the Study

In much of the literature pertaining to African American graduate students, the research focuses on this population as a whole and does not distinguish between the genders nor recognize that they have distinct needs. In general, this is true of all research about graduate students as there is also a lack of research distinguishing between masters and doctoral level students. This study focused solely on African American male doctoral students and did not attempt to compare them with any other race or ethnicity. The goal of the study was to collect

in-depth, specific information that would assist universities, departments, faculty, staff, and advisors in gaining a better understanding of this population and their needs. This includes faculty members who assist in the socialization process and in the integration of students into the departmental community. The researcher wanted to examine the factors that aid African American male students in persisting to degree completion and provide a “roadmap” for university personnel to use when developing retention strategies.

Overview of the Literature

Doctoral Student Persistence

When referring to the persistence of doctoral students, Bair (1999) defines persistence as “the continuance of a student’s progress toward the completion of a doctoral degree” (p. 8). Forty to 60% of students that commence a doctoral program regardless of subject area do not complete their degrees (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Lieberman & Dorsch, 2005; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000; Lovitts, 2001). Lovitts (2001) reports four major reasons to study this area: (a) the psychological impact on the student, (b) the large amounts of time faculty members invest working with the student, (c) the financial cost expended by the university, and (d) the loss of another highly educated person. Bair and Haworth (1999) conducted a meta-synthesis that provided recurring themes among the reasons for doctoral student attrition and persistence. The themes are: (a) student/faculty relationships, (b) student/student interactions, (c) institutional financial assistance, (d) program satisfaction, (e) student involvement in academic life, and (f) the dissertation.

Impediments to Success

Racism is a reality for African Americans in the United States. On college and university campuses, African Americans may encounter various forms of racism such as institutional

racism, a negative campus racial climate, and racial microaggressions. A study by Solorzano, Ceja, and Yooso (2000) using 10 focus groups comprised of 34 African American college students explored the students' experiences at three predominately White universities. The results of this study support the notion that racial microaggression still exists on college campuses and impact African American men and women academically and socially. As a result of possible daily exposure to racism, many African Americans may experience race-related stress. Watkins, Guidry, Green, Stanley, and Goodson's (2007) study involving focus groups found that the high levels of stress related to racism experienced by African American male college students contribute to their decision to leave college, especially among those who attended predominately White institutions.

Positive Faculty Advisor and Student Relationship

According to Golde (2000), when there is a positive relationship between the student and the faculty advisor typically the successful completion of the program can be predicted. When the relationship is negative, it can contribute to the attrition process for doctoral students. Golde (2000) used a case study method to determine the reasons three doctoral students from three different universities and disciplines decided to leave their programs. One recurring factor indicated by all three participants was difficulties with their faculty advisors. According to Maher, Ford, and Thompson (2004), the relationship that doctoral students build with their advisors greatly impacts degree progress, particularly through the dissertation stage. Bloom, Propst, Hall, and Evans (2007) concur that the student and advisor relationship is the most significant factor in graduate student success.

Mentoring Relationships

In *The Elements of Mentoring*, Johnson and Ridley (2004) describe mentoring relationships as mutual personal relationships involving an experienced person as a role model and teacher for a less experienced person. On the doctoral level, a mentoring relationship is thought to have a vital role in degree completion because there is a great deal of influence on the professional and emotional development of the student (Bell-Ellison, & Dedrick, 2008). Mentoring is an important practice that will support and assist in the persistence of most doctoral students, and is strongly suggested for the persistence of African American men at all educational levels (LaVant, Anderson, & Tiggs, 1997). Harper (2006a) contends that mentoring for African American male students is essential to success because a mentoring relationship can provide validation and encouragement.

Rationale for the Study

Since the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954 and the ensuing Civil Rights movement, African Americans began pursuing more higher education opportunities. Despite these legal and legislative successes, African American students remain in the minority in doctoral programs (Ellis, 2001). In 2007-2008, African Americans were awarded 6.1% (3,906) of doctoral degrees in all fields, while Whites were awarded 57.1% (36,390) of doctoral degrees in all fields (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). In fall 2009, 13% of the first time students enrolled in graduate education programs were African American. This percentage lags behind Whites who have a first time enrollment of 72% (Council of Graduate Schools [CGS], 2010).

Research Questions

The questions addressed in this study were:

1. Why do African American men persist to doctoral degree completion?
2. How do African American men perceive their doctoral student experience?

Design and Methods

A qualitative research methodology was utilized to investigate this topic. This approach to research includes collecting descriptive data, employing inductive thinking, and emphasizes understanding the participant's viewpoint (Bogdan & Biklin, 2007). Denzin & Lincoln (2005) posit that qualitative research focuses on understanding and describing the lived experiences of the participants. According to Bogdan and Biklin (2007), the qualitative approach to research includes five characteristics:

(1) qualitative research is naturalistic, which allows participants to contribute to the study in their own environment, (2) the data collected in qualitative research is descriptive, where words and/or pictures are used, (3) qualitative researchers are less concerned with the outcomes of the research and more concerned with the process, (4) this method of research is inductive, which allows themes to surface and be grouped together during data collection, and (5) qualitative research stresses meaning, which explains how the participants make sense of their lives. (p. 4-8)

A purposeful sample was selected. This sample met a certain criteria based on the purpose of the study. A participant information sheet was designed to collect demographic information from the selected participants, such as type of doctorate earned and time-to-degree for completion of the doctorate. The participant information sheet allowed the researcher to collect information to allow for a closer examination of each participant and describe the group

of participants. For data collection, an informal and conversational interview took place with each participant with the use of semi-structured questions. Each interview was recorded and transcribed. The grounded theory approach was used, which allowed the researcher to generate theories. The constant comparison method and three levels of coding: open, axial, and selective, were used for data analysis.

Definition of Terms

All But Dissertation (ABD) - A doctoral student who has completed all of the requirements for the doctoral degree with the exception of the dissertation.

Black/African American - A person having origins in any Black racial groups of Africa (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

Doctoral Degree - A degree awarded for completing extensive coursework and culminating with research on an original topic that will add to the body of knowledge in a field.

Doctoral Degree Completer - A person who has successfully completed a doctoral degree.

Research University (high research activity) - A university with high research activity that awards at least 20 doctorates per year (CGS, 2009a).

Resilience - “An outcome of successful adaptation to adversity” (Zautra, Hall, & Murray, 2010, p. 4).

Doctoral Student - A student enrolled in a doctoral degree program.

Faculty Advisor - A faculty member assigned to assist a doctoral student with course selection and who may become chair of the doctoral student’s dissertation committee.

Historically Black College and University (HBCU) - Any historically Black college or university that was established prior to 1964, whose principal mission was, and is, the education of African Americans (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

Mentoring - A relationship or partnership in which a veteran or expert fosters the academic, cultural, personal, and/or professional growth of a novice by sharing knowledge, skills, information, support, and encouragement (Baker & Griffin, 2010).

Persistence - The trait of being determined to achieve a goal. For the purpose of this study, persistence is used to describe the determination to complete a doctoral degree.

Predominately White Institution (PWI) - A college or university with a majority Caucasian (European origin) student population.

Time-to-degree - The total number of years, from initial enrollment, a student takes to complete all the necessary requirements of a doctoral program.

CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The review of the relevant literature that pertains to doctoral student persistence generally and particularly for African American men is presented in this chapter. A brief history of the doctorate in the United States and an outline of the standard doctoral process are provided. Next, impediments to success that African Americans face including different forms of racism, race-related stress, and racial identity struggles coupled with the history of gender disparities and its continued effect on present attainment at all educational levels are discussed. Next, an examination of literature that emphasizes support for doctoral students and African American men is included. This section includes the importance of mentoring relationships, a positive faculty advising relationship, socialization, and other support systems necessary for success. The review of literature concludes with the theoretical framework that established the boundaries of the study.

Overview

The Doctorate in the United States

The doctorate is the highest level of formal study in the United States and in most countries. In the majority of academic disciplines, the doctorate is considered the most prestigious academic degree in higher education. By 1904, many American universities were requiring that all their university professors hold a Ph.D. (Rudolph, 1990). The American doctorate degree was necessary for students who wanted to pursue careers as researchers and

scholars. The degree allowed this elite group of students to continue their study in preparation for their future careers (Nettles & Millet, 2006). The status of Ph.D. degree holders was elevated among the academic elite and society. Possessing the degree demonstrated “academic respectability, the mark of professional competence, the assurance of a certain standard sameness of training, experience, and exposure to the ideals, the rules, the habits of scientific Germanic scholarship” (Rudolph, 1990, p. 395). The doctorate is the prominent symbol of scholarship in the American educational system (Greene, 1974). Yale University established its first Ph.D. degree in 1860 and awarded the first three Ph.D. degrees a year later in 1861 (Nettles & Millet, 2006; Rudolph, 1990). The recipients were Eugene Schuyler, philosophy and psychology, Arthur Williams Wright, physics, and James Morris Whiton, classics (Rosenberg, 1961).

The Doctoral Process

The process of obtaining a doctoral degree is fairly uniform across the United States. The components include: extensive course work, a comprehensive examination, and a dissertation. The successful completion of course work provides the foundation for the remainder of the doctoral process. The student and the faculty advisor select certain courses based on the comprehensive knowledge required for the subject area and the research interests of the student. After the coursework has been successfully completed, a comprehensive examination is administered to demonstrate competence in the student’s subject area. The student must pass this examination in order to begin individual research. The doctoral process culminates with an independent original research study and the presentation of the results. Data from the Council of Graduate School Ph.D. Completion Project have shown that 57% of all doctoral students complete their degree within 10 years (CGS, 2008).

Time-to-Degree

With all the required components involved with doctoral study, according to the CGS, the time-to-degree remains a concern for doctoral students, faculty, and university personnel. The median number of years to complete the doctorate was 7 years for recipients in 2007-2008 (Bell, 2010). Over the past 20 years, the time-to-degree has declined; however, there are still two areas of concern. First, there is a considerable difference in the amount of time certain racial and/or ethnic groups take to complete the degree. According to the CGS, the median time-to-degree was 7 years for multi-race, Caucasians, and Asians students while the median time-to-degree was 8 to 9 years for Native Americans, African Americans, and Hispanic students (Bell, 2010). Secondly, there is a significant difference in the amount of time-to-degree among fields of study. According to the CGS, in the 2007-2008 academic year, doctoral recipients in physical sciences, engineering, and life sciences had the shortest median time-to-degree of 6 years while in the field of education, the median time was 12 years and for the humanities 9 years (Bell, 2010). Bowen and Rudenstine's (1992) study found the field of study influences the time-to-degree among doctoral students more than any other issue.

African American Doctoral Attainment History

In 1876, 15 years after the first doctorate was awarded, Edward Alexander Bouchet became the first African American to earn a doctorate. He graduated from Yale University with a Ph.D. in physics (Greene, 1974). African Americans earned less than 400 doctorate degrees from the time of Reconstruction to the beginning of World War II (Greene, 1974; Thompson, 1999). There were two major obstacles that contributed to the low number of doctorates awarded to African Americans. According to Greene (1974), during this period of time, educational segregation prevailed; therefore, almost all African American undergraduate students

were products of historically Black colleges and universities which were referred to by some as “glorified junior colleges” (p. 23) and were the only educational option for most African Americans. Second, often African Americans who were academically prepared for graduate study were unable to pursue graduate education because of insufficient funds. African Americans in the North had more access to education at all levels than those in the South (Greene, 1974).

By the late 1960s and 1970s, those barriers were broken as a result of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which prohibited discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, or national origin in any federally funded college or university. This movement provided more opportunities for African Americans and other minorities to access higher education (Thompson, 1999). Special recruiting efforts and programs geared toward minorities were created and financial aid programs were established. As a result more minorities began attending institutions of higher education, specifically predominately White institutions. However at the graduate level, only 9% of full-time students were minorities and the majority of the doctorates earned by African Americans were in the field of Education (Thompson, 1999). The large number of doctorates awarded to African Americans in the area of Education would remain steady in the 1980s and 1990s. For example, in the 1984-1985 academic year, there were 521 doctorate degrees in education awarded to African Americans and this number increased to 620 in the 1994-1995 academic year (U.S. Department of Education, 1988, 1997).

The 1980s saw a decrease in overall doctorates earned among most groups except Asian American students as a result of noncitizens studying in the United States on temporary visas. For example, in the 1976-1977 academic year, African Americans earned 1,253 doctorate degrees while in the 1984-1985 academic year, African Americans earned 1,154 doctorate

degrees. Thompson (1999) suggests that the decline in African American doctoral enrollment and attainment during the 1980s was related to the federal government's indifference for minorities during the Reagan administration; high interest in military service; negative racial climate present on some college campuses; the drug epidemic; high unemployment rates including those with earned graduate degrees; and the attainment of professional degrees, which in some cases were more lucrative than doctoral degrees. The 1990s saw growth from the previous decade among African Americans earning doctoral degrees. In the 6-year period from 1990-1995, the number of African Americans that earned doctorates grew from 1,153 to 1,667. Despite this increase, the overall numbers of African American doctoral recipients remain low (Thompson, 1999). Table 1 reveals that both African Americans and Whites saw a slight decrease of earned doctorates from 1976-1977 to 1984-1985. However, overall Whites still earn the majority of doctorates. African Americans saw a sizable increase of earned doctorates from 1994-1995 to 2007-2008. In spite of the many impediments to success African Americans may face in academia, this population continues to successfully complete doctoral degrees.

Impediments to Success

Racism

“Racism is a belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial difference produce an inherent superiority of a particular race” (Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary, 2005, p. 1024). Utsey (1998) describes racism as “insidious, pervasive, and ubiquitous” (p. 269) with dire consequences for many African Americans. Racism can negatively affect African Americans' physical and mental health, with such diseases as high blood pressure, stroke, cardiovascular disease; psychiatric disorders like substance abuse and depression. Racism also contributes to low self-esteem and decreased satisfaction with life.

Table 1

Doctorates Earned by Racial Group During 1976-1977, 1984-1985, 1994-1995, and 2007-2008

| | 1976-1977 | % | 1984-1985 | % | 1994-1995 | % | 2007-2008 | % |
|--------------------------------|-----------|------|-----------|------|-----------|------|-----------|------|
| Total | 33,126 | | 32,307 | | 44,427 | | 63,712 | |
| White | 26,851 | 81.1 | 23,934 | 74.1 | 27,826 | 62.6 | 36,390 | 57.1 |
| Black | 1,253 | 3.8 | 1,154 | 3.6 | 1,667 | 3.8 | 3,906 | 6.1 |
| Asian or Pacific Islander | 658 | 2.0 | 1,106 | 3.4 | 2,690 | 6.1 | 3,618 | 5.7 |
| Hispanic | 522 | 1.6 | 677 | 2.1 | 984 | 2.2 | 2,279 | 3.6 |
| American Indian/Alaskan Native | 95 | 0.3 | 119 | 0.4 | 130 | 0.3 | 272 | 0.4 |

Sources: U.S. Department of Education, *Digest of Education Statistics*, 1988, p. 225; U. S. Department of Education, *Digest of Education Statistics*, 1997, p. 301; U.S. Department of Education, *Digest of Education Statistics*, 2009, p. 430.

“Racism in one form or another, permeates many aspects of African American life and as such significantly infringes on the quality of life enjoyed by African Americans” (Utsey, 1998, p.270).

Institutional Racism

Institutional racism is defined as the constant unequal distribution of resources and opportunities that provide advantages to one racial group while excluding others. The benefactors of this discriminatory practice are often unaware of this subtle form of racism and its harmful and long-lasting effects (Taylor & Clark, 2009). Obach (2000) adds because of institutional racism “members of certain groups are systematically disadvantaged due to discriminatory processes that are ingrained in social institutions” (p. 50). Keleher and Johnson (2001) assert institutional racism is one of the most intense forms of racism. The researchers believe the unnoticeable and unintentional nature of institutional racism is powerful. Taylor and Clark (2009) add because institutional racism is so deeply rooted in society through everyday laws and practices this form of racism typically continues without question. Noguera (2001) concurs stating the challenge to recognizing and ending institutional racism is the fact these procedures are so common, they seem “race neutral” (p. 36). Keleher & Johnson (2001) provide an example:

When state laws or local school policies have the effect of advantaging or disadvantaging certain racial groups, or when funds and resources are distributed unequally, institutional racism is at work. When racial disparities go unaddressed, this, too, is a form of institutional racism. (p. 25)

According to Taylor and Clark (2009) the power, privilege, wealth, and status Whites have in society can be attributed to institutional racism (p. 115). However, according to Obach (2000), Whites commonly challenge the notion that inequality can be ingrained into social

institutions. Consequently, Whites' inability to grasp and/or accept the reality of institutional racism only continues the unequal treatment. Obach (2000) continues stating:

It is difficult to demonstrate that what dominant groups have, should be seen as a privilege and not an entitlement. The dominant group's status is, in part, a result of their own efforts, and in part, a result of their position in a society which they had little role in creating. In reality, their status and their standard of living were made possible through the labor of generations before them, including that of the oppressed and exploited peoples whose descendants are still suffering the consequences of that unfair treatment.

(p. 54)

Kendall (2006) adds White privilege is difficult to see for those who were born with access to power and resources, but it is clearly evident for those who were born without it.

Campus Racial Climate

Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) define campus racial climate as the general racial atmosphere or mood of a college or university toward the minority student population. The researchers assert that in order for a college or university to have a positive racial climate it must contain four elements: the inclusion of minority students, faculty, and administrators on campus; the incorporation of a curriculum that includes the experiences of minorities in society; the creation or enhancement of support programs that will aid in the recruitment, retention, and graduation of minority students; and a commitment to diversity in the college or university's mission. In contrast, a negative campus racial climate does not include or encourage these elements (Solorzano et al., 2000). Higher retention and graduation rates are associated with a positive climate and poor academic outcomes, lower retention rates, and less satisfaction with the college experience are associated with a negative climate.

The participants in the Solorzano et al. (2000) study, which consisted of 10 focus groups comprised of 34 African American college students at three predominately White universities, support the notion of the harmful effects of a negative campus racial climate. Several of the participants revealed that the campus climate was negative for them because of their White peers. A participant stated that some of his White peers did not believe he was attending the university using academic scholarships instead of athletic scholarships. Similarly, a participant in the study disclosed her experiences battling the notion that she was only accepted into the university as a result of affirmative action. Another participant discussed how a negative interaction with a White faculty member caused the campus climate to be negative. The participant stated that she was asked by her instructor to retake a quiz because she performed well on the quiz and the faculty member believed she cheated. The student complied retaking the quiz in a room alone only with a graduate teaching assistant present and received an even higher grade on the quiz. This is an example of the low expectations some White faculty have for African American students.

A study by Harper and Hurtado (2007) produced nine themes about the racial climate at colleges and universities using focus groups that included 278 African American, Asian American, Latino, Native American, and White students from five different predominately White institutions. Additionally 41 staff members participated in a focus group from the five campuses. The first theme that emerged was cross race consensus regarding institutional negligence which refers to both minorities and Whites experiencing frustration by the lack of institutional support encouraging racial understanding among different groups. A White participant from a rural area, who had never interacted with anyone outside of his race until college, was not certain how to start a conversation with someone outside of his race. The second theme was race as a four-letter

word and an avoidable topic which denotes that race is seldom discussed on campus and is seen as a taboo subject. The third theme to surface was self-reports of racial segregation which implies self-segregation occurs on campus. Participants in the study discussed the segregation that is often seen in dining halls and among fraternities and sororities, especially at social gatherings. The fourth theme that emerged was the gap in social satisfaction by race which refers to how socially satisfied a student is on campus greatly depends on their race. For example, White and Asian American students reported a higher level of social satisfaction than African American students. The fifth theme that emerged was the reputational legacies for racism which refers to the reputation an institution has in the African American community. African American students expect to face racism at an institution that has received a negative racial reputation through the media or from current or former students. The sixth theme was White students overestimation of minority student satisfaction, which denotes White students' assumptions that minority students seem content and experience college in the same manner as they do. The seventh theme that surfaced was the pervasiveness of Whiteness in space, curricular, and activities. Several participants revealed that the campus multicultural center was the only location minorities felt comfortable enough to share aspects of their culture. A participant stated:

Everything is so White. The concerts. White musicians. The activities catered to White culture. The football games, a ton of drunk White folks. All the books we read in class, White authors and viewpoints. Student on my left, right, in front, and in back of me in my classes White, White, White, White. I feel like there is nothing for us here besides the [cultural] center, but yet [this university] claims to be so big on diversity. (p. 18)

The eighth theme that surfaced was the consciousness, powerlessness paradox among racial/ethnic minority staff which refers to the unwillingness of staff members to discuss with those in higher administrative positions, the dissatisfaction and racism minority students often experience and share with them. A participant stated the fear of being branded a troublemaker contributed to his/her decision to remain silent. The ninth theme was the unexplored qualitative realities of race in institutional assessment refer to the lack of research conducted about this subject by campus assessment offices. A participant discussed how this was the first time he had been asked these types of questions and believed that the university should be asking more questions like the ones asked during the focus group. This study demonstrates the enormous influence institutions have on race relations among the students on campus.

Racial Microaggressions

In the United States, African Americans are often a marginalized group and frequently the recipients of racial microaggressions (Sue, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007). According to Sue et al. (2007), racial microaggressions are "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional that communicate hostility, derogatory or negative racial slights and insults to a target person or group" (p. 273). Solorzano et al. (2000) suggest that racial microaggressions are often automatic or unconscious.

There are three forms of racial microaggressions: microassault, microinsult, and microinvalidation. According to Sue and Sue (2008), microassaults are blatant verbal and nonverbal attacks communicated to express discriminatory and biased thoughts. Microinsults are unintentional, offensive, and insensitive remarks or behaviors that degrade the racial heritage or

identity of a person or group. Microinvalidation denotes remarks or behaviors that negate or dismiss the opinions, feelings, and/or views of a target group.

Sue et al. (2007) describes the more “disguised and covert” (p. 272) forms of racism like microaggressions that are present today, which are aversive racism, symbolic racism, and modern racism. These forms of racism are considered less overt and public. Symbolic and modern racists maintain that only self-reliance and hard work are necessary for success. This view completely disregards the obstacles minorities may face because of the racism that is interwoven into American society. Aversive racists favor equality while maintaining anti-minority feelings unconsciously. According to Sue and Sue (2008) aversive racist sympathize with the past injustices imposed on minorities, however they retain negative feelings and beliefs about minorities “due to the socialization process in the United States, where biased attitudes and stereotypes reinforce group hierarchy” (p. 108).

A study by Solorzano et al. (2000) using 10 focus groups comprised of 34 African American college students (18 females and 16 males), explored the students’ experiences at three predominately White universities. The results of this study support the notion that racial microaggressions still exist on college campuses and impact African American men and women academically and socially. Some participants were encouraged by university personnel to drop classes, to change majors, and to transfer. The prevalence of microaggressions on campus, led several students in the study to create counter-spaces both inside and outside of the classroom. These counter-spaces provide students with a hospitable environment which has a positive racial atmosphere that is comfortable for them, like African American fraternities and sororities and academic study groups structured by African Americans. Microaggressions, which is a covert

form of racism which minorities experience in society including college campuses, directly affect the stress minorities may experience during their time on campus.

Race-Related Stress

Utsey (1998) defines race-related stress as the stress and anxiety African Americans experience when they encounter racism and discrimination. A study by Watkins et al. (2007) using focus groups with a total of 46 African American undergraduate men, age 18 to 26 years, found that the high levels of stress experienced by this population contribute to their decision to leave college. Stress related to major life changing events or daily frustrations can have serious affects on African American male college students' emotional well-being. Participants who attended both predominately White institutions and historically Black colleges and universities stated that being a student in general is very stressful. However, instances of racism at predominately White institutions and their surrounding communities is a major stressor for African American male students. A participant in the Watkins et al. (2007) study disclosed that he had experienced five separate racially disturbing incidents within his first 3 months on a predominately White college campus. Another participant discussed the racism he experienced off-campus from the people in the community. The same participant noted a possible correlation between the lack of African Americans on campus and the lack of tolerance he received from his professors. Another participant disclosed how he had subconsciously become accustomed to the abuse he experienced at his institution. In contrast, racism was not mentioned as a stressor among the participants who attended historically Black colleges and universities.

A quantitative study by Banks (2010) supports the notion that racism affects the mental health and academic success of many African Americans. The researcher investigated the connection between racial discrimination and symptoms of depression among African American

college students from a large mid-western state university. Using 194 African American students (128 female and 66 male), the researcher examined whether college hassles moderated (when or for whom variables relate to an outcome) or mediated (how and why one variable may correlate with an outcome) the relationship between racial discrimination and symptoms of depression. College hassles are defined as the everyday stressors college students may encounter. The results indicated a positive correlation between racial discrimination and college hassles as well as college hassles and symptoms of depression. The study suggests lessening college hassles may reduce the relationship between racial discrimination and symptoms of depression. Overall the results reveal that college hassles mediated the connection between racial discrimination and symptoms of depression. The participants in the Watkins et al. (2007) study reported that these stressors concerned them, but they try to devote more time and energy to achieving their goals and changing the negative image society has of African American men. However, none of the participants were forthcoming about their personal coping strategies instead they focused on their personal commitment to success noting their “stoicism and determination to proceed against all odds derived from their families, specifically parents and grandparents” (p. 115). Despite the drive to successfully complete college degrees, many African Americans struggle with who they are and who they present themselves to be while in college.

Racial Identity Struggles

Helms (1990) defined the term racial identity as “a sense of group or collective identity based on one’s perception that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group” (p. 3).

Stewart's (2008) study examined how and why five self-identified African American college students "negotiate and integrate their multiple social and cultural identities in their self-images" (p. 189). All of the participants were from a rural mid-western college and participated in four interviews. From this study, three themes emerged to add to the literature about multiple identities among African American college students. First, the validity of multiple identities was confirmed. This theme states that these students are very complex and "described identities that are composed of multiple facets that jointly affected their self-concepts" (p. 195). The students maintain that there is more to them than what was seen externally. The critical role of education and reflection in identity articulation is the second theme. This theme focuses on the education system's profound influence on the development of identity concepts for its students. Many of the participants allow their institution's applications and other entrance forms to define their identity by the action of selecting boxes to describe themselves. A participant, who stated she was bi-racial during the interview, selected African American as her race on her college application instead of "other." At this point in her life, she is more comfortable stating that she is her mother's child, who is African American than stating that she is her parents' child (her father is White). Another participant referenced the school when asked to provide a description of herself. For example, an African American female noted "I definitely feel that since I've been here, I've become more aware of that identity [being Black and female]. The third theme is the intractability of identity integration, which is the struggle and emotional distress people experience when deciding to embrace or not embrace their multiple identities. A participant states that he shifts and negotiates components of his identity depending on who he is interacting with at the time. Many of the students commented on the ways they "had to negotiate their identities for certain audiences and in certain situations" (Stewart, 2008, p. 199). Most of the

participants agreed that negotiating identities is distressing and complicated, but necessary. A participant in Watkins et al. (2007) noted internal identity struggles as a stressor that African American men experience especially at predominately White institutions. This participant disclosed his daily struggle with appearing to be “too White” or “too Black” among his peers. Another participant posed the question “What is Black?” He noted to answer the question most of his White peers do not refer to the history of African Americans in textbooks, rather they refer to television. He stated that pop culture knowledge, involving African Americans on television, is used as an indicator to determine if a person is Black enough (Watkins et al., 2007). W. E. B. DuBois describes racial identity struggles as double-consciousness.

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (DuBois, 1903/2006, p.9).

In addition to the racial struggles many African Americans face, the gap in degree attainment among African American men and women continues to widen.

Gender Disparities

The U.S. Census Bureau (2010) reported that 58% of adults, age 25-29 years, who hold advanced degrees, are women. The increasing number of women attaining master's, professional, and doctoral degrees contributes directly to the growth in graduate degree production. According to the CGS (2009b), between 2006 and 2008 doctoral degree production increased 5.7% for women compared with 3.5% for men. Women comprised the majority of graduate students in fall 2008 with 51% of the total enrollment. The same educational

attainment disparity is true among African American women and men not only at the graduate degree level but at all levels of education. The U.S. Department of Education's *Digest of Education Statistics* (2009) reported that in 2007-2008, 7.8 % (52,247) of African American men completed bachelor's degrees; 7.4% (18,357) completed master's degrees; 5.2% (2,389) completed professional degrees; and 4.2% (1,312) completed doctoral degrees. In the same year, 11.2% (100,210) of African American women completed bachelor's degrees; 12.3% (46,705) completed master's degrees; 8.8% (4,011) completed professional degrees; and 8.0% (2,594) completed doctoral degrees. Slater (1994) suggests that the increase in the enrollment and completion rates among African Americans in higher education is due to the participation of African American women. Table 2 reveals the comparison of doctorates awarded to African American males and females. In the mid-1970s, African American men were earning a great deal more doctorates than African American women. By the mid-1980s, there was a decrease in earned doctorates in general and among African Americans with very little difference between the genders. By the mid-1990s, African American women were outpacing African American men by large numbers. This trend continues in the 2000s, increasing the gender gap. Table 3 reveals the total enrollment for graduate students, which has seen a large increase among African Americans as a whole over the years. The number of African American males enrolling in graduate programs have increased, but not at the same rates of African American females.

These gender disparities are not recent occurrences within the African American community. There is a history of disparities in educational attainment among African American men and women that contribute to the current unbalanced numbers. Cross and Slater (2000) suggest that racial discrimination was the major reason for the evolution of the higher education gender gap among African Americans especially at the master's level. African American men

may have predicted that employment opportunities would likely not increase for them even with more education in the 1950s and 1960s. During this period of blatant racial discrimination, the only employment options for educated African Americans were low paying jobs and teaching positions in segregated schools. Given that women have primarily held teaching positions, more African American women took advantage of the opportunity to acquire more education and to become teachers. Therefore, it can be suggested that the lack of employment opportunities available for African American men contributed to the lower numbers of attainment for them and the higher level of attainment for African American women.

Table 2

Doctorates Awarded to African American Males and Females During 1976-1977, 1984-1985, 1994-1995, and 2007-2008

| | 1976-1977 | % | 1984-1985 | % | 1994-1995 | % | 2007-2008 | % |
|------------------------------------------|-----------|-----|-----------|-----|-----------|-----|-----------|-----|
| Total number of students | 33,126 | | 32,307 | | 44,427 | | 63,712 | |
| Total number of African Americans | 1,253 | 3.7 | 1,154 | 3.5 | 1,667 | 3.7 | 3,906 | 6.1 |
| Total number of African American males | 766 | 2.1 | 561 | 1.7 | 731 | 1.6 | 1,312 | 2.0 |
| Total number of African American females | 487 | 1.4 | 593 | 1.8 | 936 | 2.1 | 2,594 | 4.0 |

Sources: U.S. Department of Education, *Digest of Education Statistics*, 1988, p. 226; U.S. Department of Education, *Digest of Education Statistics*, 1997, p. 302; U.S. Department of Education, *Digest of Education Statistics*, 2009, p. 431.

Table 3

Graduate Enrollment (Post Baccalaureate) Number of African Americans During the Fall of 1976, 1980, 1990, 2000, 2003, and 2008

| | 1976 | % | 1980 | % | 1990 | % | 2000 | % | 2003 | % | 2008 | % |
|------------------------------------------|-----------|------|-----------|------|-----------|------|-----------|------|-----------|------|-----------|------|
| Total number of students | 1,566,644 | | 1,617,720 | | 1,859,531 | | 2,156,896 | | 2,431,117 | | 2,737,076 | |
| Total number of African Americans | 89,670 | 5.7 | 87,910 | 5.4 | 99,819 | 5.4 | 181,425 | 8.4 | 230,342 | 9.5 | 315,194 | 11.5 |
| Total number of African American males | 39,185 | 43.7 | 35,515 | 40.4 | 36,733 | 36.8 | 58,418 | 32.2 | 70,254 | 30.5 | 90,460 | 28.7 |
| Total number of African American females | 50,484 | 56.3 | 52,394 | 59.6 | 63,085 | 63.2 | 123,006 | 67.8 | 160,087 | 69.5 | 224,733 | 71.3 |

Source: U.S. Department of Education: National Center for Education Statistics, Status and trends in the education of racial and ethnic groups, 2010, p. 125

Achievement Gap

Preferential treatment given to girls at the primary and secondary level is suggested by Cross and Slater (2000) as a contributor to the gender gap between African American men and women at all educational levels. The current teacher population does not reflect the changing demographic in American classrooms. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010) of the four million teachers in American 87% are White, 77% are women, and only 2% are African American men. There may be a correlation between the lack of minority teachers and the disproportionate number of African American males labeled disciplinary problems and are tracked to special education courses. Both of these outcomes can affect African American males' progress through grade levels and may have implications on future employment opportunities.

The Council of the Great City Schools' report, *A Call for Change: The Social and Educational Factors Contributing to the Outcomes of Black Males in Urban Schools* (2010), states that the gap in proficiency levels among race begin at a very young age. According to this report in the fourth grade, only 12% of African American males nationally and only 11% in large cities were proficient in reading compared to 38% of White males. In his 1985 book, *Countering the Conspiracy to Destroy Black Boys*, Jawanza Kunjufu developed the term "fourth-grade failure syndrome" (Kunjufu, 1985, p. 7) in reference to the decrease in achievement levels among African American males at the fourth-grade. Kunjufu contributes this distinctive occurrence among African American males to low teacher expectations, teachers' lack of knowledge of African American culture, limited parental involvement, lack of positive role models, and the shift from tactile and kinetic teaching methods to more traditional teaching methods such as lecture.

According to the Children's Defense Fund's *State of America's Children* (2010) report, 85% of African Americans in the fourth grade were performing below grade level in reading and 85% were performing below grade level in math compared to 59% of Whites who were performing below grade level in reading and 50% below in math. Among school suspensions, African Americans had a school suspension rate of 14,982 per 100 in 2006 compared to 4,760 per 100 for White students. Also in 2006, the number of African Americans enrolled in classes for students with mental retardation were 1.9% compared to 0.8% of Whites; 1.4% of African Americans were enrolled in classes for students with emotional disturbances compared to 0.8% of Whites; and 6.3% of African Americans were enrolled in classes for students with learning disabilities compared to 5.2% of Whites. In contrast, the number of African Americans enrolled in gifted classes was 3.5% to 8.0% of Whites. All of these findings contribute to low enrollment and completion rates among African American men at the college level and can contribute to the high unemployment rate and high prison rates of African Americans.

Performance Gap

Some African Americans who achieve academic success and/or elect to pursue higher educational opportunities may experience abuse and/or rejection by their African American peers and are often accused of *acting White* (Cross & Slater, 2000). This form of "internalized racism or internalized oppression" (Harper, 2006b, p. 338) is referred to as oppositional culture. Fordham and Ogbu developed this controversial hypothesis/theory in a study conducted in 1986 with eight high achieving African American students in a high school with a large minority population. The researchers' theory was created as one explanation for the academic performance gap of some African Americans. The researchers' theory suggests that some

African Americans reject academic success to avoid being accused of acting White and/or to avoid what they see is as involuntary assimilation.

Oates (2009) presents five other possible explanations, academic engagement, cultural capital, social capital, school quality, and biased treatment, for the gap in educational performance among African Americans and Whites besides internalized racism.

1. Academic engagement denotes the attitudes some African Americans have toward positive academic achievement as a reason for the achievement gap. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) provide a theory, stating positive academic achievement may be negatively affected by oppositional culture among African American students. Oates' (2009) study challenges this theory and suggests that the perception of acting White or being ridiculed for academic success by peers has little or no impact on the achievement gap. Those persons who are supportive of scholastic success have more of an impact.

2. Cultural capital refers to the notion that some African Americans may not have access to activities and educational opportunities considered "high-status or high-brow as a result of race on socioeconomic privilege" (Oates, 2009, p. 418). Activities such as museum visits and private tutoring may not be available because of the lack of economic resources.

3. Social capital denotes the individual and communal support a student experiences and its effect on educational achievement. Individual social capital refers to the household structure and involvement among the parents within the schools, while communal social capital refers to the pride students feel toward their community. As a result of the disproportionate number of African American students with single parent households, some parents may not have the opportunity to be very socially involved within the schools, with the teachers, and with other parents, which can contribute to the achievement gap among African Americans and Whites.

4. School quality states that the African American-White educational gap can be decreased if schools prioritize learning. Schools that prioritize learning encourage a sense of purpose in their students. Students' assignments and progresses are carefully examined and the school has an environment conducive to learning with a dedication to positive learning outcomes.

5. Biased treatment examines the possibility that the educational gap among African Americans and Whites can be contributed to the teacher's negative perceptions of performance and the low expectations held for African American students. These elements may lead to tracking this student population into special education courses thus confirming the self-fulfilling prophecies of some teachers. Oates (2009) states that "self-fulfilling prophecies occur when students perform in a manner that validates erroneous teacher-perceptions. Such perceptions are erroneous to the extent that they are not thoroughly justified by past performances and other relevant information" (p. 421). A large socioeconomic divide between the student and teacher can also perpetuate biased treatment.

A study by Harper (2006b) using one-on-one interviews with 32 high-achieving (GPA above 3.0) African American men from six mid-western universities aimed to discover more about the experiences of this population specifically focusing on the support this population receives from peers. The results of this study suggest that support and encouragement of same-race peers does contribute to college success for this population which challenges the premise of Fordham and Ogbu's (1986) theory. Harper (2006b) states "No participant reported social ostracism or feelings of alienation from other African American students. Instead, they all described how peer support significantly enhanced the quality of their experiences as high-achievers in predominately White learning environments" (p. 347).

Within the study, peers were considered fourth after God, themselves, and their parents to whom the students would attribute their college success. A participant stated that he knows: How it is to be the only African American student in all of your classes and they know that most Black organizations on campus are led by African American women, not the ‘brothas.’ So, when they see a ‘brotha’ who is involved and stepping up to be a leader in class or outside of the classroom, they are especially proud and supportive. (Harper, 2006, p. 347)

Many of the participants stated that they found the majority of their same-race peer support within Black student clubs and activities on campus.

The impediments to success in academia for African Americans particularly African American men include racism, institutional racism, campus racial climate, racial microgression, race-related stress, racial identity struggles, gender disparities, achievement gap, and performance gap. These obstacles have major implications for the successful completion of college degrees at all levels, which directly affects the pipeline of African Americans in doctoral degree programs.

Persistence

Doctoral Student Persistence

When referring to the persistence of doctoral students, Bair (1999) defines persistence as “the continuance of a student’s progress toward the completion of a doctoral degree” (p. 8). Forty to 60% of students that commence a doctoral program regardless of subject area do not complete their degree (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Lieberman & Dorsch, 2005; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000; Lovitts, 2001), and this percentage has remained steady for the past 40 years (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005). A quantitative study by Bowen and Rudenstine (1992) using data

sets from the Doctorate Records File which included 10 universities and six fields of study, states that one-third of doctoral students depart after 1 year of entering the program, another one-third depart before completing all required coursework, and yet another one-third depart before completing the dissertation.

Doctoral student attrition may appear to be an individual decision that will only affect the student who has decided not to complete a doctoral program. However, the consequences extend beyond the student's departure. There are ramifications for the university and society as well. Lovitts (2001) reports four major reasons to study doctoral student persistence and the possible long-lasting impact. The psychological implication that leaving the program may cause a student is a primary concern. Students disclosed that their decisions not to complete the doctoral degree caused periods of depression and in some cases thoughts of suicide. Another concern is the considerable amounts of time faculty members spent working with, advising, and mentoring these students who decided to leave the program. That time could have been better used with other students. Another concern is the financial cost to the university and the department. When a student decides to leave a doctoral program, enrollment decreases for that program; therefore some programs may be in jeopardy of being discontinued if the level of attrition continues. Another concern is the loss of a talented educated person. When doctoral students do not persist to the completion of the doctoral degree, there is the loss of the contribution of original research and the opportunity to mentor other doctoral students (Lovitts, 2001).

In a paper presented at the Association for the Study of Higher Education by Bair and Haworth (1999) the researchers discussed their findings from a meta-synthesis of 118 studies on the doctoral attrition and persistence research. The meta-synthesis provides six recurring themes for doctoral student persistence. First, student/faculty relationships were stated. The amount of

time and quality of time spent between the doctoral student and the advisor is directly related to successful degree completion. The second theme was student involvement in academic life. Involvement at the doctoral level includes attendance at graduate and professional association conferences, academic and social activities, attendance at departmental and university meetings, and activities directly related to the students' future professional aspirations. Third, student satisfaction with the program was noted. The recurring themes within this area of student satisfaction were: program quality, communication with students, fairness of the program, consistency in the evaluation, and interest in students as professionals. The fourth theme was student-to-student interaction. Doctoral students demonstrating interest and support for other doctoral students are important to persistence. Fifth, institutional financial assistance was suggested. Doctoral students who were able to acquire teaching, research, and/or general graduate assistantships or other financial support by the institution have a higher rate of completion than students who were unable to take advantage of assistantships. The final theme is the dissertation. Elements that support the completion of the dissertation include: an effective advisor, an interesting topic, inner motivation, firm deadlines, little or no employment, and future incentives such as postdoctoral fellowship opportunities or employment (Bair & Haworth, 1999).

In a study conducted by Golde and Dore (2001) 4,114 doctoral students were surveyed and provided insight into the often overlooked contributors of high attrition rates among doctoral students. The study suggests that some students were unaware of the specific details and components involved with doctoral study before entering a program. For example, some students were not aware of the amount of time and money a program requires, how doctoral study would affect their daily lives, and the perseverance required to successfully complete a program. Golde and Dore (2001) assert that some students are not asking the appropriate

questions at the proper time and university personnel are not providing the beneficial information needed to assist students through the process. A study by Allison (2003) concurs, stating that some students entering doctoral programs are unaware of the nature, the expectations, and/or the rigor of doctoral programs. The doctoral students in this study suggested more transparency initially from the department and the university about the programs. Providing information about attrition rates, average time-to-degree, financial assistance availability, and faculty research interests before students apply may decrease attrition rates. In addition, the lack of transparency may have contributed to the 49% of students who stated that they would or might select a different university if they had the opportunity to start their program again (Golde & Dore, 2001).

Lieberman and Dorsch (2005) discuss the reorganization that took place at Northern Illinois University, College of Education, to address attrition problems with the Ed.D. program. Before entering the program, an interview is conducted in conjunction with an on-campus writing sample to assess students' writing abilities. Also throughout the coursework, significance is placed on writing strategies and linking assignments to the dissertation topic. The expectations and the ability required to successfully complete a dissertation are communicated clearly to the students before the process begins. To assist in the dissertation process and to decrease the number of students that are ABD, the "Big Paper Network" was created. The Big Paper Network is a support group for doctoral students who are conducting research for the dissertation. Dissertation themed meetings are held at a faculty member's home twice a semester. The themes include self-advocacy, time management, and creating and maintaining a support system (Lieberman & Dorsch, 2005). To support the notion that additional clear connections between coursework and the dissertation need to be implemented, 35% of the

doctoral students surveyed in the Golde and Dore (2001) study thought their coursework did not provide the proper groundwork for conducting independent research.

A study by Gardner (2009), which interviewed 60 doctoral students and 34 faculty members of high and low attrition departments at one university, describes the disconnect that exists between the perceived reasons for student departure by students and faculty. The three main perceived reasons for attrition cited by faculty were student lacking, student should not have come in the first place, and personal problems. With student lacking, faculty noted the lack of ability and motivation to complete graduate level work. Second, faculty noted they believed some students should not have come to graduate school in the first place. This suggests students elected to enter graduate school not suited for graduate work. The third perceived reason was personal problems that included mental and/or emotional health issues. Faculty noted some students were not equipped to handle the stressors of graduate school. Overall, the underlying cause for departure cited by faculty was student failure. The three main perceived reasons for attrition among students were personal problems, departmental issues, and wrong fit. With personal problems students noted family responsibilities as their number one concern. Second, students cited departmental issues noting the lack of financial support, inadequate advising, and departmental politics. Third, students suggested that graduate school was the wrong fit. A student noted, despite having the ability to successfully complete graduate work, graduate school was not an appropriate fit. This study demonstrates that regardless of the level of attrition within a department, there are common perceived reasons for departure. In addition, personal problems have different connotations for faculty and students, which would suggest a need for improved communication between faculty and students to increase persistence.

African American Doctoral Student Persistence

The same issues that influence attrition and persistence for doctoral students in general also may affect African Americans. However, in addition to those factors, there are some that are specific to African Americans. The racial climate of the university and the departments at predominately White institutions can affect persistence among African Americans. A study by King and Chepytor-Thomson (1996) using surveys of 74 African American doctoral recipients, found 18% of the doctoral students surveyed remembered only negative feelings about their experiences at their doctoral institution. Some participants disclosed feelings of loneliness and alienation because of the lack of African Americans on campus. A large number of participants (78%) stated that in their department there were no African American professors. Thirty-one percent of participants had a combination of positive and negative feelings about their institution. One participant reported a combination of positive and negative feelings at a departmental social event. The participant felt out of place and lonely because he or she was the only African American at the event, yet the participant felt the event was hospitable. During his or her tenure in the doctoral program, this participant never felt respected at the institution (King & Chepytor-Thomson, 1996).

Milner (2004) describes four additional stressful and negative factors that affect persistence among African American graduate students at predominately White institutions, which are the lack of value and respect, the burden to invalidate stereotypes, unfair conceptions of expertise, and alienation by virtue of perspective. First, the lack of value and respect refers to feelings some African Americans experience in classrooms that their perspectives based on their way of knowing is not valid. Second, the burden to invalidate stereotypes describes the constant battle some African Americans face to prove the intellectually inferior stereotype associated with

African Americans is false. Third, the unfair conception of expertise, which implies that some African Americans are only knowledgeable about African American issues and subject matters and suggests that African Americans cannot have expertise in other areas. Fourth, alienation by virtue of perspective that refers to the lack of faculty members and peers with similar research interests especially if the interest involves race and/or ethnicity issues.

To address the negative factors African Americans face as graduate students, Milner (2004) suggests three strategies departments and universities can employ. First, make the implicit explicit, by making the obscure rules, norms, and expectations of the culture of higher education obvious to all graduate students. Second, develop substantive mentoring relationships by finding a person that has an investment in a student academically, professionally, and personally. Third, develop culturally appropriate advising for African Americans by considering their experiences and perspectives.

Similar themes emerged from Lewis, Ginsberg, Davies, and Smith's (2004) study using a combination of eight current students and recent graduates interviews with African Americans in an Education doctoral program about their experiences at predominately White Carnegie I research institutions. Feelings of isolation were the most prevalent theme among the participants. Many of the students stated they felt "invisible" (Lewis et al., 2004, p. 233) on campus and contemplated departing from their program. All of the students interviewed believed the university provided little support for them and as a result the students had to become very self-reliant to ensure degree completion.

Second, students felt like they stood out on campus and in the surrounding community because of the small number of African Americans on campus. The adjustment was particularly

difficult for those students who were from schools or communities with a large minority population. An African American male participant noted:

What really happens is when you get on the campus you have very, very few African American professors, and in particular, males. So if you don't have any male professors and you're an African American male, then who can you relate to on campus? (Lewis et al., 2004, p. 234)

The U.S. Department of Education's *Digest of Education Statistics* (2009) reported in fall 2007, 5.1% (38,030) of African American male faculty (instruction/research/public service) were employed in American colleges and universities compared to 76.2% (556,918) of White male faculty.

The third theme was the importance of relationships with peers, especially relationships with other African American students. The participants discussed an informal group within the Education department they created to support each other personally, academically, and emotionally. The fourth theme, negotiating the system, places the responsibility on the student to find support, assistance, and an advisor soon after beginning the program.

A study by Ballard and Cintron (2010) found similarities within the stories told by African American men who successfully completed Ph.D.'s in Higher Education at predominately White institutions. Using interviews of five African American men, the researchers discovered methods and characteristics that contribute to the success of this population. The researchers found that with each participant failure was not an option for them after acceptance into their doctoral program. Additionally, simply accepting African American men into doctoral programs is not enough, role models and mentors are essential to the success of these students as they provide support and guidance. A participant stressed the importance of

support systems stating, “No one completes a Ph.D. by themselves” (Ballard & Cintron, 2010, p. 19). These support systems were created to foster love, encouragement, and to bring comfort to the participants from nurturing faculty, family members, and cross-cultural peer relationships. To cope with loneliness and isolation, one participant found solace in reflections on childhood experiences where he felt safe, comfortable, and encouraged. Each participant stated that they had experienced microaggressions during their doctoral program tenure. Most microaggressions came in the form of university politics that often caused postponements in progress; for example, the unequal allocation of financial resources. However, these delays only intensified their determination to complete the program. One participant stated “You can’t get away from politics. You just have to learn not to take things personal” (Ballard & Cintron, 2010, p. 20). As a result of the persistence issues many doctoral students may experience, particularly African Americans, persistence models have been created to address these concerns.

Persistence Concept Models

The Model of Factors Related to Minority Students’ Experience and Outcomes in Doctoral Programs (Nettles, 1990) consists of five categories: (a) demographic background characteristics, (b) undergraduate education, (c) transition from undergraduate to graduate school, (d) graduate education experiences, and (e) doctoral program outcome. Nettles created this model (see Figure 1) to address the persistence and some experiences of minority doctoral students based on his quantitative study comparing minority and White doctoral student experiences. The sample included a total of 956 White, Black, and Hispanic doctoral students who completed the Doctoral Student Survey. In the study, Nettles found more African American

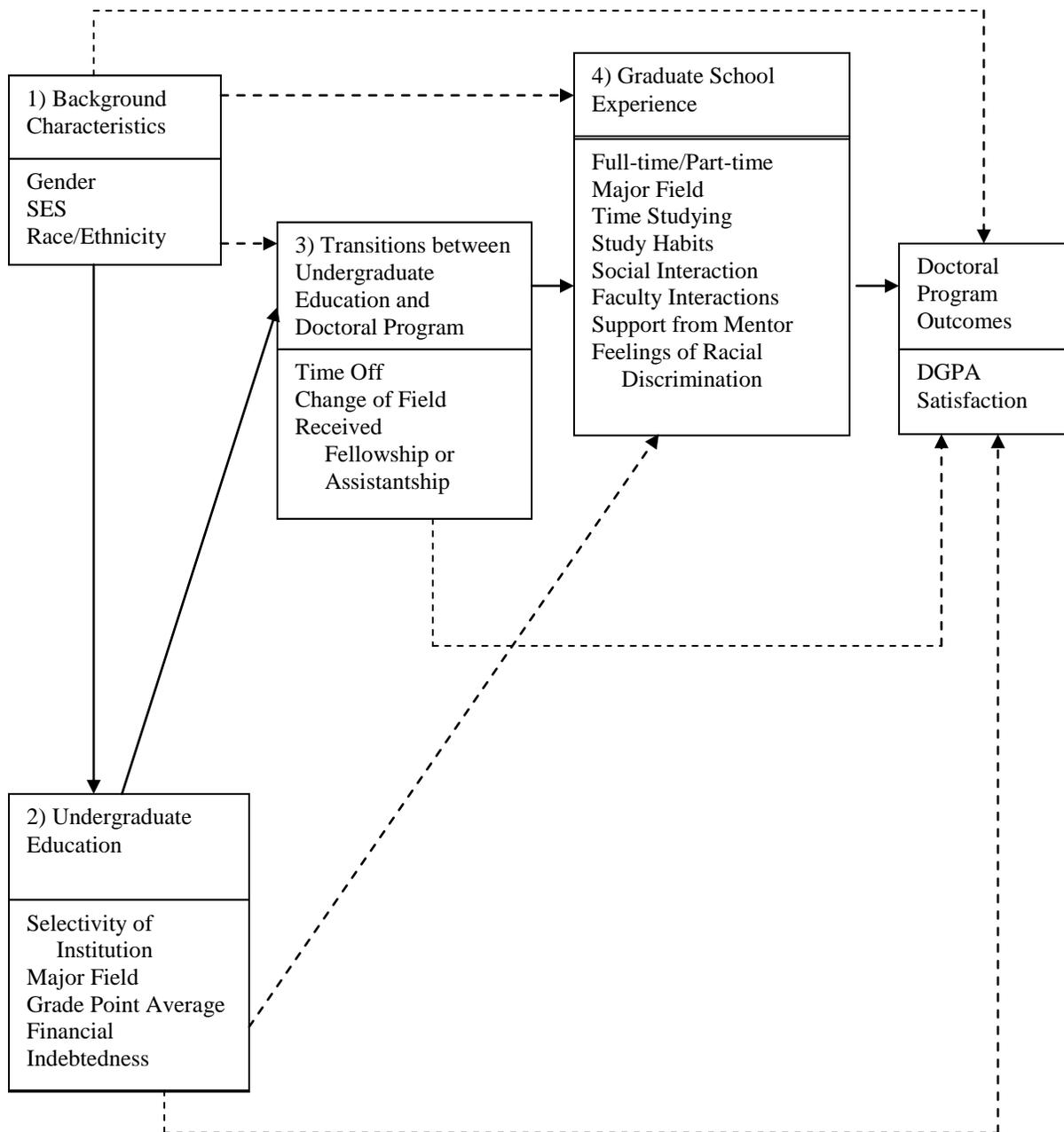


Figure 1. This conceptual model presents factors related to minority doctoral students' experiences and outcomes.

Source: Nettles, M. T. (1990). *American Journal of Education*, 98, 494-522.

women were represented in the sample; African Americans were less likely to attend a selective undergraduate institution; and between graduating from their undergraduate institution and beginning their doctoral program, there was an average of 9 years off for African Americans (Nettles, 1990).

Nettles and Millett (2006) expanded the conceptual model to include more aspects of the doctoral student experience, which is an expansion of the previous model. The data collected for this model (see Figure 2) include additional information from a larger and more diverse sample. The Conceptual Model of Doctoral Student Experiences (Nettles & Millett, 2006) contains variables that address: (a) background, (b) admissions attributes and criteria, (c) funding during the doctoral program, (d) fields of study, (e) outcome measures, (f) graduate school experiences, (g) research productivity, (h) doctoral student socialization, (i) doctoral student satisfaction, and (j) immediate post degree career expectations. Within this model, solid line boxes represent experiences that predict outcomes and dotted line boxes represent experiences that may influence outcomes.

To address the persistence and experiences of doctoral students, Nettles and Millett (2006) used this model as the conceptual framework for their study. The sample for this quantitative study included a total of 9,036 African American, Asian American, Hispanic, White, and international doctoral students who completed the Survey of Doctoral Student Finances, Experiences, and Achievement. In the study, Nettles and Millett (2006) found African American doctoral students were usually older and 40% of African American doctoral students' parents have graduate degrees.

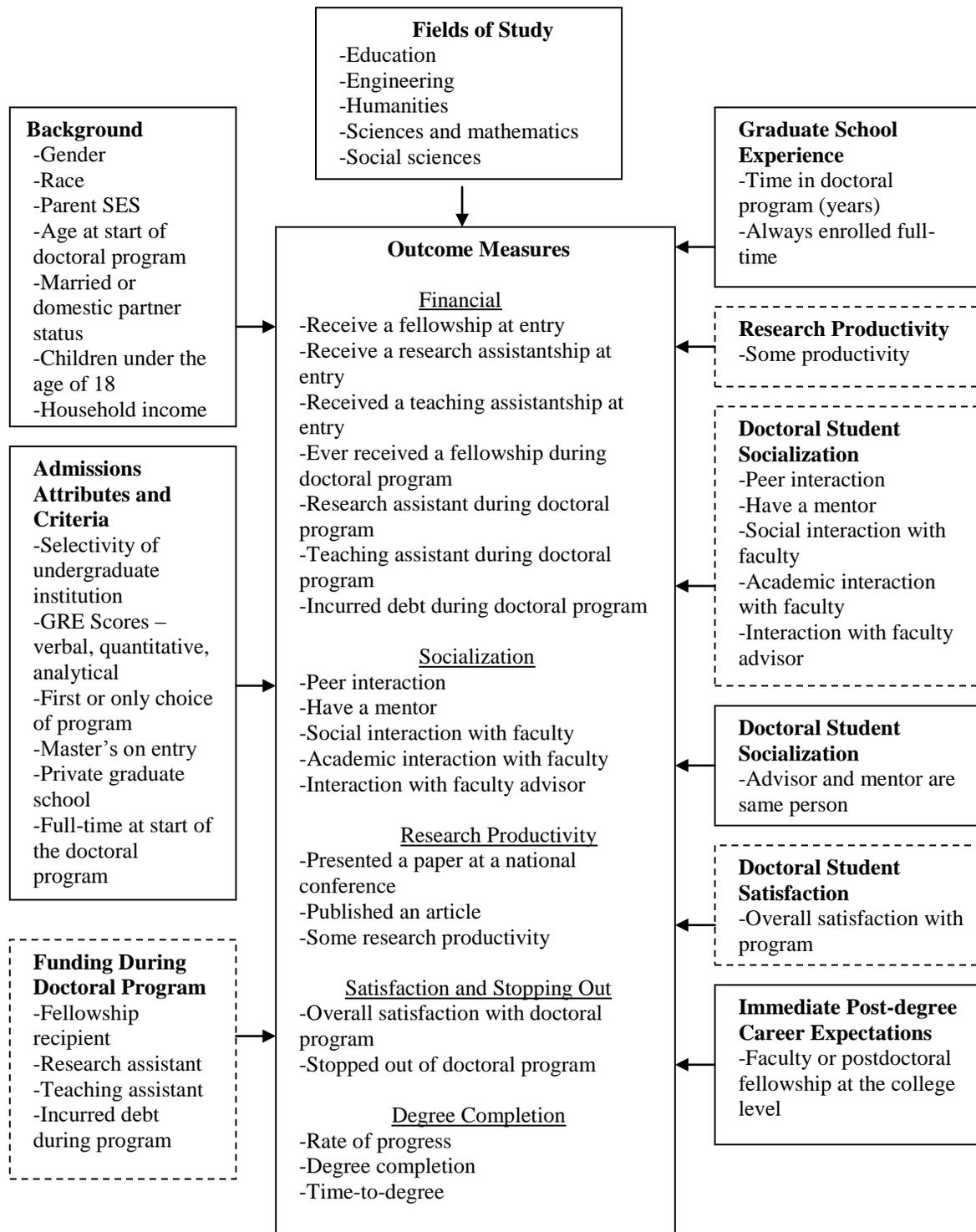


Figure 2. This conceptual model presents elements that contribute to doctoral students' program experiences and outcomes.

Source: Nettles, M. T., & Millett, C. M. (2006). *Three magic letters: Getting to Ph.D.*, p. 28.

Persistence Support

Mentoring Relationships

In *The Elements of Mentoring*, Johnson and Ridley (2004) describe mentoring relationships as mutual personal relationships involving an experienced person as a role model and teacher for a less experienced person. Baker and Griffin (2010) add that mentoring relationships should include an emotional commitment that is fostered between the partners that persists further than simply providing information. They assert that mentoring relationships are long-term commitments that include having an interest in the mentee's academic, personal, and professional progress.

After the partners are committed to a mentoring relationship, certain elements are essential to foster an effective relationship. The relationship must include "trust without exploitation, candor coupled with compassion, high expectations as well as patience with ambivalence and doubt" (Liddell, Cooper, Healy, & Stewart, 2010, p. 12). These elements can be found in both formal and informal mentoring relationships at the postsecondary level. Based on mentor program observations, LaVant et al. (1997) suggest that formal mentoring relationships are typically used to retain students, especially minority students and informal mentoring relationships are more spontaneous, yet deliberate. As a result of the nature of informal mentoring, Milner (2004) suggests that mentoring workshops for the mentors and mentees should be developed to assist in the effectiveness of the relationship. Effective mentoring relationships include a mentor that encourages and provides the mentee with suggestions and techniques that can be used to persist academically and professionally. Mentors in informal mentoring relationships can include faculty members with similar research and/or professional interests, a person who has reached the educational level the mentee aspires to

achieve, or alumni who have completed the same or similar degree as the mentee aspires to achieve. These partnerships are often created as a result of the mentee's desire for additional support.

There are certain qualities that make an effective mentor. According to Liddell et al. (2010):

An effective mentor (1) recognizes the learner as capable, but potentially not yet autonomous in cognitive authority, (2) supports the potentially competent adult who is becoming while challenging and pushing the learner toward his or her potential, (3) inspires the individual learner to meet high expectations, and (4) stays in authentic and caring dialogue while the learner works through conflict and challenge. (p.12)

Minority students often search for and select, if possible, mentors based on gender or race. Mentoring is a strongly suggested method for the persistence of racial and/or ethnic minorities, especially African American men, at all educational levels (LaVant et al., 1997). Harper (2006a) asserts that it is imperative to have role models on campus to support, validate, and empower African American men. Green and Scott (2003) concur, stating that feelings of isolation, alienation, and discrimination are more prevalent among African American students and they suggest mentoring relationships as a method to combat those issues. Green and Scott (2003) further state that "mentoring relationships have served as an invaluable channel of information and other intangibles for success" (p. xii). At predominately White institutions, the lack of mentoring relationships has the potential to hurt African Americans throughout their careers, with missed opportunities that could have resulted in leadership positions (Green & Scott, 2003).

Baker and Griffin (2010) note that by 2020, roughly half of all college students will be from diverse racial and/or ethnic backgrounds and these students will desire to have a mentor who will be able to identify with and appreciate their experiences. Harper (2006a) asserts mentoring for African American males is essential to success; however, within some departments and universities the opportunity to be mentored by someone of the same race and gender can be absent. Therefore Harper (2006a) encourages institutions of higher education to commit to hiring and retaining African American male faculty members. Anderson-Thompkins, Gasman, Gerstl-Pepin, Hathaway, and Rasheed (2004) state that in order to increase the number of African American male faculty members, universities and departments must retain African American men from the undergraduate level through the doctoral level. Anderson-Thompkins et al. (2004) refer to the retention of African Americans from the bachelors through the doctorate as “the academic pipeline” (p. 229), which would increase the number of African American men eligible for faculty and mentor positions. Ellis (2001) concurs stating that the success of African American doctoral students has a direct impact on the pool of future African American faculty members. The researcher warns that this academic pipeline could run dry if efforts are not made to recruit and retain African American men.

The mentor relationship is thought to have a vital role in degree completion among doctoral students (Bell-Ellison & Dedrick, 2008). A study by Allison (2003) using focus groups of doctoral students concurs that mentoring is a major component to doctoral student success. The students in the study believed mentoring is one of the most important responsibilities of faculty members and stressed early and consistent mentoring by the faculty. One focus group participant stated:

Traditionally, information provided by graduate colleges and individual departments to prospective or new Ph.D. students cannot capture the nuances and peculiarities of the individual Ph.D. experience. Quality mentoring may be the best way of providing individually tailored information to students. (Allison, 2003, p. 136)

Data from the Council of Graduate Schools' Ph.D. Completion Project report containing exit survey data from doctoral students concurs. Sixty-five percent of the 1,856 respondents, representing 18 universities, indicated that mentoring/advising was the major contributor to degree completion (CGS, 2009b). These studies illustrate that mentoring is important to many college students, especially doctoral students. However a positive relationship among faculty advisors and students is imperative to successful completion.

Positive Faculty Advisor and Student Relationship

According to Bloom et al. (2007) much has been written about the role faculty advisors have in the academic lives of undergraduate students, but the literature is lacking on the relationship between faculty advisors and graduate students. The researchers note that in Gordon and Habley's 2000 book, *Academic Advising: A Comprehensive Handbook*, only five pages (p. 100, 101, 110, 280, and 281) (cited in Bloom et al., 2007) out of 452 were written about advising graduate students. However, in recent years more studies have been conducted concerning this relationship on the graduate level.

Golde (2000) using case studies determined the reasons three doctoral students from three different universities and disciplines decided to leave their programs. The study discovered that students' reasons for leaving are multifaceted and departure is usually not a result of one issue. A reoccurring factor indicated by the three students was difficulties with their faculty advisors, which led to a change of advisor during their tenure in the program and/or departure from the

program. When there is a positive relationship between the student and the faculty advisor, the successful completion of the program can be predicted. When the relationship is negative, it can contribute to the attrition of doctoral students (Golde, 2000). A participant, who decided to leave his doctoral program, felt his advisor lost interest in him, lost interest in his research, and ceased caring about his progress.

At the undergraduate and master's level, a student takes a series of courses and may conclude the program with an examination. The doctoral student academic experience is unique to all other academic endeavors. This scholarly journey incorporates large scale examinations and a dissertation to demonstrate research skills and content knowledge. These components necessitate a positive relationship with a faculty advisor and are necessary for success. Bloom et al. (2007) suggest the student and advisor relationship is the most significant factor in graduate student success. Maher et al. (2004) agree stating the relationship that students build with their advisors influences the degree progress, particularly through the dissertation stage. In addition, the participants in Golde and Dore's (2001) study concur and also strongly recommend careful selection of an advisor, because of the advisor's impact in the doctoral process. The study also includes some reasons why participants selected their advisor. Intellectual interests were first with 65%; second, 64% reported interesting research; and third 56% stated positive reputation as a good researcher. Notably, the top three responses of the participants are directly connected to the dissertation stage in the doctoral process.

A study by Hoskins and Goldberg (2005) that included interviews with 33 Counselor Education doctoral students and recent graduates, also suggests that positive faculty relationships affect persistence among doctoral students. Their qualitative study found that a positive "social-personal" (p. 179) match that includes faculty relationships, contributed to students' decision to

continue or depart the program. A participant in the study described his faculty as supportive and accommodating, and he attributed this helpful relationship to his persistence in the doctoral program. Another participant attributed her decision to leave the doctoral program after 4 days to a lack of connection with anyone in the department. The department was relocating to a new facility and the participant did not feel the same connection that was present before entering the program. However, a year and a half later, the same participant reentered the program and made connections with faculty and credits her persistence to those connections. Lovitts and Nelson (2000) assert “students leave less because of what they bring with them to the university than because of what happens to them after they arrive” (p. 50).

In order to expand the research regarding positive advisor characteristics and its relationship to successful program completion, Bloom et al. (2007) conducted a study using a qualitative textual analysis of 24 advisor nominations for the outstanding graduate advisor of the year award submitted. These nominations were submitted from 2001 to 2003 by MD and Ph.D. students from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The five most noted themes were: (a) care for students and their success, (b) accessibility, (c) individually tailored guidance for each student, (d) serve as a role model, and (e) proactively integrating students into the profession (Bloom et al., 2007, p. 31-33).

Zhao, Golde, and McCormick (2007) suggest:

Good or bad, the quality of the relationship between doctoral student and advisor directly influences the quality of the doctoral education experience. A constructive relationship is associated with beneficial outcomes for students, including a positive departmental environment, successful socialization into the department and discipline, and timely

completion of the degree. An unsatisfactory advising relationship is strongly implicated in many students' decisions to leave doctoral study. (p. 264)

In order to combat attrition among minority students in academia, an organization was formed by graduate students to provide support to students at all levels of study.

Graduate Student Organization

National Black Graduate Student Association. African American graduate students, Robert M. Sellers, Todd C. Shaw, Robert Brown, Daria Kirby, Lisa Brown, and Thomas LaVeist began the National Black Graduate Student Association in 1989 at the conclusion of the first National Black Graduate Student Conference held at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. At the conference, issues concerning the African American community were addressed. African American graduate students from around the country were invited to participate in workshops, roundtable discussions, and paper presentations. This student-run organization's goal is to discover and focus on the needs of African Americans at institutions of higher education, by supporting this population in their pursuit to successfully complete graduate degrees. To achieve their goal, the National Black Graduate Student Association has three objectives, which are:

1. To increase the number of African American graduate and professional students by encouraging undergraduates to pursue graduate and professional degrees.
2. To provide resources that will enhance the probability of academic and career success of current graduate and professional students, and
3. To develop a network of new African American scholars with the dedication and knowledge of the needs and concerns of an increasingly diverse academic community.

For example, the E-Mentoring Project was established to connect association members with graduate students and professionals for support, advice, and encouragement through e-mail,

chats, and other social media outlets. Each pair created through E-Mentoring is required to communicate twice a month. In addition, this organization publishes the peer-reviewed *Scholarly Journal of the National Black Graduate Student Association*. This interdisciplinary journal focuses on the concerns and issues of African Americans in academia and the community. The National Black Graduate Student Association has become the largest interdisciplinary graduate student organization among African American students, and its membership is open to undergraduate, graduate students, and institutions with a mission to support African Americans in academia (National Black Graduate Student Association, 2010). In addition to this organization, retention programs have been created by universities to increase the number of African Americans in doctoral programs.

Examples of Doctoral Retention Programs

McKnight Doctoral Fellowship Program. The Florida Education Fund's McKnight Doctoral Fellowship Program was established in 1984 in Florida with the goal to increase Ph.D. degree production in fields of study where African Americans are underrepresented, particularly: agriculture, biology, business administration, chemistry, computer science, engineering, marine biology, mathematics, nursing, physics, and psychology. This competitive program in Florida provides support to African Americans who have been accepted into doctoral programs at nine participating universities: Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, Florida Atlantic University, Florida Institute of Technology, Florida International University, Florida State University, University of Central Florida, University of Florida, University of Miami, and University of South Florida. The McKnight Doctoral Fellowship Program and the participating schools make a 5-year commitment to support the selected fellows. A commitment is also made by faculty and administrators from these colleges and universities to participate in the

fellowship's program activities, which include orientation workshops, annual meetings, graduate school conferences, annual research and writing conferences, and new initiatives such as an intensive research and writing institute. Each year, 25-30 new fellows are selected and each fellowship consists of \$17,000 per year in tuition, fees, and stipend. The retention rate for this program is nearly 80% and the average time-to-degree is 5 years (Florida Education Fund, 2010; Morehouse & Dawkins, 2006).

Grad Prep Academy. The Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania created the Grad Prep Academy in 2009 with the mission to increase Ph.D. production among African American men in the field of Education. The program identifies 8 to 10 African American men who are juniors at a college or university and prepares them for admission into the Education Ph.D. program at the University of Pennsylvania after the completion of their bachelor's degree. The Education doctoral programs in the School of Education at this university do not require the completion of a master's degree for acceptance. The activities and benefits in the program include: a 4-day visit to the University of Pennsylvania, workshops on applying to and succeeding in graduate school, networking with faculty, an all-expenses paid 4-week Graduate Record Exam prep course, and an introduction to a mentoring relationship with a current African American male School of Education Ph.D. student. Those students who are selected are fully funded for up to 4-years during their doctoral study and are granted research assistantships. Admission into the Grad Prep Academy does not guarantee admission into the University of Pennsylvania's School of Education (University of Pennsylvania, 2010). Both of these retention programs provide the much needed financial support that most doctoral students require for successful doctoral degree completion.

Financial Support

Eighty percent of doctoral students attribute financial support as the number one reason for degree completion according to the Council of Graduate Schools' Ph.D. Completion Project's exit survey of doctoral students. Ninety-four percent received financial support and 70% acquired support that continued for multiple years (CGS, 2009a). Most forms of institutional financial support include fellowships and teaching and research assistantships. A study by Lovitts and Nelson (2000) found that students who did not receive financial support were at a high risk of withdrawing from a doctoral program and that assistantship recipients integrated better into the community as a result of their responsibilities. Bowen and Rudenstine (1992) concur stating that students who received financial assistance from their institutions had higher rates of completion than those that funded their own educational pursuits. At one institution, the researchers found completion rates of 41% for doctoral students that received funding from the institution compared to 14% for those who did not receive funding. However Lovitts and Nelson (2000) warn that fellowships recipients, especially minority fellows, tend to have a high attrition rate because of the possible disconnection with the department. In addition to institutional financial support which contributes to the higher completion rates among doctoral students, those who are socialized into departmental communities persist at a higher rate than those who are not.

Socialization

Socialization constitutes a practice where a novice learns the "encoded system of behavior specific to their area of expertise and the system of meaning and values attached to these behaviors" (Taylor & Antony, 2000, p. 186). Examples of socialization include new student orientations, instructions from faculty members and/or mentors, and observed behaviors of faculty members and/or mentors. A survey study by Lovitts and Nelson (2000) found a strong

correlation between successful doctoral completion and social and professional departmental integration. This study included 816 students, 511 graduates, and 305 nongraduates. Golde (2005) suggests that among graduate students, the department is the “locus of control” (p. 671). The lack of socialization at the graduate level can lead to isolation and attrition because of the small number of faculty present in some departments.

Academic and Social Integration

Academic integration for doctoral students is the initial stage of scholarship in a chosen discipline. Academic integration is accomplished by attending discipline specific conferences, writing and presenting papers, and working closely with faculty members with similar research interests. Social integration takes place outside of the classroom setting and typically includes connecting with other doctoral students and attending social events. Golde (2000) found that academic integration contributes to doctoral student persistence more than social integration. However, Golde (2000) suggests that social and academic integration are connected because social integration supports the efforts of academic integration. Lovitt and Nelson (2000) concur stating, “Students that are invited into the department’s academic and social community are more likely to succeed” (p. 50).

Student Involvement

In order to examine elements of socialization, Gardner and Barnes (2007) interviewed 10 doctoral students about the role of student involvement in their professional socialization. This qualitative study found four contributing factors of student involvement and better socialization. First, the value of graduate involvement was noted by students. Most students emphasized the importance of becoming more involved at the graduate level compared to their limited involvement at the undergraduate level. Second, the continuum of involvement is significant.

This refers to joining and actively participating in professional associations instead of only collecting monthly journals. The person who suggests the involvement is the third factor. This person is likely aware of the influential organizations that are essential to the discipline. Fourth, the outcome of involvement is a contributing factor. Networking and making connections in the classroom and the community is a positive benefit of student involvement (Gardner & Barnes, 2007). In addition to involvement in departments and professional organizations, students who have the ability to bounce back from adversity are more likely to successfully complete college degrees.

Resilience

Resilience is defined as “an outcome of successful adaptation to adversity (Zautra et al., 2010, p. 4). Resiliency is an important aspect in the research of the doctoral student experience. Information about the characteristics, coping mechanisms, and motivational forces of those who have successfully complete doctoral degrees are essential to persistence research. Richardson (2002) suggests resiliency has been researched in several different phases: (a) the characteristics of resiliency, (b) how to attain these characteristics, and (c) how to use these characteristics to motivate success through adversity and to grow during the process.

An essential component of resiliency is protective factors, which are defined as “processes that ameliorate the negative effects of adversity” (Luecken & Gress, 2010, p. 243). Protective factors act as a buffer to counteract frustration and/or obstacles with the least amount of negative outcomes. Yates, Pelphrey, and Smith’s (2008) study using interviews, observations, and archival data of eight African American men, found common protective factors that contributed to their college success. First, family, including parents, grandparents, and siblings were found to be a protective factor. The participants depended on their parents and

grandparents for emotional support and encouragement. Also, being a role model for a sibling motivated a participant to complete college. Second, individual factors, including personal drive to succeed and the influence of faith or religion were indicated as protective factors. Participants in this study came from diverse backgrounds including a former drug dealer who because of personal drive changed his life and became a college graduate. Third, school factors, including personal high expectations for performance was shown to be a protective factor. Participants realized that having high expectations for one's self is of equal or greater importance than one's instructors' expectations. The ability to overcome and persevere despite difficulties and/or setbacks is essential to academic success. Morales (2010) describes academic resilience as "the process and results that are part of the story of an individual who has been academically successful, despite obstacles that prevent the majority of others with the same background from succeeding" (p. 164). The ability to rebound after experiencing adversity is a process many students, especially minority students, must master in order to complete college degrees. Therefore, to identify and combat these adversities, critical race theory was created.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory

Maxwell (2005) defines the theoretical framework or conceptual framework as the "system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that supports and informs your research" (p. 33). Theoretical frameworks guide the research study and support the theories and themes presented in the research. Critical race theory, referred to as a movement and a theoretical framework, began in the 1970s in the legal field. The movement began to reassess post civil rights legislation in response to what minority legal scholars believed was the slowdown in the progress of the civil rights movement and civil rights litigation (Closson, 2010).

According to Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, and Thomas (1995) the rationale for the critical race theory movement was to “understand how a regime of White supremacy and its subordination of people of color have been created and maintained in America” and “not merely to understand the vexed bond between law and racial power but to change it” (p. xiii). Taylor (1998) defines critical race theory:

As a form of oppositional scholarship, critical race theory challenges the experiences of Whites as the normative standard and grounds its conceptual framework in the distinctive experiences of people of color. This call to context insists that the social and experiential context of racial oppression is crucial for understanding racial dynamics, particularly the way that current inequalities are connected to earlier, more overt, practices of racial exclusion. Critical race theory is grounded in the realities of the lived experiences of racism which has singled out with wide consensus among Whites, African Americans, and others as worthy of suppression. Critical race theory thus embraces this subjectivity of perspective and openly acknowledges that perceptions of truth, fairness, and justice reflect the mindset, status and experience of the knower. (p. 122)

Within critical race theory there are seven tenets:

1. “Racism is a normal, not aberrant or rare, fact of daily life in American society” (Taylor, 1998, p. 122). Solorzano et al. (2000) maintain that racism is embedded in American society, particularly in the legal and educational systems.

2. The notion of colorblindness is not accepted within critical race theory. The concept of colorblindness allows those in the dominant group to ignore racism by pretending discrimination based on race is a thing of the past (Harper & Hurtado, 2007).

3. Critical race theory provides an opportunity for minorities to voice and share their lived experiences while offering legitimacy to the viewpoints of minorities (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009).

4. Taylor (1998) states critical race theory is interest convergence, which means that historically, interest in racial equality for African Americans “ha[s] been accommodated only when they have converged with the interest of powerful Whites” (p. 123).

5. Harper et al. (2009) state that critical race theory supports revisionist history, which includes a reexamination of historical facts without bias and encompasses the experiences and contribution of minorities.

6. Racial realists are people who accept racism as a part of the fabric of American society. Critical race theory depends on racial realists to assist in the process to create solutions for minorities (Harper et al., 2009).

7. Continuing to challenge the established beliefs of “meritocracy that sustain White supremacy” (Harper et al., 2009, p. 392) is essential to critical race theory. As long as this belief of superiority is accepted, society as a whole, particularly the legal and educational systems will remain biased against minorities.

Advocating for equality and justice for marginalized groups is a focus of critical race theory. This theory seeks to be a vehicle for removing and eliminating inequality and injustice by placing attention on the “form and function of dispossession, disenfranchisement, and discrimination across a range of social institutions” (Trevino, Harris, & Wallace, 2008, p. 8). This theory aims to provide awareness to the ways racism within established structures hinders some groups in society.

Initially, critical race theory was primarily used in legal studies, yet according to Closson (2010) in the mid-1990s, scholars began to use critical race theory as a theoretical framework in the field of Education. Scholars began to analyze educational research conducted about marginalized groups and specifically “resegregation via practices such as tracking” (Taylor, 1998, p.123). In order to examine and change the aspects of education that continue the marginalization of certain groups, this theory provides insight and methods as a structure for researchers (Solorzano et al., 2000).

According to Taylor (1998) storytelling is a powerful method used by critical race theorists to engage and challenge negative stereotypes, myths, images, and beliefs held by the majority in order to maintain racial inequality. Storytelling can assist in building a common understanding of “what is and what ought to be” (p. 122) by providing firsthand accounts of the negative effects of racism. Trevino et al. (2008) concur stating the use of storytelling, which provides lived experiences, is an effective way to combat the preconceived notions that are now ingrained in society. Solorzano et al. (2000) state:

When the ideology of racism is examined and racist injuries are named, victims of racism can find their voice. Further, those injured by racism discover that they are not alone in their marginality. They become empowered participants, hearing their own stories and the stories of others, listening to how the arguments are framed, and learning to make the arguments themselves. (p.64)

Critical race theory has been used as a movement and a framework over the decades and will continue to provide a lens/viewpoint to support the goal of equality and justice.

Summary

The review of literature reveals that graduate student persistence has been researched heavily over the past two decades using multiple research methods and a variety of samples. Persistence among African Americans is often researched combining both masters and doctoral students, which neglects the uniqueness of the doctoral journey. Few studies specifically examine the persistence of African American men at the doctoral level. This study aimed to add to the persistence literature by focusing specifically on African American males who have successfully completed doctoral programs. Historically, doctoral student attrition has been high, but attrition rates are even higher among African American men. These rates can be attributed to the effects of racism in all forms, race-related stress, gender disparities, and racial identity concerns. There are some common methods that universities, departments, faculty, and staff can use to assist with the persistence of doctoral students such as mentoring, socialization, and positive faculty relationships. In addition to those strategies, the personal ability to cope with and bounce back from adversity is a characteristic and a process that will motivate and lead to an increase number of success stories among African American men pursuing doctoral degrees.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Introduction

A review of the literature on African American doctoral student persistence reveals a lack of qualitative research, in particular the voices of African American male doctoral students. There is a need for more understanding regarding the reasons this population persists in doctoral programs directly from African American men themselves.

Rationale for Qualitative Approach

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of African American men from the beginning to degree completion in doctoral programs. The researcher collected the accounts of African American male doctoral degree completers in their own words by using qualitative research methods. The information-rich data added to the body of knowledge on this topic and provided detailed accounts and examples, which are often absent in quantitative studies. Also, critical race theorists encourage providing accounts of lived experiences through storytelling as an effective method to combat negative stereotypes of minorities. Creswell (1994) defines qualitative research “as an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting” (p. 1-2). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) add:

Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials – case studies; personal experiences; introspection; life story; interview artifacts; cultural texts and production; observational, historical, interactional and visual

texts – that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives.
(p. 3-4)

Miles and Huberman (1994) provide the strengths of qualitative research:

1. Offers the strong potential for gathering knowledge and collecting data about underlying or nonobvious issues.
2. Provides a strong possibility for revealing the complexity of specific phenomena that will yield rich and holistic descriptive data.
3. Permits the researcher to extend further than snapshots that only address the questions of what and/or how many to address questions that focus on how and why things happen.
4. Focuses on lived experiences of people, in the pursuit to discover the meaning people place on specific events, processes, and structures within their lives.
5. Offers a valuable strategy for the discovery and exploration of new areas that have the potential to assist in the development of hypotheses.
6. Allows the researcher to expand on quantitative data gathered from the same setting by validating, explaining, or reinterpreting the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.10).

The discovery of patterns and themes that will emerge from data collection and data analysis is the goal of qualitative research (Patton, 1990).

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is a qualitative method of inquiry created by Glaser and Strauss (1967) to explain a phenomenon. Glaser and Strauss (1967) believe the purpose of qualitative research is to create theories instead of testing them and the goal of grounded theory “is the discovery of theory from data, systematically obtained and analyzed in social research” (p.1). Glaser (1978) adds the aim of grounded theory “is to generate a theory that accounts for a pattern of behavior

which is relevant and problematic for those involved” (p. 93). According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), this research methodology also offers a set of procedures for data collection and analysis and theory building about a specific social phenomenon. In this study theoretical saturation, the constant comparison method, and open, axial, and selective coding were used.

Grounded theory was selected because it is the ideal method for understanding and explaining how a group of people, through social/symbolic interactions define their reality (Glaser and Strauss (1967). According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), symbolic interactions assumes that every person is a social construction and people become persons through their interaction with society, using language, communication, and community, which is the philosophical foundation for grounded theory. For this study African American men, provided accounts of their experiences including interactions with family and friends, faculty members, advisors, peers, and colleagues.

Grounded theory was the logical approach for this study as the purpose of the study, was to develop theories about how African American men succeed in doctoral programs. The findings from the study were used to build a descriptive model that provides a guide for successful doctoral completion, specifically for this population and those who interact with this population at the doctoral level.

Research Questions

The questions addressed in this study were:

1. Why do African American men persist to doctoral degree completion?
2. How do African American men perceive their doctoral student experience?

Sites

The researcher located all the participants for the study from five predominately White public universities in one mid-Atlantic state in the United States. All the universities have a Carnegie classification of research universities with high or very high research activity. These institutions have a total enrollment that ranges from 8,000 to 33,000 students, undergraduate enrollment ranges from 6,000 to 24,000 students, and graduate student enrollment ranges from 2,000 to 8,000 students. These universities offer up to 70 baccalaureate degrees, 80 master's degrees, and 50 doctoral degrees, which include comprehensive doctoral programs, science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) dominant doctoral programs, and professional dominant doctoral programs. Full-time faculty among these universities ranges from 600 to 2,000 with the majority being White males. In the degree seeking graduate student population, females outnumbered males at all but one institution and Whites are represented in higher numbers than all minority groups combined at all the institutions.

Sampling and Participants

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), "Qualitative researchers usually work with small samples of people nested in their context and studied in-depth" (p. 27). According to Patton (1990) "Purposeful sampling seeks information-rich cases which can be studied in- depth" and is the dominant strategy in qualitative research (Patton, 1990, p. 169). Information-rich cases are those cases in which a researcher has the opportunity to learn a large amount of information about the focus of the study (Patton, 1990). A benefit of purposeful sampling is the ability to obtain a considerable amount of useful information from a relatively small yet knowledgeable sample. Within purposeful sampling, there are many strategies that can be employed in the selection process. For this study, participants were identified using snowball

sampling. Snowball or chain sampling is the process where potential participants are identified by actual participants or by others who are aware of potential participants (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1990). Snowball sampling is consistent with the grounded theory approach to data collection procedures by “constantly comparing incidents with incidents until categories emerge and through the sampling of informants that will lead to the development of categories” (Creswell, 1994, p. 56).

Theoretical saturation was used to determine the sample size for this study, which is the measure for the final sample size in grounded theory. Theoretical saturation occurs, according to Strauss and Corbin (1998) “when no new or relevant data seem to emerge regarding a category, the category is well developed in terms of its properties and dimensions demonstrating variation, and the relationship among categories are well established and validated” (p. 212). The researcher included participants from a diverse number of programs of study, a variety of ages, and various time-to-degrees, which will “increase the scope or range of data exposed” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 40) until saturation was reached. Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Strauss and Corbin (1998) do not provide a specific number of participants that should be included in a grounded theory study; however, Creswell (1998) suggests 20 to 30 participants (p. 65). Data collection and data analysis from the interviews determined the final sample size for this study would be 20. All 20 participants for this study were African American men who had successfully completed a doctoral degree (Ph.D. or Ed.D.) from an on-campus program in Education (12) or in a Humanities and Sciences field (8) during the 10 years from 2001-2011.

Instrumentation

Interviews are used in qualitative studies to gather descriptive information in the participant’s own voice and to acquire and cultivate insights on how they interpret a certain event

or situation (Bogdan & Biklin, 2007). For this study, an informal, conversational interview using semi-structured questions was conducted with African American men who persisted and ultimately completed their doctoral degree. This type of interview allowed the participants to describe and elaborate on their lived experiences. This data allowed the researcher to gather this knowledge and produce themes about their experiences. The interview was guided by a protocol (Appendix A) consisting of several key questions that each participant was asked. The protocol included questions about the motivations for applying to a doctoral program, factors and strategies that contributed to success, coping with challenges while in the program, the important relationships while in the program, and the effects of racial identity on the doctoral student experience. The interview questions were developed based on the literature and results from prior studies addressing African Americans especially men in academia (Ballard & Cintron, 2010; Harper, 2006a, 2006b; King & Chepytor-Thomson, 1996; LaVant et al., 1997; Lewis et al., 2004; Milner, 2004) and doctoral student persistence (Bair & Haworth, 1999; Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Golde, 2000; Golde & Dore, 2001; Lovitts, 2001; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000; Nettles & Millett, 2006). Each participant was interviewed once for approximately 60 minutes.

The researcher identified an expert reviewer, who was not affiliated with the study to review the research protocol and to provide comments and any recommendations for revision before the data collection commenced. The expert reviewer completed the reviewer comment form (Appendix B) and the researcher and expert reviewer discussed the clarity of the questions, the sequence of the questions, and the possible answers these questions might yield. The reviewer was an African American man, who had completed a doctoral degree, but did not qualify to participate in the study based on the year of degree completion (prior to 2001).

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted through a participant information sheet (Appendix C) and an interview. The participant information sheet was used to collect demographic information, (current age, current profession, household status), educational background information (type of doctorate, time-to-degree, age at degree completion, full or part time enrollment), and the universities from which the participants received their undergraduate, master's, and doctoral degrees. The participant information sheet allowed the researcher to gather additional information for a closer examination of each participant.

The interviews were digitally recorded with the participants' permission. Recording the interviews allowed better accuracy when transcribing and coding the interviews. Each interview was transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriber. The professional transcriber signed a confidentiality agreement form (Appendix D) to ensure privacy. Field notes were taken during and after the interviews to allow the researcher to complete any gaps within the interviews, to provide any additional observations, to assist in the creation of additional questions for elaboration or clarification, and to assist in data analysis (Patton, 1990).

To enhance the credibility of the study, member checking was conducted following the transcription of each interview (see Appendix E). Member checking is the process of allowing the participants to review the interview transcription for accuracy (McMillan, 2008; Maxwell, 2005). To ensure objectivity, the researcher used strategies that included an external peer debriefer to evaluate the impact of researcher bias and to increase trustworthiness of the data collected, a field log to maintain a record of dates, times and locations in the field, and a field journal to record data analysis decisions and the rationale for those decisions (Bogdan & Biklin, 2007; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001).

The initial contact for the potential participants came in the form of an email (Appendix F) including the researcher's contact information, a brief description of the study, and the qualifications to participate. After the potential participant consented to participate in the study, a packet was sent to each participant. Enclosed in the packet was a participation confirmation letter (Appendix G); an informed consent form (Appendix H) detailing the purposes of the study and the research procedures, the steps the researcher would take to keep the information confidential; the participant information sheet; and a copy of the interview protocol. Including the interview protocol before the scheduled interview allowed the participants to begin their thought process about the topic, which was intended to yield more thoughtful answers with examples during the interview. After the potential participant returned the consent document and the participant information sheet to the researcher, a decision was made if the potential participant qualified to participate and an email (Appendix I) was sent to solicit convenient dates, times, and venues for the interview.

The researcher conducted 16 in-person interviews and four telephone interviews. To ensure that the participants would be comfortable disclosing candid information about their doctoral student journey, all the interviews were held in venues selected by the participant. Thirteen of the interviews were conducted in the participant's work office, including two by telephone; five interviews were conducted at the participant's home including two by telephone; one interview was conducted in the researcher's work office location; and one was held in a secure conference room at the participant's place of work.

In order to track and develop ideas while collecting data, the researcher maintained memos, which is a component of grounded theory (Glaser, 1978). According to Glaser (1978), "Memos are the theorizing write-up of ideas about substantive codes and their theoretically

coded relationships” (p. 83). Memos are useful with helping the researcher gain a better understanding of the topic and allow personal reflections, reactions, questions, and emerging themes to be recorded (Maxwell, 2005). The memos for the study were written and attached to the individual participant interviews after coding.

Data Analysis

The researcher listened to all the recordings and then read and reviewed all the transcripts, field notes, field logs, and field journals (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). Codes were created grouping together patterns and themes that were found to be similar concepts. The use of the interview questions were the basis of the initial theme categories of data. As the data were examined in more detail, other theme categories were added. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), coding is the method of identifying and assigning meaning to a large amount of descriptive data to create themes by dividing the data into small units for analysis. The use of open, axial, and selective coding is often used in grounded theory studies (Creswell, 1994). Open coding is the process of breaking down the data with the intent to gain knowledge about the experience being studied and to establish general themes or categories. The goal of axial coding is to understand and identify significant and similar categories within the data. From this process, links are established between the categories while theories start to emerge. Selective coding is the process of determining one category that provides an explanation of the relationship between the categories established in open and axial coding, which produces a theory about the experience.

For example the responses to the interview questions: “What motivated you to apply to a doctoral program?” and “What strategies did you use to successfully complete your doctoral degree?” were used to create the internal factors to degree completion for the study. The open

codes consisted of: motivation (MOT), refinement (REF), and effective coping mechanism (COM). The axial codes which included specific elements of the open codes were: career advancement (MOT-CADV), academic ambition (MOT-ACAM), each one teach one (MOT-EOTO), personal (REF-PERS), academic (REF-ACAD), professional (REF-PROF), exercise (COM-EXER), other's experiences (COM-OTEX), attitude of perseverance (COM-ATPE), streamline activities (COM-STAC). The first three letters represent the open codes and the last four letters symbolize the more specific axial codes. The selective code, internal factors for success, was determined to be the theme that offered the explanation for the open and axial codes. A more detailed explanation of all the themes is located in chapter 4.

These themes and patterns found in the data were developed through the constant comparison method. According to Bogdan and Biklin (2007) the constant comparison method “is a research design for multi-data sources, which is like analytic induction in that the formal analysis begins early in the study and is nearly complete by the end of data collection (p. 73). Using this method, the researcher began preliminary coding after the first interview “to serve as a foundation for further data collection and analysis” (Strauss & Corbin, 2008, p. 163). After data had been collected from each individual interview, the data from each interview was analyzed individually and compared to the data collected from prior interviews using Glaser's (1978) constant comparison method. Glaser's (1978) steps in the constant comparison method are: data collection; locating the important and recurrent events that could develop into categories/themes; collecting a diverse set of data within each category/theme; writing in detail about the categories/themes while looking for new occurrences; analyzing the data to discover links among the occurrences; and within each category/theme, sample, code, and write for analysis. The steps in this method took place concurrently during data collection until categories/themes were

saturated. Strauss and Corbin (2008) state that within grounded theory, constant comparison “is essential to all analysis” (p. 73) by providing the researcher an opportunity to distinguish between categories/themes and the characteristics of those categories/themes.

Credibility

In this study, steps were taken to ensure credibility. In qualitative research, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2005) there are four methods to evaluate rigor within a study, which include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (p. 24). Through member checking and an independent peer debriefer who had no connection with the study, credibility, dependability, and confirmability were ensured. The purpose of the peer debriefer was to serve as a critical reviewer “who engages in discussion of the researcher’s preliminary analyses and next methodological strategies in an emergent design” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001, p. 412).

The peer debriefer for this study was an African American female with a Doctor of Philosophy degree and who had previously conducted a qualitative research study while in her doctoral program. The peer debriefer reviewed four interview transcripts. The researcher randomly selected these four interviews by pulling a number from each clusters of five interviews (1-5; 6-10; 11-15; and 16-20) to ensure that an interview from the entire span of data collection were reviewed. The peer debriefer also provided the researcher with suggestions during data collection and data analysis (see Appendix J, Peer Debriefing Agreement Form).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) consider transferability as gauging the accuracy of qualitative research. Transferability is the process of using and/or judging if the results of research in one situation are comparable to other situations by the reader (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The researcher, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), “can provide only the thick description necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether

transfer can be contemplated as a possibility” (p. 316). In order to increase transferability, the researcher must provide thick descriptions to the reader that must include thorough illustrations of the context and selected participants and site, which include demographic data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The Role of the Researcher

Creating and providing meaning to the lived experiences of the participants in a research study is the goal of qualitative researchers (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This means qualitative researchers “stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied and the situational constraints that shape inquiry” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 10). McMillan and Schumacher (2006) concur stating “qualitative researchers become immersed in the situation and the phenomenon being studied” (p.16) especially in studies where interviews are the source of data collected. As a result of the intense connection between the qualitative researcher and the research, openness about the researcher is required.

The researcher is an African American female pursuing a doctoral degree at a large predominately White public research university. The researcher’s interest in this subject began at the commencement of the doctoral program where the lack of African American men enrolled in the doctoral program was clearly evident. Each semester, the researcher would enroll in classes where there were either one or no African American men and overall, the researcher only encountered three African American men while in the program. Interests and questions about the reasons for this phenomenon served as a catalyst to pursue this research.

The researcher’s experience as a doctoral student provided a connection between the participants and the researcher/interviewer. The researcher’s awareness of the demanding and unique nature of doctoral study lent itself to the uninhibited responses of the participants. Also

having professional work experience in student affairs in higher education, afforded the researcher with the knowledge concerning the needs of college students outside of the classroom.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity according to McMillan and Schumacher (2001) “is the rigorous self-scrutiny by the researcher throughout the entire research process” (p. 411) to remain objective.

According to Maxwell (2005), during the analysis in qualitative research, researcher bias can be a threat to credibility because of the impossibility for the researcher to divorce his or her “theories, beliefs, and perceptual lens” (p. 108). A method of self-reflection the researcher used to guard against and continually examine bias is bracketing. Often used in grounded theory studies, the self-reflecting process of bracketing instructs the researcher to identify and then “set aside (but do not abandon) their a priori knowledge and assumptions, with the analytic goal of attending to the participants’ account with an open mind” (Starks & Trinidad, 2007, p. 1376). In order to assess potential biases, the researcher used a reflective journal throughout the entire research process, especially during the data collection and data analysis process. After the completion of all data analysis for the study, the researcher reviewed the journal for bias.

Institutional Review Board Statement

Prior to data collection for this study, an application for approval was submitted to Virginia Commonwealth University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB is tasked with reviewing all the university’s research proposals and upholding federal, state, and local regulations pertaining to research that includes human participants.

Limitations

There are several limitations that may impact the study.

1. The data collected was self-reported by the participants. Self-reported studies may yield exaggerated responses and allow participants to avoid revealing details they elect not to share.

2. The participants were from one mid-Atlantic state, which could limit the generalizability of the study.

3. Depending on the length of time since degree completion, the participants may have difficulty with retrospective recall, which may affect the reporting of certain events and the frequency with which those events occurred.

4. Triangulation was not achieved in this study. University personnel, such as the participant's advisors and dissertation committee members were not interviewed for the study and no archival documents were examined.

5. The participants self-selected to participate in the study. Those who elected to participate in the study may either have very strong positive or negative views of events.

Delimitations

The purpose of the study was to examine the experiences of African American men to degree completion in doctoral programs. The parameters for the study included only African American men who had successfully completed doctorates within the last 10 years (2001-2011). All the participants completed doctoral degrees from on-campus doctoral programs in one mid-Atlantic state.

CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of African American men who have successfully completed doctoral degrees. The goal was to collect specific, in-depth, information that will assist universities, departments, faculty, staff, and advisors in gaining a better understanding of this population and their needs. The findings from this study are presented in this chapter first as a group summary of participants and then in individual participant profiles. Finally, the central themes that emerged from the data are presented with excerpts from the interviews that support the themes. The two research questions this study addressed were:

1. Why do African American men persist to doctoral degree completion?
2. How do African American men perceive their doctoral student experience?

Group Demographics

Twenty African American men participated in this study. All graduated from predominately White institutions in one mid-Atlantic state between the years of 2001 and 2011. Each participant earned either a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) or Doctor of Education degree (Ed.D.) in Education or in a Humanities and Sciences field. For this study, Humanities and Sciences include humanities and arts, social sciences, and natural and physical sciences. Twelve participants (60%) earned doctorates in Education and eight (40%) earned doctorates in a Humanities and Sciences field. Time-to-degree for the 20 men ranged from 3 to 11 years. The average time-to-degree was 5 years; the mode was 5 years, and the median was 7 years.

Fourteen of the 20 men (70%) were enrolled as full-time students, while 6 (30%) were enrolled as part-time students. Fourteen participants (70%) received financial support during matriculation. One participant (7%) received funding exclusively from his employer. Thirteen men (92%) borrowed student loans and/or held graduate or research assistantships. In combination with those loans and/or assistantships, 4 (30%) of the participants held fellowships; 2 men (15%) were in scholars programs or received scholarships; 5 participants (38%) received tuition remission or reimbursement from their employer; 1 (7%) received a grant; and 1 participant (7%) received assistance from his academic department.

Seven participants (35%) were married before they started their doctoral study and 3 (15%) were married during matriculation. Five (25%) were single, having never married. One participant (5%) became partnered during matriculation. One participant (5%) divorced before entering doctoral study and 1 (5%) divorced before degree completion. Two (10%) separated from their spouses while in doctoral study. Fifteen of the men (75%) have children. Five participants have one child; 6 men have two children, and 4 participants have three children.

Age at doctoral completion ranged from 25 to 55 years. The mean age for participants was 38 years. Two participants (10%) completed their doctoral degree in their 20s. The highest number of participants, 13 (65%), completed their doctorate in their 30s. Three participants (15%) finished their degree while in their 40s and 2 (10%) completed their doctorate in their 50s. All the participants successfully completed a doctoral degree within the 10-year period from 2001-2011. Four participants (20%) completed their doctoral degree between 2001-2004, 2 (10%) between 2005-2007, and the highest number of participants, 14 (70%) between 2008-2011.

The current employment for the participants is divided into five categories: (a) educator in a university setting, (b) administrator in K-12 setting, (c) administrator at the university level, (d) employment with the government, and (e) post-doctoral fellow. Seven of the participants (35%) are educators at the university level, 6 (30%) are administrators in a K-12 setting, 2 (10%) are administrators at the university level, 3 (15%) work with the government, and 2 (10%) are postdoctoral fellows.

Individual Participant Profiles

The following are descriptions of the 20 men who participated in the study and the main theme that resonated from their interviews. All 20 participants were recipients of doctoral degrees from five predominately White universities in one mid-Atlantic state. Appendix K provides a visual summary of the demographics of the participants. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym by the researcher.

Ray was in his late 30s when he finished his doctorate in Education. Ray completed his degree in 5 years; he did not receive financial support during matriculation and attended on a full-time basis. He is an assistant professor at a university and a single parent of three children. Ray emphasized the importance of his mentoring relationship. Ray described his mentor as “the father that I never had.” This relationship provided him with support and guidance academically, personally, and professionally, which led to his success during his doctoral journey and beyond.

Ted was one of the oldest participants, earning his degree in his early 50s in a Humanities and Sciences field. Ted was a full-time student; he completed his degree in 7 years and financed his degree with an assistantship and loans. Ted is single, has no children, and is a postdoctoral fellow. Ted cited a historical responsibility to complete his doctoral degree. He asserted, “It was the historical context of my experience. It wasn’t just for me, it was for others.” Ted spoke about

those who came before him who suffered and died so he would have an opportunity to pursue and attain higher levels of education.

Sean completed his degree in Education in his late 30s. Sean received financial support in the form of grants, loans, and tuition reimbursement and finished his degree in 3 years as a part-time student. He is an associate director in a K-12 setting and a married father of three children. Sean felt an internal pressure to always be more than average because of his race: “I’ve always felt like I needed to do more and be more in an effort just to be equal.” These self-imposed pressures compelled Sean to contribute more to class discussions and with class projects even when he was not asked to do so.

Larry was in his mid-30s when he earned his doctoral degree in Education. Larry finished his degree in 3 years as a full-time student and received financial support through employment benefits. He is a married father of two children and a principal in a K-12 setting. One of Larry’s most significant relationships during matriculation was with his wife. She provided him with daily encouragement to persevere through difficult times and a well-balanced home life which allowed him to concentrate on his studies. Larry described his wife as “a rock.”

David was the youngest participant in the study, completing his degree in Education in his mid-20s. David completed his degree in 4 years; attended on a part-time basis and did not receive financial support. He separated from his spouse while in doctoral study; he has one child and is a superintendent in a K-12 setting. David was the only African-American male in his cohort which affected him mostly during class discussions on race, class, and/or equality. He emphasized that during these discussions “Folks would look at me to see whether I was going to respond or how I was going to respond.” He felt at times as if he had to represent the entire African American race during these discussions. David recalled several occasions in class where

he elected not to respond to a discussion about race and the instructor asked him specifically if he wanted to add to the conversation.

Mike was the oldest participant, completing his degree in a Humanities and Sciences field in his mid-50s. Mike used financial support from his employer to finance his degree and matriculated on a part-time basis for 7 years. He is a married father of three children and holds a management position within the federal government. Mike believed strongly that graduate programs should market to African American students at the undergraduate level. He declared, “It’s imperative that we start to recruit in areas that are really lacking for African-Americans.” While in the doctoral program, Mike realized that most African Americans with doctorates are concentrated in certain areas like education and public policy. He believed presenting information about the various educational and career options available to students at the beginning of their educational careers would increase the number of African Americans obtaining doctoral degrees tremendously.

Fred earned his doctoral degree in Education in his late 30s as a full-time student. He completed his degree in 3 years and did not receive financial support. Fred separated from his spouse during matriculation; he is a father of three and a principal in a K-12 setting. Fred found solace in dealing with challenges during matriculation by talking to people in and outside of the program. In the past, Fred viewed talking to people about his challenges as complaining; however, by taking advantage of opportunities to vent, he created long-lasting bonds with his peers, which he found “therapeutic.”

Sam completed his doctorate degree in a Humanities and Sciences field in his late 30s. He was a full-time student for 5 years and did not receive financial support. Sam is single with no children and holds a management position with the federal government. As a result of

beginning doctoral study later in life, Sam emphasized how maturity is an important factor that leads to the doctoral student success. He insisted:

When you decide you want to do a doctoral program you really have to be mature and realize that you have to really sacrifice a lot of the things you did before—your social time, your family time. It's really gonna suffer because you really, really have to concentrate on your program.

He cited the commitment and investment that has to be made to the program, while actively balancing work, school, and family and having the maturity to make sacrifices to focus on the program.

Ben was in his early 30s when he completed his doctorate in a Humanities and Sciences field. Ben pursued his degree on a part-time basis; he received financial support in the form of scholarships and loans and completed his degree in 7 years. Ben married during matriculation, does not have any children and holds a management position in local government. An important strategy for addressing challenges during matriculation for Ben was to learn from others' success and failures. He asserted "I tried to replicate some of the things that people did right so I can minimize as many challenges as I could." Ben was proactive and discussed aspects of the doctoral program with those who had successfully completed the degree and those who were still in the program to assess the best course of action regarding the comprehensive exam and the proposal and dissertation defense.

Bill completed his degree in a Humanities and Sciences field in his late 40s. Bill received financial support though a fellowship and an assistantship; he attended on a full-time basis and completed his degree in 4 years. He divorced before commencing doctoral study; he has one child and is a professor at a university. Bill always had aspirations to pursue a doctorate

and a career in academia. As a result of downsizing at the company where he was employed, the circumstances became ideal for him to pursue the degree. Bill declared “I always said I wanted to go back to school and get my doctorate at some point, but this was sorta like the big motivator.” With his experience in corporate America and academia, Bill had the desire to give back to the community through teaching.

Brad was the second youngest participant, finishing his degree in a Humanities and Sciences field in his late 20s. Brad matriculated through his doctorate in 5 years on a full-time basis without financial support. Brad is single, has no children, and is a postdoctoral fellow. Noting he was the first African American male to complete a doctorate in his program, Brad felt tremendous internal pressure to outperform his classmates to prove that he belonged. He stated:

I look around and I see that I am the only African-American in my class, in my program, I'm gonna be forced to work, or feel forced to work harder and to strive harder to be the best that I can be to really show that I belong here.

Brad felt this intense pressure during his entire tenure as a doctoral student.

Frank completed his doctorate in a Humanities and Sciences field in his early 30s. Frank finished his degree in 5 years as a full-time student and received financial support through a fellowship. This married father of two is an assistant professor at a university. Frank asserted that mentorship is the most critical factor in succeeding in graduate school. He suggested that “You should definitely, more than just looking at a specific program, look at the mentor that you would like to have, and then think about the program second.” Frank found an African American male mentor that displayed the qualities he required to navigate effectively through the doctoral process and beyond, which included successfully balancing his family, work, and community responsibilities.

Aaron completed his doctorate in Education in his mid-40s. Aaron earned his degree in 3 years on a full-time basis, and he received financial support in the form of assistantships, tuition remission, and loans. Aaron is a single father of one child and an assistant professor at a university. Upon entering a doctoral program at a predominately White university, Aaron had no doubt that he would be successful because he began his journey with a strong racial identity: “I think for other Black males going into a doctoral program, if they don’t know who they are, they’re gonna get lost in the mix, and become discourag[e], and eventually drop out.” Aaron admitted his experience while completing his doctorate has changed him, but he continues to have a strong racial identity that has contributed to his success as an educator.

Ford was in his mid-40s when he completed his doctorate in Education. Ford finished his degree in 11 years, which was the longest time-to-degree of all of the participants. Ford was a part-time student and used loans to finance his education. He is a married father of two children and an assistant professor at a university. Ford encountered overt racism while in his doctoral program and remains upset about his experience. He admitted he did not handle those situations well, because he isolated himself instead of talking about it with others. As a result of his experience, Ford recommends African American males create support groups. Ford emphasized, “Don’t isolate yourself. The worst thing for Black students to do is to isolate themselves. You know, we’re a community-minded people. We function better in groups and we have a community spirit.”

Rob completed his doctorate in Education in his late 30s. Rob earned his degree on a part-time basis in 4 years with no financial support. Rob is a married father of two children and a director in a K-12 setting. The intrinsic motivation for Rob to complete his doctoral degree was to be a role model. He acknowledged:

I felt a sense of responsibility that I needed to do it. Not for myself, but for the kids that I work with every day, and more so for my son to see it's important to get as much education as you possibly can.

Noting the few minority males who have doctoral degrees, Rob believes that it is important for minorities to know someone who has successfully completed a doctoral degree in order to share the benefits of pursuing higher education.

Mason was in his early 30s when he completed his degree in Education. Mason, who participated in a scholars program, earned his degree in 5 years as a full-time student and received financial support from his department. During matriculation, Mason went from being single to partnered, he has no children, and is an assistant dean at a university. With the belief that the doctoral process was very political, Mason handled many of his challenges by seeking out people to advocate for him, such as his advisor, faculty members, and administrators. Mason believed that the best course of action was “going to someone and speaking quietly about it, and letting them quietly advocate for me on my side such that I would not damage myself in the process.” He noted those students who advocate for themselves typically did not complete the program because of the lack of knowledge about the departmental political climate.

Brett finished his degree in Education in his late 30s. Brett completed his degree in 9 years, which was one of the longest time-to-degrees. Brett received loans, had an assistantship as financial support, and attended on a full-time basis. He married and had one child during matriculation and is an assistant principal in a K-12 setting. The key to doctoral student success according to Brett is selecting the right institution. He stressed:

If you're in an institution that feels warm and that you're having your needs met, and people are sensitive to your external factors that you [are] dealing with all day long from day to day, then that's going to be a good institutional fit for you.

Brett suggested thoroughly researching institutions by visiting the campus and locating the support services, speaking to current students about their experiences, and exploring the research areas of the professors in your program of interest.

Tim earned his doctorate degree in Education in 5 years. Tim finished his degree in his late 30s, received financial support through loans, and attended on a full-time basis. Tim is a professor at a university and a married father of two children. Accepting criticism is an area where Tim felt African American doctoral students often struggle. Tim warns that "If you can't accept criticism, then I do not recommend that you do a doctoral program." Acquiring thick skin is essential because the process of learning to write at a scholarly level is timely and full of constructive criticism from multiple people.

Will was in his late 30s when he earned his doctorate in Education. Will completed his degree in 10 years, which was the second longest time-to-degrees of all of the participants. He attended on a full-time basis and received financial support through assistantships and a fellowship. Will married and had two children during matriculation and is a director at a university. While in his doctoral program, Will stayed engaged with the campus community in multiple ways. He spent a great deal of time in the multicultural affairs office socializing with the director and staff and attending programs, he was a student representative on several advisory boards and committees, and he joined a fraternity. Will noted that he "was able to spend [his] time immersed in the campus in a lot of different ways." He admits that he was more active in campus life as a doctoral student than as an undergraduate student.

Burt earned his doctorate in a Humanities and Sciences field in his mid-30s. Burt completed his degree in 3 years; he was a full-time student and received financial support through his employer and a fellowship. Burt was divorced during matriculation. He is a parent of one child and a professor at a university. During matriculation, Burt and a few of his classmates created a cohort: “We would study together, discuss things, and we sort of formed into a little support group.” This established cohort began with the coordination of a study session, then the group progressed to taking most of their classes together, and ultimately when group projects were assigned, Burt and his cohort already had a group organized who were ready to work and support each other.

Emergent Factors and Themes

Internal Factors

The data analysis revealed five main internal factors that contribute to the persistence of African American men in doctoral programs: (a) personal refinement, (b) academic refinement, (c) professional refinement, (d) motivation, and (e) effective coping mechanisms.

Personal refinement. Personal refinement is the individual improvement participants experienced while in the program. These include seeking out the opinions of a diverse group of people, learning to care for oneself during difficult processes, and preparing to accept the responsibilities and challenges of having a doctorate. This factor was echoed by the majority of participants. During his tenure in the doctoral program, Ray experienced a transformation within himself. He affirmed, “I just felt like that program stripped me of a lot of things that were holding me back.” Unlike his experiences in other degree programs, he felt that he had improved in the manner in which he spoke, wrote, dressed, and his attitude toward life. It took 10 years for Will to complete his doctorate degree and he believed that he probably could have completed it

sooner, but admitted if he had, he would not have felt any differently about himself. He acknowledged “By the time I finished my doctorate, I felt that I had earned it. . . I was ready to be a doctor.” During his tenure, Will became more confident in his abilities, as he progressed from the novice student, to the “statistics guy,” and to having a doctorate.

Ted admitted that completing a doctoral degree was difficult, but during the process, he became more patient with himself and decided not to be so hard on himself. He confessed “I became my own best friend.” He continued to hold himself accountable for the requirements for degree completion, but he felt no need to beat up on himself. Sam’s personal refinement involved his willingness to learn from and work with others who were different from himself. He claimed, “Working with other students and getting that experience from their different viewpoints really helped me.” Sam wanted to gain a better understanding of other people’s philosophies and thoughts and have discussions and open debates. He stated, “Listening to different viewpoints and being able to understand where people are coming from or why they feel a certain way has even helped me.”

Academic refinement. Academic refinement is the modifications in the techniques participants used in order to be successful at the doctoral level. These include incorporating new reading, writing, and learning techniques. This theme was reiterated by many of the participants. Bill admits that it took him at least a semester to learn a reading strategy that enabled him to read and understand articles proficiently and quickly. He learned “how to actually dissect a paper, understand what’s necessary to read, what to focus on and what not to focus on.” His strategy included reading the introduction, the conclusion, rereading the introduction, and reviewing the literature and methodology sections to gauge the article’s importance before deciding to read or not read the article.

When Ray completed his master's degree, he felt his style of writing was high quality; however, at the beginning of his doctoral program he learned it was not on the scholarly level it needed to be. Ray commended his professors with assisting him in refining his writing, stating: "I felt [the professors] went in, stripped [my writing] down, and then built [my writing] back up." Early in the program, Brad established effective study habits by discovering what methods worked best for him at the doctoral level. There was a great deal of information Brad had to memorize in his field and he determined that creating and using flashcards were an effective method for him. He claimed, "One thing that I never did until I got to my graduate program was I wrote out note cards, flashcards. . .I would pull them outta my pocket and read them everywhere I went."

Professional refinement. Professional refinement are the improvements participants made by taking advantage of all professional opportunities and realizing that a great deal of professional experiences begins at the doctoral level, such as presenting and networking at conferences. This theme was discussed by the majority of participants. Brad took advantage of every opportunity that was afforded to him while in the doctoral program by presenting his research through poster presentations and applying for travel grants for conferences and took full advantage of the networking opportunities there. He declared, "Whenever there's an opportunity, I took advantage of it." Ray cultivated himself professionally by learning the importance of never burning bridges, noting that, "You never know what those professional research experiences will lead to."

Aaron believed that developing a professional identity begins at the commencement of the doctoral program by attending conferences and networking and joining professional organizations on the state and national levels. According to Aaron, these activities allow

doctoral students to become a part of their professional community, noting, “[African American students] need to get educated about what’s out there, because. . .we don’t know what’s out there that could have helped.”

Motivation. The data analysis revealed three primary factors that motivate and contribute to the persistence of African American men in doctoral programs: (a) career advancement, (b) ambition to continue education, and (c) each one teach one.

Career advancement. Career advancement was echoed by 18 participants who had clear career goals that were connected to the successful completion of the doctoral degree. For the participants, the doctoral degree would allow for the advancement or expansion of their current career and/or the opportunity to work or teach in academia.

David had acquired a great deal of experience in his field, but he knew that a doctoral degree was necessary to continue the advancement, thus his motivation to pursue the doctoral degree was to advance his career. He acknowledged that “the biggest motivation was the fact that I was moving up pretty quickly in my career.” Similarly, Aaron recognized after years of teaching in K-12 settings his aspirations to teach at an institution of higher education. He admitted to pursuing a doctoral degree to teach at the collegiate level, and he referred to this goal as the “factor that motivated me. . .and related to what I wanted to do for the rest of my career.”

Sam not only wanted to advance in his current career with the federal government, but he also wanted to become a professor and write for publications. Sam found that “publishing companies are more prone to publish [your work] if you have a PhD.” Ford’s motivation was the desire to continue working in higher education, noting that, “It had been impressed upon me, that if you want to work in higher education, particularly at a university, then you need to have the

doctoral degree.” Burt realized as an undergraduate that to fulfill his long-term goal of becoming a college president, “You must have a PhD.”

In addition to advancing their current career or preparing for a future career, three participants had aspirations to conduct research. Noticing and feeling disappointed by the small numbers of African Americans enrolling in and completing programs in his undergraduate and graduate major, Mason decided to research this phenomenon and to seek “knowledge, research methodologies. . .to find out what I could do to help the situation” to improve the recruitment and retention of minorities.

While Tim was an educator in a K-12 setting, he wanted to research the area of gifted African American males. Tim revealed that, “What motivated me really was to learn more about that population of students and I wanted to know what the research was about, how I could structure my research to focus on that population of students.” Tim found a doctoral program that focused on his interests and he researched the topic.

As a straight A student while completing his K-12 education, Brett experienced difficulty adjusting and locating guidance and support services as an undergraduate student. Brett noted that he could “recall times as an undergrad [when, despite scheduled meetings with advisors] there was nobody there to talk to me, about my classes and what I needed to do.” These experiences motivated Brett to pursue a doctorate in order to research, understand and contribute to knowledge on the struggles previous A students face as undergraduates.

Academic ambition. Academic ambition was discussed by 11 participants. These participants felt compelled to further their education beyond the undergraduate level. This desire came naturally for some participants, who had parents who were educators or for participants who were successful in their past educational pursuits. Other participants’ aspirations came from

television shows and past academic failures. The importance of education was impressed upon Ben by both of his parents who were educators. Ben revealed, “What really motivated me was the fact that my parents instilled [in] me at a very young age the value of getting an education, and furthering that at any opportunity that I could.” Ben had intense ambitions to continue his education, especially after the completion of his master’s degree. Ben maintained, “When I completed my master’s program, I didn’t feel that that was enough.”

Bill’s mother has a master’s degree, taught at a university, and is an attorney. He and his mother would often talk about acquiring additional education and Bill admitted that, “She just motivated me to look into it to see if it was something I wanted to do.” Burt’s inspiration to pursue and continue his education came from watching *The Cosby Show* as a child. Burt recalled, “At the end of *The Cosby Show*, [I would] always see William Cosby, Ed.D. So watching Bill Cosby gave me an idea that Blacks could be professional.” After watching the show and dating someone whose parents had doctoral degrees, Burt began to visualize himself as a professional, with a doctoral degree who worked in higher education. Ted’s ambition to continue his education was based on his success as an undergraduate student and his competency in his field of study. Ted’s “initial ambition academically was to get a master’s degree, but [he] found out that [he] somewhat qualified or was eligible for a doctoral program. So ... [he] was like why not apply for a doctoral program.”

Ray confessed that he was not a model undergraduate student and when he discussed pursuing a doctoral degree with professors he was told he “probably couldn’t cut the mustard.” Ray was determined to prove the doubters wrong and this served as the driving force in his pursuit of more education. Similarly, Will experienced academic difficulty during his first 2 years as an undergraduate student, and consequently he lost confidence in himself academically.

He eventually completed his undergraduate degree and aspired to continue his education. Will's godfather, who had a doctorate and aided him in the graduate application process, was pivotal in building Will's academic confidence, which led Will to believe that "If [he] were granted the opportunity [he] would thrive." This is a belief that Will "just never let go of."

Each one teach one. Each One Teach One is a concept that originated during slavery when learning to read was forbidden for African Americans. When a slave acquired the ability to read, it was their responsibility to teach others. This theme was reiterated by nine participants who felt it was their duty to continue their education to be a role model for others.

Bill lives by the motto "each one teach one." Bill contends that "[African Americans] need to hear that over and over and over again because they hear so many other different things, negative things about African-Americans in general. Let's tell them, show them the positive side of it," and he encourages African American males to reach down and pull others up by mentoring and showcasing their own success.

Mike was motivated to pursue the degree in order to be a role model. He "wanted to be one of those examples to other African-American males, in particular, but African-Americans in general to be able to show that this is important and it is something that we can do." Mike hoped to model the benefits and value of education to his grandchildren, specifically his four grandsons. Equally, Larry hoped to instill in a son not just the importance of education, but the sacrifice and dedication it takes to pursue and complete any degree. He affirmed, "I wanted to leave a long legacy of what education does for you and this is what it can get you if you work hard." In addition to being a role model for his son, he often tells those interested in doctoral programs "I stand upon shoulders, upon shoulders, upon shoulders of people who came before me." Quitting

was not an option for Larry as the social responsibility he felt required him “to make a way for whoever else is going through, so they can stand upon [his] shoulders.”

Ben felt it was important to support African Americans contemplating or pursuing any level of higher education. He is “always trying to encourage folks that are going through the same thing. . . .Offering any assistance. . . saying ‘You can do it. I did it. Others have done it. Don’t quit.’” Since receiving his doctoral degree 4 years ago, Brad has returned to his undergraduate alma mater and given seminars about his journey to where he is now, including his educational experiences and his current job. He conducts the seminars because he feels an introduction to varied careers was missing, noting “I didn’t know anything about this field until I got to this point. And I feel like a lot of us are missing out because, we don’t have that early exposure.”

Effective coping mechanisms. The data analysis indicated that African American men who handled their challenges well were able to persist to degree completion. Four main coping mechanisms were used to persist: (a) exercise; (b) learn through others’ experiences; (c) an attitude of perseverance; and (d) streamlining activities and/or relationships.

Exercise for mental and physical health. Exercise was a recurring theme for eight participants who reduced stress while in the program and kept themselves mentally and physically healthy through various activities. Aaron ran “five and six miles a day” while in the doctoral program, which gave him “time to think, to process through things, to clear my mind.” Ted worked out and meditated daily. He made eating better and getting enough sleeping a priority, which he says increased his energy level and he insisted “You can’t effectively read, write, study, or do research if you’re physically tired. . . physically and psychologically if you’re not rested, your ability to cope with stress is reduced.”

Frank worked out at the gym four times a week during his tenure in the doctoral program to combat stress. He acknowledged, “I don’t care what was going on. . .I was in the gym.” In addition, Frank started golfing to calm himself, playing a few days before his comprehensive exam and dissertation defense. When David was faced with challenges while in the doctoral program, exercise helped him through. He, like Frank, found “playing golf or working out” a panacea for relieving stress.

Will began to exercise frequently as a stress reliever while completing his doctoral degree. He stated, “I drove my car once a week, so I walked everywhere, I ate a good diet and I was [in] tremendous shape.”

Learn through others’ experiences. A recurring factor for five participants was to reduce their challenges or reduce the severity of their challenges by using the positive and negative experiences of current or former doctoral students. Ben attempted to minimize the challenges he encountered in the doctoral program by learning from other doctoral students’ successes and failures by “[speaking] to people who have passed their comprehensive exams and [speaking] to people who have failed them.” Ben learned that creating study groups and practicing with old test questions was the key to successfully completing the exam. Burt also faced his challenges by learning from friends who had already completed their doctoral degrees, affirming, “It was always good to call them to talk about the process.” Even though his friends’ doctorates were in different fields, he felt comfort discussing his questions and ideas with those who had completed the process.

Like Burt and Ben, Tim found comfort in discussing his issues with peers who were going through or who had completed the doctoral process. Tim consulted his professors and peers about methods to prepare for the exam and decided to schedule study time only for the

exam, revealing, “I would [go] to the library from 6:00 to 12:00, uninterrupted, Monday through Friday and then on Saturday mornings from 9:00 to 12:00 and then on Sunday afternoons from 3:00 to 7:00.” Learning from peers who were ahead of him in the program helped Frank deal with challenges noting, “If you’re a second year, having a good relationship with a third or fourth year [is valuable], because then they can pass information down to you.” These peers are able to provide advice regarding the successes and the pitfalls involved in the program.

Attitude of perseverance. Having an attitude of perseverance is establishing the outlook, during the doctoral process, that challenges will be managed and leaving is not an option. This theme was echoed by the majority of participants. Larry faced several challenges while in the doctoral program. He was concerned about how to balance the demands of a new job, the doctoral program, and his responsibilities at home, “[I] found a way to make it work. [I] still got through and persevered. And I can say today that I’m here with the actual degree.”

Will describes his perseverance to complete his doctoral degree as “stick-to-it-iveness.” While in the program, Will became employed full-time after the completion of his coursework, he married, and had two children and he delayed taking his comprehensive exam for a year and a half. In this time the motivation to work on his dissertation dwindled. He admitted, “I’d work on the dissertation seriously for about a month and then I’d forget about it. . .keeping [the dissertation] on the radar and trying to stay motivated to finish the work was a challenge.” Yet, Will persevered and completed the program with the support and understanding of his advisor and wife. Similarly, Brett was married, found new employment, and started a family while in the program and completing his dissertation became less of a priority. He disclosed “The dissertation process gets pretty disheartening and lonely because [it’s] you and only you who has the power to keep persisting and get it done.”

Ben's commitment to persevering to complete the program was evident when his goal to graduate was delayed two and a half years, "I'm not a quitter at heart; that wasn't how I was raised. I was raised to finish things through."

Streamlining activities and/or relationships. This theme was discussed by three participants who limited their external distractions by streamlining activities and/or relationships in order to cope with challenges. Ted handled challenges by eliminating extraneous activities and relationships asserting "the challenges I had in grad school had more to do with time than anything." As a result, Ted made more time for his studies by minimizing or eliminating activities. He had to stop teaching Bible study and doing youth ministry noting "I couldn't be in church two or three times a week for several hours." Similarly, Ray decided to eliminate unproductive relationships while in the doctoral program noting that "I just had to buckle down and cut off a lot of people in my life that were not on the same path." He added those who were cut off were people who were too demanding of his time.

Sam made a lot of compromises while in the program and admitted that it takes a mature person to be able to eliminate or reduce activities and/or relationships in order to focus. Sam stated, "When you decide you want to do a doctoral program you really have to be mature and realize that you have to really sacrifice. . . your social time, your family time."

External Factors

The data analysis revealed three main external factors that contribute to the persistence of African American men in doctoral programs: (a) support systems, (b) a positive relationship with the advisor/chair and committee, and (c) financial support.

Support systems.

Articulate needs and solicit help. This theme was reiterated by nineteen participants who noted the ability to effectively communicate and seek out assistance when needed from professors, friends, and/or campus resources as essential to their success. Frank believes that:

If you're not able to [articulate your own needs], you can really suffer, and that African American students, [in] predominately White programs tend to be very laid back and oftentimes our White colleagues, they get what they need. They go in and they have a list. And we're not taught to do that.

David solicited assistance from a friend who was an English teacher because he thought it would be beneficial to have someone who had never seen the dissertation drafts provide feedback. He would send her drafts "and she [would say] okay, I like this, don't like this, really don't understand this." Aaron cited pride as a reason that "a lot of us don't make it through," noting that instead of seeking help when "something is challenging; we decide with our little egos that we're going to just take on the challenge." Aaron admits that while "it wasn't detrimental" he did not communicate as effectively as he should have while working on his previous degrees and that "it would have [been] much more resourceful had I done that." However, while in the doctoral program, Aaron was not afraid to knock on his professors' doors and to solicit help on any subject.

Ray admitted to "need[ing] guidance every step of the way" after his poor performance the first semester in the doctoral program and spending a great deal of time in his professors' offices "to make sure that I was on the right track." Sam suggested "learning where the library is and where the sections are you need to get to," and he took the time to find the resources he

needed before he needed them. Sean experienced challenges working on group projects because he felt some group members lacked good work ethics and interest in the work that was produced in the group. In order to improve the situation, he sought advice from his professors who were “very helpful” in “giv[ing] us the tools to work through situations” and to “have conversations with our partners, [to] set parameters, [to] set goals.”

Self-established cohorts. Self-established cohorts are cohorts that were developed by peers in order to support each other during the doctoral process. This factor was discussed by five participants who created cohorts while in their doctoral programs. Ben and his cohort peers took similar paths through the program. According to Ben, they “took courses together, the comps together, and defended around the same time.” These group members encouraged each other and used each other as sounding boards to express ideas.

Mike and his peers developed a cohort and intended to take each class together and to use the individual strengths of each group member. Mike explained:

We used the strength of the person in the study group related to the subject to be the lead of that study group. One of the people that I came through the program had his bachelor’s degree and master’s degree in economics. So when we took the economics class. . .he was our lead.

This strategy was productive and allowed the group to progress successfully. Equally, the establishment of Burt’s cohort was spontaneous. Burt insisted that “It was one of those things that just sort of happened. In between class breaks we would start talking. Someone took the initiative to coordinate a study session. After that, we started taking classes together, studying together.” The members of the group began to care about each other and provided support for

each other. Will was the last member to join the group, and he benefited from the experiences of others who were further along in the program.

Brett's cohort started the program around the same time, and they took the majority of their classes together, creating study groups for classes and for the comprehensive exam. Brett noted, "If one of us managed to finish and get through, they would lend a helping hand and pull the rest of us up." The cohort members would assist each other in preparation for the proposal and the dissertation defense by participating in and providing feedback for mock defenses.

Established cohort. Established cohorts are cohorts that were organized by the department; the students in these cohorts begin at the same time and take the same classes throughout the program. The importance of an established cohort was discussed by five participants. Frank describes his relationship with his seven-member cohort as critical and he realized early on that it was impossible to successfully complete a doctorate alone. Frank affirmed, "In graduate school you have to have somebody that's got your back." Frank recalls a cohort member picking him up at the train station after the passing of his father to offer him support and to provide him with the information he missed in class. The cohorts cared for and looked out for each other. He mentioned:

If someone had an illness, somebody in the group was going to get to that person, make sure they had what they need[ed], there's no way that one of us would not be in class and nobody would call you.

He recalled the marathon study sessions in the library for the comprehensive exam and how helpful it was for all of them and remarked that "there's no way of overstating the importance of your colleagues, your cohort." One of the factors for David was his relationship with the members of his cohort. The group members supplied each other with the support and

encouragement to successfully complete the doctorate. He explained, “Because we were in a cohort it was almost like we were making sure that the other person did not fail.”

Aaron and his cohort of one formed a tight bond, which produced a genuine friendship. He professed, “Having that cohort support was really, really important because we’re all going through the same thing. We were able to support each other and we were able to really form a strong relationship.” The two were so comfortable with each other they were able to tell when something was wrong with the other, which made it easier for them to encourage each other. Sean credits his cohort with keeping him on track. His program required several group projects and he did not want to let the group down. Sean stated, “All of these folks that are in my program I really cared for. . .I wanted to make sure for them, and for myself, that my job was done to the best of my ability and on time.” This group dined together, talked about their experiences, and provided moral support. Sean admitted, “That was really a time where you could be with someone that knew exactly what you were going through.” Larry describes his cohort of 20 as “a very tight-knit group.” Everyone in the cohort had similar employment thus they experienced parallel trials and tribulations. Larry asserted:

Having the cohort really helped and being able to rely on them even during the dark times, when I didn’t think I was going to make it through, that was the best. We as a group got each other through.

Mentors. Many participants encouraged African American males to find an African American male mentor, but they acknowledged the difficulty. Only two participants had an African American male mentor throughout their doctoral program. Ray had what he described as “a really good mentor” he found while completing a field experience. He professed, “He took me under his wing like in the first day. . .he helped me navigate not [only] academically, but

[with] the personal obstacles that I was trying to overcome.” Ray noted that his mentor relationship was paramount to his success because his mentor showed interest in him as a person and not just a student.

Frank’s most important relationship while in the doctoral program was with his mentor. His mentor embodied everything he was looking for in a mentor and everything he wanted to be. He asserted:

I think me being male with a male mentor, African American male mentor was enormous. I see it now that I’m out of the program how much of a benefit that was and how much it helped me being male with an African American male mentor.

Frank’s African American male mentor had studied and written papers on African American issues, which benefited Frank as he navigated through the program and beyond.

Instructors. Having positive relationships with instructors was an essential factor to African American doctoral students and the theme was echoed by seven participants. These men commend supportive instructors, who took the time to get to know them and provided them with opportunities to mature as students and professionals. During his tenure, Ford found several student-friendly professors who took the time to get to know him and who “understood [his] plight and understood some of the things that [he] was going through.” He recalls one professor in particular who was very friendly to African American students saying, “He stood up for us, and he helped us out along the way and kind of ran some interference for us when we had particular problems.”

Aaron described the faculty within his department as supportive. He noted that, “They treated us like colleagues instead of students,” and stated, “I felt they genuinely believed in students which contributed a lot to my success.” As a result of the amount of time Mike had to

spend with his professors, he felt he needed to establish positive relationships with them “to make sure that [he] had a firm foundation. . .to be able to reach them when [he] needed them.” Burt’s relationships with several professors were essential to his success. He revealed, “There were a couple of professors that took me under their wing...they would talk about the academic stuff, but they would also talk to me about general stuff like life.”

Sam describes the faculty at his university as “very nurturing” and “extremely caring and supportive.” Sam commended them with providing hands-on experience and having an open door policy. Ray had important relationships with several of the faculty members in his department who were considered leaders in the field. Ray recalled one professor who provided him with the opportunity to co-author publications. In addition, the two played basketball on occasion and they would discuss future career goals. Ray disclosed “I don’t know if I could even sit here right now without my relationship with him.”

Family. The importance of family was a theme echoed by fifteen participants who strongly credited the support they received from home as a factor of their success. It was imperative for these participants to have people outside of school who encouraged them throughout the process. Aaron believes one of the factors that contributed to his success was the support he received from his immediate family. Aaron affirmed, “My parents were like, if you need to do it, do it, and we’re supporting you and they were.” The support from his family was essential because he began his doctoral program in mid-career in his early 40s.

Ray’s family was a major factor in his success, “My family pushed me extremely hard. My family [was] extremely supportive.” Having a good support system at home, particularly support from his wife contributed to Larry’s success as a doctoral student. He revealed “My wife, through it all, [was] very supportive, working through our stuff at home, making sure that

we had home taken care of as well as me having the time to be able to work on my degree.” She would often encourage him during difficult times. He disclosed:

When I was at my lowest, feeling I don’t think I can go any further with this. [His wife would say] ‘No, you started this, you have the drive. You need to push yourself, stay on it, and stay with it.’

Ben’s girlfriend was very beneficial to his success and provided him with encouragement. He admitted:

The rare times when I may have been a little concerned about the program or frustrated with some potential setbacks, she was always there to keep me on solid ground, telling me toughen up; it’ll be okay and you will get through it.

Ford praises his success to an excellent support system at home. He ascribes, “My wife was really supportive because there were so many times that I was not at home or I had to leave, and she said ‘I understand, go and work on your degree.’”

Frank attributes a strong family support system as a factor of his success. He declared, “Sometimes you just need people to believe in your success.” He acknowledges that his family members did not know specific details about the doctoral process, but they were aware the process was difficult. A major factor in Tim’s success was the support and understanding he received from his wife. Tim and his wife are both in the field of education and according to him, “She understood the rigors and the expectations of the university.”

Colleagues. The significance of colleagues was repeated by six participants as a source of support. Ben’s relationship with co-workers who were pursuing higher education themselves provided him with support. He noted, “I was helping them get their master’s through encouragement and through helping them with their coursework and when they finished, they

offered that encouragement and support to myself as well.” Relationships with supportive coworkers were important to Mike while in the doctoral program, “I had to rely on my coworkers to support me at times when I had to take some time off to actually focus on my coursework.”

Sean found support from his supervisor, who encouraged him to find a sense of balance between work responsibilities and the doctoral program. He noted, “It was a support that was primarily to make sure you have balance because you have to make sure your job is done properly...my boss helped me really keep [things] in context.”

Brett’s supervisor was in a doctoral program and had children just like he did. The two had a good relationship because they shared an understanding of what the other was going through. He maintained, “It was just kind of a nice chemistry there where if he needed to leave and do something, I would cover. If I needed to leave, he would cover.”

Positive relationships with advisor/chair and committee. The majority of participants stated having a positive and constant relationship with their advisor/chair and committee as essential to their doctoral student success. This factor was echoed by 12 participants. David attributes his positive relationship with his dissertation chair as a reason for his success as a doctoral student. Noting the pivotal role of chair in the dissertation process, David and his advisor “communicated about three times a week” including “quick check-ins,” he and his chair met and they established a 9-month timeline for completion, “and basically every other week something was due. And it just really kept me on track so that I could see the end was coming.” Similarly, Sam’s great relationship with his advisor, who also became his dissertation chair, and their constant communication contributed to his success as a doctoral student. He revealed “I constantly talked to him, constantly got mentoring on what classes should I take, what strategies should I use to improve my study habits, what are the options for what should I do when I get out

of school.” Sam praises his advisor for listening to him and providing him with worthy advice and a conducive environment to express himself.

Rob asserted that he had great chair. He recalled:

At first I was very intimidated by him [but] by the time I got ready to write the dissertation the relationship changed. He didn’t push me. I think I pushed him, which changed the level of respect that he had for me.

Will’s advisor, who eventually became his dissertation chair, established a personal connection. He acknowledged, “I felt there was a mutual personal fondness between the two of us, and I never doubted his desire to see me succeed or his commitment to help me succeed.” In addition, Will’s advisor provided him with professional opportunities that allowed him to progress in his field. He declared, “He gave me this belief that I could and should succeed; [he] looked out and made sure that I was seeking opportunities to develop professionally.” Will co-authored a paper with his advisor and was allowed to attend training sessions provided by professional associations in his field.

Ted had great admiration for his advisor affirming, “I think I had the best advisor on the planet. I had the best advisor in all of history.” The two were good friends, but he admits, “At the same time she was extremely demanding, she expected excellence and she never just signed off on anything.” Ted recalled that she was the very last person to sign off on his dissertation because she wanted to make certain the discussion section was comprehensive. Ted declared, “If she was a different kind of person I wouldn’t have made it. If she wasn’t flexible, understanding, supportive, I wouldn’t have made it.”

Financial support. The majority of participants contributed receiving financial support from the university, their employer, or other venues that earmarked educational funds as a factor of their doctoral student success. This theme was reiterated by 14 participants. Frank’s mentor assisted him in finding financial support, specifically a fellowship, noting that, “one particular fellowship that paid for the first 3 years of school and gave [him] money to live on, and the university picked up the rest of the other 2 years.”

Ted had several assistantships, student loans, and fellowships, which allowed him to avoid the burden of obtaining additional employment. He remarked that “not really stressing about funding was important.” Burt cites his fellowship and other tuition assistance as key to his doctoral student success, disclosing, “There’s no way I would have been able to complete the degree without those because I worked at a university and decided to quit a full-time job to go back and be a PhD student.”

Ford recognized that the assistance he received benefited him. He acknowledged that “just having the financial assistance help[ed] me out” and having the ability to concentrate solely on his studies was a reason for his success. Aaron admitted, “I had great financial support from the university.” He received tuition remission and had a graduate assistantship that paid him a monthly stipend.

Impact of Racial Identity

The data analysis revealed the participants’ racial identity can have both negative effects, covert and overt racism and isolation and positive effects, historicism and feeling supported.

Negative Impact

Covert racism. Covert racism is a form of racism that is more disguised and less public than overt racism; however, it is still very potent and can have long-lasting effects. Eight participants expressed experiencing some form of covert racism while in the doctoral program.

Talking dog syndrome. The talking dog syndrome is the astonishment some people demonstrate when a person or group of people defies their expectations. Mason felt his peers were surprised by his intelligence because of his race and gender, which he called the *talking dog syndrome*. Mason describes the talking dog syndrome as the amazement and shock his White peers would exhibit when he spoke in class. He disclosed, “It’s as if I weren’t supposed to say anything intelligent and I [didn’t] have the same education as them, and I got there without having undergraduate and graduate degrees.” He added that these reactions would happen frequently in his classes; however, it did not happen to the African American females as “they [his White peers] expected them to be smart and did not expect [him] to be smart.”

Although Sam was aware that his peers may have questioned his qualifications, his writing ability, and his articulateness based on his race, he did not allow it to obstruct his progress. He stated, “It’s nothing that really hindered me or stopped me. But you’re aware of it.”

Debunking stereotypes and discussions of race. Assuming the cumbersome duty to disprove stereotypes and to represent the entire race was repeated by five participants who reluctantly accepted that responsibility in several of their classes while in the doctoral program. Mason often felt the burden to debunk false stereotypes about African Americans noting, “It’s extremely taxing to have to debunk a stereotype that you clearly know is not true.” He recalled being described as hostile towards White people by two of his White female peers during a

conversation that took place at a social gathering, which Mason did not attend; however, the assessment was a surprise to him. He admitted:

I feel like they expect me to be laughing and dancing and shucking and jiving in front of them. What they don't realize is I'm not smiling in your face all the time, but I'm not smiling in anybody's face all the time and it had nothing to do with them being White.

He added, "I have never said anything out of the way to any [one]. I never had an argument with anyone, never gotten into any disagreements other than intellectual disagreements in class." He believes that these two females perceived him to be hostile and any interactions or lack of interactions with him was seen as hostile.

Accepting the responsibility to represent the entire race is impossible, but some participants often felt they had to during class discussions. On several occasions, Larry felt as if he had to speak for all African American males in class discussions. This made him uncomfortable because one person cannot speak for an entire race. Larry professed, "I can't say I represented every African-American male because it's not possible. But a lot of times in some of the discussions I had to." David noted when class discussions turned to race, class, and/or gender, he felt he had to represent all African Americans and being the only African American in his cohort, his classmates and instructors would often look to him to provide the African American view. David claimed, "Folks would just look at me and try to figure out how I would respond to certain things."

In some classes, ignoring the subject of race was preferred. Mason believed some of his peers wanted him to avoid discussing race in class often being asked by his peers, "Did you say that because you are Black?" and "Why is it always about race with you?" Mason thought that conversations about race were imperative considering America is becoming more diverse and in

the field of Education, the goal is to educate all children. He believed his peers preferred to discuss the White middle-class child, ignoring all others, affirming:

I don't want to assume a typical kid. I want to consider the kid that is middle-class, the kid that is in poverty, the kid that is wealthy. I want to consider the White kid, the Hispanic kid, the Asian kid, the Black kid and it's almost like they did not want me to bring that up.

Mason felt his classmates wanted him to be less male and less Black declaring, "If I didn't bring the voice, it wouldn't be present at all in the conversation and then they could just go on talking about middle class White kids as if they are what make up every school."

Loneliness/isolation. Feelings of loneliness and isolation while in the doctoral program, as a result of the small number of African American male students and professors in their programs or departments were mentioned by eight participants. There were a total of four African American men in Ben's program. Although he felt alone at times, the scarcity of African American men did not dissuade him from pursuing his goal of completing his doctoral degree admitting, "I'm somewhat used to being a rarity and racially, you always notice it, but I just don't let it bother me."

Mason was performing well academically, but he had grown tired of people he believed were racist and of being the only African American. He acknowledged, "The [doctoral] process is stressful in and of itself and I became tired of being the only Black person around." These feelings of isolation almost caused Mason to leave his program. Ford also felt isolated from his peers and it was particularly troubling for him when group work was assigned noting, "Nobody wanted me to be in their group." He believed the reason was because of his race and the perceived stereotypes associated with his race. There were no African American professors in

Ray's program and at times he found that very difficult. He admitted, "I think that was [a] tough pill to swallow. There was really no one to relate to and I think that hurt me a lot, too."

Overt racism. Overt racism is a form of racism that is more public, more direct, and more easily recognizable than covert racism. Six participants expressed experiencing some form of overt racism while in the doctoral program. Frank entered the program with a strong racial identity and the conviction that, "If [anyone] misrepresented African American people in any way, [he] was going to let [them] know it." Therefore when he heard that a girlfriend of one of his classmates cited affirmative action as the only reason African Americans were accepted into the program at a beginning of the year mixer, he felt the need to address those comments on the first day of class, which fortunately was a class on multiculturalism.

Sam experienced overt racism while completing a class group project with a White male and White female. He divulged, "When I would talk in the group, she would never look at me and she would always look at him and never actually talk to me directly." This overt racism was so apparent the White male apologized to Sam for her behavior. Sam spoke to the professor about his concerns and was able to join another group and decided not to address the issues with the White female. Brad experienced overt racism after being awarded a prestigious grant. He recalled most of his peers being excited for him; however, one of them told him that "the only reason you got that is because you're Black." Brad was offended and surprised by the comment and decided to distance himself from that person for the remainder of his tenure in the program and to use the incident as motivation to do well. Brad noted, "Regardless of why I was awarded the grant, I'm just going to take advantage of [it] and go forward." During his first semester in the doctoral program, Ray recalled being blatantly told by at least three professors that he did not belong there. In addition, he was told by one professor, "If I had the choice of accepting you into

the program I would not have accepted you.” These comments hurt Ray and he perceived those comments as overt racism. He stated, “I was tired of them saying [I] don’t belong here,” and he used the incidents as motivation to complete the program and to prove them wrong.

Ford recalled experiencing racism in a class where the professor refused to look in his direction or acknowledge him. Ford was the only African American and the only male in a class of 14 White females. He recalled “I sat on the front row in the right side of the room for the entire semester and the professor stood on the left side of the room and delivered his lectures.” Ford received an A in the class, but the experience was isolating. He noted there were a few people in the class that recognized what was happening and reached out to him but despite the time that has passed since graduating, Ford still harbors resentment about the racism he experienced stating, “I’m still angry and bitter about what happened to me.” Mason was informed by his advisor that the department chair did not like him because he was African American. His advisor summarized a meeting he had with the chair by stating, “the [chair] he didn’t say this, but, he pretty much sees you as the n***** he loves to hate.” Mason’s advisor, who was not African American, cautioned him to be mindful and watch his back, because there were some within the department who did not want him there and did not want to see him succeed.

Positive Impact

Historicism. Historicism is theory that underscores the importance of history (Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary, 2005). African Americans are now afforded the opportunity to pursue all levels of education, which was not always the case. One participant felt an obligation to complete his doctoral degree to pay homage to those who were denied the opportunity in the past. As an African American man, Ted believed that he had a historical responsibility to

complete his doctoral degree and it was this historical underpinning that framed his entire experience. He understood many people before him struggled, fought, and died to afford him the opportunity to pursue any level of education he desired. He affirmed, “It wasn’t just for me, it was for others.”

Internal pressure to be better. The majority of the participants did not feel they were evaluated any differently on class assignments, projects, and tests than other students; however four participants felt an internal constant pressure to be better than their White peers in order to be considered equal. This intrinsic motivation to be better would ultimately propel them to doctoral completion. Aaron believed he was evaluated equally with his peers, but when preparing for class, assignments, and tests he felt internal pressure “to be on point” because he was in a professional degree program and because he was an African American man. He revealed, “I did feel the pressure that I needed to represent and I had to stay there and I had to do this and I did.”

Sean recalled being told as a child that he had to be more than average because he was an African American male and since then he has felt internal pressure to do so. He professed, “I think I’ve always been hyper-aware of race. I’ve always felt like I needed to do more and be more in an effort just to be equal.” Sean strived to be better to avoid being labeled as lazy. Similarly, Burt felt internal pressure to be better than others because of his race. He admitted, “I felt a little pressure that I had to work a little harder, work a little better. I always thought that my work had to be just a little better than my White counterparts.”

Feeling supported. Three participants felt supported by the university and their professors because of their race. Sam insisted that he did not receive any special treatment because he was one of only a few African American men in his program. However, he realized

how unique he was and he believed “the professors were nurturing to [him] and sensitive to the challenges [he] face[d].”

Being the only African American male in his program, Tim wondered if he was fulfilling a quota when he first entered the program. However, after being asked to revise a paper, he realized that his professors were fair and the expectations were the same for everyone. He credits the professors for being open and honest with him and his institution for providing support stating, “They had a good support system there. They have a good multicultural program there.” Will felt empowered and supported while in the doctoral program, he never believed that any one tried to hinder his progress and he was encouraged to research a topic he felt passionate about. He noted, “I think I was largely able to put race to the side. I felt that I had the respect of my classmates.”

Summary

The factors that contributed to the persistence of African American men in doctoral program can be divided into two categories: (a) internal factors, which encompass personal, academic, and professional improvement, specific motivations to pursue the degree, and effective coping mechanisms employed; and (b) external factors, which include seeking support when needed, creating support systems with family, friends, and classmates, having positive relationships with advisor/chair and committee, and receiving financial support. Table 4 provides a listing of these themes. The findings indicated that based on their racial identity, African American men perceive their doctoral student experience as both negative and positive. The negative impacts include covert and overt racism, and isolation, and the positive impacts include historicism, internal pressure to always work harder, and feeling supported. Table 5 lists the aforementioned themes.

Table 4

Factors That Contribute to Doctoral Student Persistence

| Internal factors | External factors |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| Research Question 1 - Why do African American men persist to doctoral degree completion? | |
| Personal refinement | Support systems |
| Academic refinement | Positive relationships with advisor/chair and committee |
| Professional refinement | Financial support |
| Motivation | |
| Effective coping mechanisms | |

Table 5

Perceptions of Doctoral Student Experience

| Negative | Positive |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Research Question 2. How do African American men perceive their doctoral student experience? | |
| Covert racism | Historicism |
| Loneliness/isolation | Feeling supported |
| Overt racism | Internal pressure to be better |

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore the African American male doctoral student experience. All 20 participants in the study successfully completed doctoral degrees in the field of education or in a humanities and sciences field. In this chapter, the major findings are discussed; a descriptive model, conclusions, and recommendations are presented.

Discussion and Interpretation of Findings

There is no single answer to the question of why African American men persist in doctoral programs. It is a complex question and each participant had his own strategies for persistence. This study explored both internal and external factors that contribute to the persistence of this population as well as the impact of the participants' racial identity.

Internal Factors

Motivation. Based on their responses, the majority of the men had a strong motivation to pursue and complete the degree for two major reasons: career advancement and/or a wider array of future career options, and to serve as role models for others. David knew that a doctoral degree was necessary to advance in the K-12 setting and he did not want any educational barriers to restrict him from his career ambition. Aaron, Sam, and Burt aspired to begin or continue careers in higher education and realized a doctoral degree would be required for most positions. Thus connecting the doctoral student's career aspirations directly to the opportunities and benefits the degree can offer is imperative.

Role modeling was essential to the participants and ultimately served as a factor in their persistence to doctoral completion. The participants wanted to be role models to African American students of all levels. As a role model, Bill wanted to combat the negative stereotypes of African American men. Mike hoped to instill the importance of education to African Americans, and Brad wanted African American children to know about the career options a doctoral degree affords. Therefore, the participants' sense of duty and obligation contributed to their persistence to degree completion.

Personal, academic, and professional refinement. The participants in the study were fully aware of the time, effort, and energy needed to successfully complete a doctoral program, but few were aware of the changes or adjustments they would have to make in order to complete the program. Ted decided to become his own best friend and decrease the internal pressure he placed on himself. Ray modified his speaking and writing skills, and Sam began to open himself up to consider diverse viewpoints on various subjects. Academically, Bill employed new reading strategies and Brad created and used flashcards to memorize concepts and terms for the first time. Professionally, Brad was proactive in pursuing networking opportunities and Aaron began to develop a professional identity by joining professional associations. In each area, the changes were positive enhancements for the participants; however, some participants experienced impediments in initiating the modifications. These findings revealed that the same methods of learning and connecting with others that were effective at other levels of education are not as effective at the doctoral level, which should be communicated to students at the beginning of doctoral programs.

Effective coping mechanisms. Coping effectively with various challenges related to the doctoral process was a factor in the persistence of African American men in doctoral programs. The data found physical activity was important among African American men as a method to reduce stress and gain mental clarity. Frank and David preferred playing golf, while Will and Aaron began to walk or run daily. These findings revealed that support groups should be created around physical activities, which can be coordinated through doctoral student support centers. This would allow students to bond, network, and reduce stress.

Having the attitude that quitting the program was not an option, despite the obstacles that arose, was essential to the success of African American men in doctoral programs. The participants experienced difficult times while in the program, but these participants had the attitude that the dark times were going to pass and they would persevere. Participants like Larry, Brett, and Will gained new employment and/or started families while in the program which made it necessary to readjust their priorities. Ben's time-to-degree was extended by two and a half years through no fault of his own. His perseverance demonstrated his ability to be flexible and continually stay engaged with his dissertation. The data indicated that when the participants entered their doctoral programs, they acknowledged that impediments would occur. Thus African American male students were less likely to depart the program if the position of quitting is not an option was established early in matriculation.

External Factors

Support systems. A combination of support systems promoted persistence among the African American men in this study. The data indicated that African American men, who established a three-fold support system, successfully completed the program. The three levels include support at: school, home, and work. The main source of encouragement at school was

from cohorts. Ten participants cited cohorts for support. Five participants established their own cohorts groups while five participants' cohorts were established by the program. Whether cohorts were established by the department or by a group of students, having a connection with classmates was paramount to the persistence of African American men in this study. Ben, Mike, and Burt's cohorts were created spontaneously, but evolved purposefully, when cohort members began taking courses together and creating study groups which allowed the person with the most expertise in the area of study to lead. Frank, Larry, and Aaron were placed with their cohort members, but the same encouragement and connection were evident. The results from this study substantiate the finding from Bair and Haworth (1999) that indicated the significance of student-to-student interactions in doctoral programs.

The major source of outside support was from family and friends. Fifteen participants commend their wives, parents, and friends as a factor of their success. Aaron, Ray, and Frank credit their parents and/or children for believing in them and pushing them when they needed encouragement to continue during challenging times. Larry, Ford, and Tim praised their wives for taking care of their homes and children, and sacrificing their own time to provide them with the time and conducive environment needed to read, study, and write while in the program. The majority of the participants acknowledged that their family and friends were unaware of the specifics involved in completing a doctoral program, but the data indicated having that knowledge was irrelevant and general encouragement and support was the key.

The main source of encouragement at work was from colleagues. Work colleagues served as a source of support for six participants in the study. The data revealed that this type of support was different from the other two forms of support. In Sean's case, his supervisor encouraged him to find a balance between his work and school responsibilities. Mike's

colleagues would occasionally cover his work duties, and Brett's supervisor was completing a doctoral degree as well. Ultimately this three-fold support system involved having people who believed in the participants' success in three major areas of their lives and was a key to the persistence of African American men in this study. These findings suggest that African American men should begin to create support systems in these three areas before commencing a doctoral program.

Positive relationships with advisor/chair and committee. Twelve participants attributed a positive and constant relationship with their advisor/chair and committee as essential to their doctoral student success. David and his chair communicated at least three times a week, Sam's advisor provided information to improve his study skills and professional advice about life after the doctoral program, and Ted's advisor/chair expected excellence from him. The data revealed that the participants who had advisors/chairs who had interests in them academically, professionally, and personally successfully completed the program. The responses in this study mirror Golde's (2000) findings, which indicated that a positive relationship between the student and the faculty advisor can predict the successful completion of the program. These findings suggest that students and faculty should meet with each other before advisor assignments are made to establish if the match between the two will be constructive.

Mentors. Although nine participants suggested African American men in doctoral program seek out African American male mentors, only two participants had African American male mentors throughout their doctoral program. Frank met his mentor before entering the program and acknowledged his relationship with his mentor was the most important relationship he had while in the program. Ray found his mentor while in a practicum experience early in his doctoral program and spoke very highly of the connection the two established. Finding African

American male mentors is difficult at many colleges and universities; however, it is important and was a motivator for several participants to pursue and complete the doctoral degree.

Harper (2006a) asserts African American male mentors validate and empower African American men. Even though having an African American male mentor would perhaps combat isolation and promote self-efficacy, the majority of the participants in the study did not have an African American male mentor, yet they successfully completed the program. This phenomenon can be explained by the positive connections the participants made with others including, advisors, peers, instructors, and other trusted persons who had their best interest at heart regardless of race. Relationships with an advisor and/or mentor could off set the obstacles and challenged which lead to the failure to complete.

Financial Support. Fourteen participants received financial support from the university, employers, or other organizations and all attribute their success to this support. Frank, Ted, Ford, and Brad found financial support that afforded them the opportunity to focus on their studies without the pressure of acquiring additional employment to support themselves. The results from this study substantiate the findings from Bair and Haworth (1999) and Bowen and Rudenstine (1992) which indicated that there is a higher rate of completion among doctoral students who received financial support than those who did not receive financial support. Receiving financial support was imperative to the success of the participants; therefore, these findings suggest that universities should reach out to the business and nonprofit community and to alumni to solicit funds to establish fellowships, scholarships, and grants specifically for African American men. These opportunities should be announced throughout the semester and advisors should be aware of the opportunities and communicate them to their advisees.

Impact of Racial Identity

Racism

Eight participants expressed experiencing some form of covert racism while in the doctoral program. Mason and Sam dealt with peers who questioned their intelligence and Larry and David were burdened with debunking stereotypes or representing the entire African American race. Milner (2004) believes the added stress and the negative feelings that occur with this type of treatment places African American graduate students' persistence to degree completion in jeopardy.

Seven participants expressed experiencing some form of overt racism during their tenure in their doctoral program. Sam was ignored by a group member, Ford was ignored by an instructor for an entire semester, Brad was told that he received a grant only because of his race, and three instructors told Ray that he did not belong in a doctoral program. For the participants in this study, the racism they experienced affected them deeply. Some thought of leaving the program, yet none of them did. In all the cases, the participants were able to overcome racism and they used it as a motivation to succeed.

The first tenet of critical race theory is that racism is a fact of daily life in America and is deeply ingrained in American society. In order to combat the effects, the findings suggest that universities first acknowledge that racism exists on their campus. Second, a dialogue about what African Americans and other minorities are experiencing on campus should begin. Finally support groups should be established to provide a safe environment for minorities to express their feelings about their experiences. The support groups would address the loneliness and isolation expressed by some of the participants.

Loneliness/Isolation

Feelings of loneliness were experienced by eight participants because of the lack of African Americans and especially African American males on campus. There were four African American men in Ben's program, Mason was the only African American in his program, and there were no African American male instructors in Ray's program. It was difficult for the participants to experience isolation during matriculation, yet all remained in the program. In Lewis, Ginsberg, Davies, and Smith's (2004) study, the African American participants felt invisible on campus and became self-reliant in order to complete the doctorate. These findings suggest that universities should make a special effort to recruit and retain African American male faculty and administrators. This can be accomplished by advertising vacancies in publications geared toward minorities and participating in minority job fairs.

Historicism

Historicism is a theory that emphasizes the importance of history (Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 2005). One participant believed he had a duty to complete his doctoral degree. The educational opportunities that were afforded to him were the result of the sacrifices of those who came before him. This mindset propelled Ted to complete his degree no matter the difficulties he faced. It would be recommended that multicultural centers and support groups for minorities integrate historicism into programs and dialogue by including degree attainment statistics, narratives from those who have succeeded, and narratives from those who experienced life before the Civil Rights movement. An awareness of history can serve as a driving force for persistence.

A descriptive model was created by the researcher to visually display the factors that influence the persistence to doctoral completion of African American men from the finding of this study (see Figure 3).

Doctoral Degree Completion for African American Men

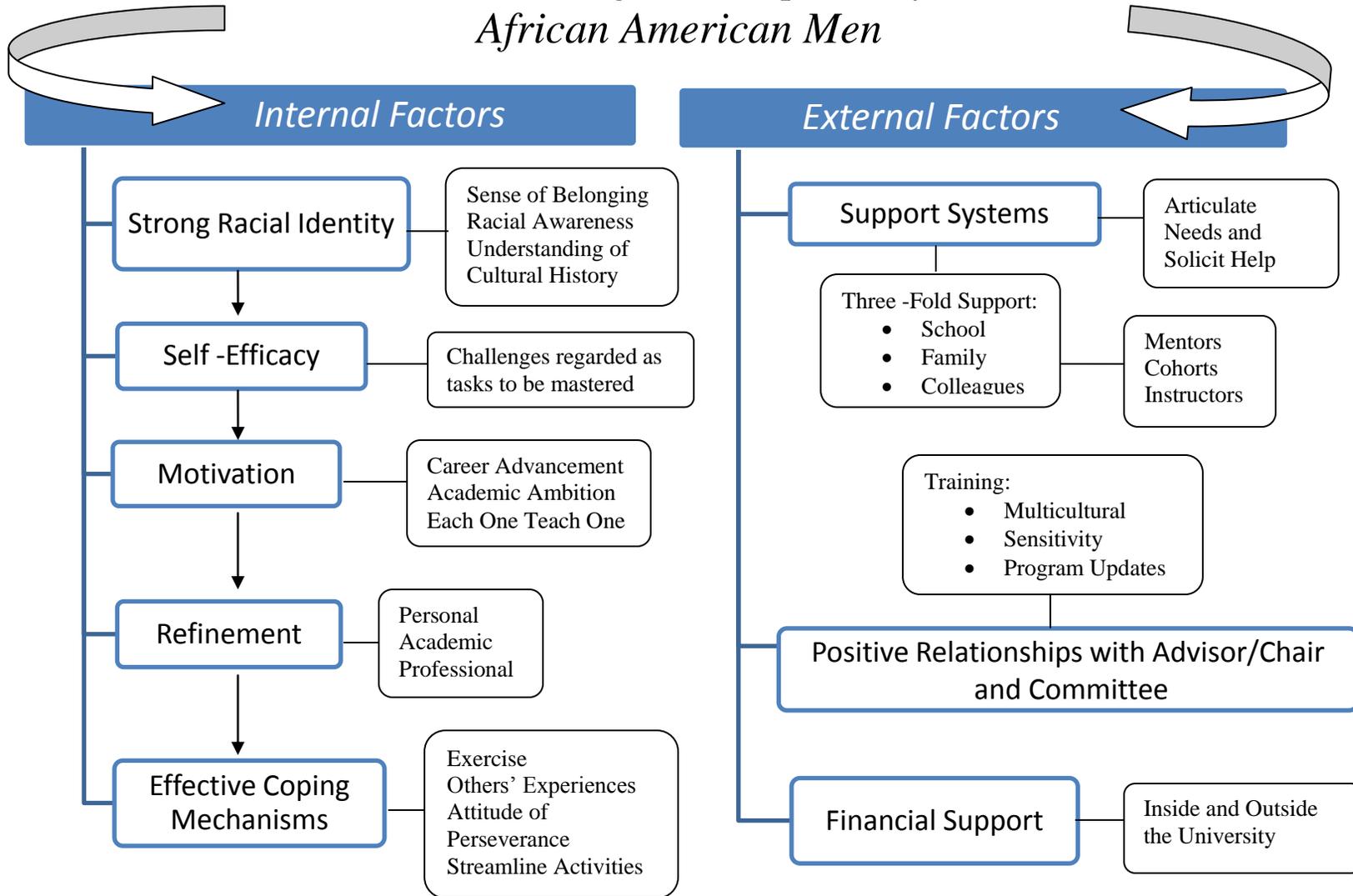


Figure 3. Factors Leading to Successful Completion of Doctoral Degrees by African American Men.

Implications

Despite the legal and legislative successes that have afforded African American students the freedom to pursue any level of education, African American men still remain in the minority in doctoral programs. In 2007-2008, the number of African American men who earned doctoral degrees was 2.0%, which is lower than the rate in 1976-1977. If this trend continues, the academic pipeline will run dry, which will directly impact the number of African American male faculty to serve as mentors and to continue the tradition of each one teach one. The sense of urgency to increase the number of African American men completing doctoral degrees appears to be strong among African American researchers, based on the race of the majority of the researchers that have studied this topic.

Institutional racism is defined as the continuous unequal distribution of resources and opportunities that provide advantages to one racial group while excluding others. Colleges and universities must acknowledge that institutional racism does exist and initiate the creation of strategies to eliminate it. These actions should assist in the reduction of some of the impediments to success African American men face while pursuing higher education. This is often a difficult task, since this form of racism is ingrained in society through common practices. In addition, colleges and universities as a whole must take an interest in and be concerned about the limited number of African American men earning doctorates and its impact on the retention of African American men at the college or university level as well as its impact on society.

Recommendations for Universities and Departments

Universities must make a commitment to recruit and retain African American male faculty and administrators. This effort can start with recruiting from the African American male doctoral students who are currently enrolled in the university to increase the academic pipeline of

African American men from the undergraduate level to the doctoral level. This action would also provide African American male students more options for race and gender specific mentors.

None of the participants in this study were asked about their doctoral student experience in an official capacity at the conclusion of their degree. All academic departments need to create an exit assessment for doctoral students. The assessment should address the campus/department climate, the support services offered, relationships with faculty and staff, and provide an open comments section. The data collected would provide insight into what the university and department is doing well and provide data about areas of improvement.

Universities should make a commitment to create and maintain a mentor program. This program should match current doctoral students with alumni, if possible in the same field. There should be mandatory mentor and mentee training provided before matches are made to make certain the expectations of both parties have been communicated. There should be a required number of interactions between the pair per month with a guide created by the university that includes topics and issues that should be discussed such as professionalism, how to handle challenges and conflicts, and the best practices for successfully completing the comprehensive examination and the proposal and dissertation defense.

Universities and departments must acknowledge that racism does exist and require advisor awareness training to combat racism on campus. Advisor awareness training must include discussions and activities that focus on White privilege, institutional racism, and multicultural awareness. The goal of this training will be to provide a greater understanding, sensitivity, and appreciation of the history, values, and experiences of all people. Additionally, advisors will gain greater self-awareness and awareness of others, develop better interpersonal communication skills, and be better able to challenge stereotypes and prejudices.

Recommendations for Advisors and Faculty

Advisors and faculty must realize their significance in a student's doctoral journey.

Doctoral students want supportive and caring advisors and faculty who want to get to know them professionally, academically, and personally. Therefore, advisors and faculty need to adopt an open door policy, keep scheduled appointments, be prepared for those appointments, inquire about the student's academic and professional goals while integrating them into their future profession, and provide personalized guidance for each student. Advisors and faculty need to become aware of campus resources (e.g., the location and services of the writing center, academic support center, the counseling center, and the fitness centers).

Advisors and faculty should request advisor training each semester to keep abreast of the modifications to academic programs and to be provided with new techniques on how to successfully interact with students from different races and ethnicities. The seven tenets of critical race theory should be used as the foundation for the training emphasizing the awareness of the ways racism within established structures hinders some groups in society. In addition, the notion of colorblindness should be discussed, stressing how this concept promotes racism by ignoring racism. Advisors and faculty need to be sensitive to and aware of the negative experiences minority students may face while in the program and provide a safe environment for minority students to express their feelings.

Recommendations for Future and Current African American Male Doctoral Students

Future African American male doctoral students should enter the program with a strong racial identity, which includes: (1) conducting a serious introspection, specifically focusing on your beliefs, emotions, and motives for entering a doctoral program; (2) having the knowledge and understanding of the importance of your cultural history; (3) developing a racial awareness

and coping skills to deal with racism; and (4) feeling a sense of belongingness to your racial group. Having a strong racial identity is the paramount internal factor leading to successful completion of a doctoral degree for African American men.

Future African American male doctoral students should visit institutions, talk with faculty and current students, and assess the racial climate. Future and current African American male doctoral students must establish early in matriculation a three-fold support system, which includes trusted people at home, work, and school. This population should also seek to join or create a minority graduate student organization to provide support and/or to advocate for minorities by bringing awareness of minority issues and concerns to the college or university. In addition, students should be proactive in seeking financial opportunities within and outside of the university throughout matriculation. Future and current African American male doctoral students should make completing the doctoral degree a priority and not an option early in matriculation.

Current African American male doctoral students should establish positive relationships with instructors, advisor, and committee members and then communicate effectively with them. Select a dissertation topic early in the program and make certain there is a faculty member who has interest in the topic. This population should find a mentor within or outside of the university who will provide support academically, personally, and professionally.

Recommendations for Further Research

Based on the results of this study, there are several recommendations for future research. First, additional persistence studies should be conducted that include the perspectives of advisors and faculty members. A positive relationship with advisors and faculty has been linked to African American male doctoral student success. Incorporating their viewpoints would add insight into the approaches they use with students. Second, all the participants were from one

mid-Atlantic state and the findings' generalizability is limited; therefore, additional studies that include more universities, programs, and disciplines from more states are recommended. Third, a comparison study should be conducted that explores the experiences of African American male doctoral completers from smaller schools (in terms of overall enrollment) and larger schools. This study should examine interactions African American men have with faculty and peers, the availability of support services, and campus climate.

Fourth, a study should be conducted to examine if HBCU alumni enter doctoral programs with a stronger racial identity. The findings from this study could provide non-HBCU institutions with methods to strengthen the racial identity of their African American male students. Fifth, a study should be conducted that examines the factors that contribute to the persistence of African American men who attend HBCUs for their doctoral degree. This study would explore if this population experiences similar difficulties as those who attended PWIs. Sixth, a study should be conducted comparing the experiences of African American men who have completed doctorates in physical and social sciences. This study should focus on the factors that contribute to doctoral student success and explore the impediments to success. Seventh, a replica of this study should be conducted in other regions of the United States. The findings from these studies should be analyzed to explore the variations of the factors of success and the impediments to success for African American men.

Conclusions

This study examined the factors that contributed to the persistence of African American men to doctoral degree completion and their perceptions about their doctoral student experience. Twenty men were interviewed and they provided internal and external factors that contributed to their success. As this study illustrates, there are five main internal success factors that contribute

to the persistence of African American men in doctoral programs: (1) personal refinement, (2) academic refinement, (3) professional refinement, (4) motivation: career advancement, academic ambition, and each one teach one, and (5) effective coping mechanisms: exercising, learning from others' experiences, having an attitude of perseverance, and streamlining activities and/or relationships. The participants were highly motivated to complete the program despite the challenges they faced and they entered into the program with a strong racial identity and the confidence that they would complete the program successfully. While in the program, the participants recognized that they would have to modify their behaviors and their academic strategies to be successful.

The data analysis revealed three main external success factors that contributed to the persistence of African American men in doctoral programs: (1) support systems - family and friends, cohort members, colleagues, mentors, and instructors; (2) developing a positive relationship with the advisor/chair and committee; and (3) financial support.

It is important that departments and faculty promote these external factors by providing African American men with the underlying principles for these success factors at the beginning of the program. It is vital that African American men create support systems and not isolate themselves during the doctoral process because difficult times will come and having the support and encouragement is essential to success. Financial support was seen as critical to the majority of the participants. Although the participants had established support systems and positive relationships with their advisor, many of the participants acknowledged their need for financial support.

The findings indicated the participants' racial identity had a negative and positive impact on their doctoral student experience. Several participants expressed feelings of loneliness,

experiencing overt racism, and covert racism: (1) the talking dog syndrome; and (2) the duty to debunk stereotypes. These participants elected to use the racism they experienced as a motivational tool to complete the doctoral degree and these experiences also highlight the importance of creating support systems to combat all impediments to success. Several participants found that their racial identity had a positive impact on their doctoral student experience through (1) historicism, (2) an internal pressure to be better, and (3) feeling supported. The participants cited professors who were sensitive to the issues minorities may face and feeling a sense of historical responsibility to successfully complete their doctoral degree.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol

Protocol questions

Guiding questions

1. What motivated you to apply to a doctoral program?
2. In your experience, what factors contributed to your success as a doctoral student?
3. What were your most important relationships while in the doctoral program?
4. How did you handle challenges while completing your doctoral program?
5. How do you think racial and gender identity affected your doctoral degree experience?
6. What strategies did you use to successfully complete your doctoral degree?
7. What suggestions or advice do you have for current or future African American male doctoral students?

Probes:

Please provide an example

Tell me more about the situation

Please elaborate

How do you think that affected...

What do you think that says about you/your character?

How do you feel about that?

How did you react?

APPENDIX B

Expert Reviewer Comment Form

Protocol: Persistence to Doctoral Completion of African American Men at
Predominately White Universities in One Mid-Atlantic State

Expert Reviewer Name: _____

Signature _____ **Date** _____

Comments/Recommendations:

APPENDIX C

Participant Information Sheet

Please use the enclosed envelope to return the completed information sheet along with the consent form.

ID Number/Pseudonym (assigned by researcher) _____

Email address _____

Telephone number _____

Best method of communication

Email____ Telephone____ Preferred time to call_____

Current age_____

Current occupation_____

Current place of employment_____

Household status while in the doctorate program

Single____ Married____ Partnered____ Separated____ Divorced____ Widowed____

Did your household status change during matriculation?

Yes____ No____ If yes, please explain_____

Do you have any children?

Yes____ No____ If yes, how many children do you have? _____

Did you have children while you were in your doctoral program?

Yes____ No____

Completed doctorate degree_____

Degree area_____

Over

University from which you received your doctorate degree_____

Year your doctorate was awarded_____

Age at the beginning of your doctorate degree_____

Age at the end of your doctorate degree_____

Number of years to complete your doctorate degree_____

University from which you received your master's degree_____

Year your master's was awarded_____

Degree area_____

University from which you received your undergraduate degree_____

Year your undergraduate degree was awarded_____

Degree area_____

Student status while in the doctorate program

Full-time____ Part-time____

Did your student status change during the matriculation?

Yes____ No____ If yes, please explain_____

Did you receive financial support during your doctorate program?

Yes____ No____ If yes, please explain_____

The information collected from this participant information sheet will only be used for the purpose of this study. All information will be kept confidential.

APPENDIX D

Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement

I, _____, (transcriptionist) do hereby agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all audio recordings received from Kimberly Matthews, (researcher) related to her research study, Persistence to Doctoral Completion of African American Men at Predominately White Universities in One Mid-Atlantic State.

The researcher has assured the participants that their real names (and the real names of anyone they refer to) will not be used at any point in the final written document. All participants will be given pseudonyms that will be used in all verbal and written records and documents. The researcher has assured all participants that audio recordings of interviews will be used only for this study and will not be employed for any reasons other than to conduct this study.

I understand that I have a responsibility to honor this confidentiality agreement.

Transcriber _____

Signature _____

Date _____

APPENDIX E

Member Check Letter

Dear Dr. _____,

Thank you for participating in my study. I appreciate you taking the time to be interviewed.

Attached is the transcript of our interview. Please review the transcript and make certain that your comments and responses are presented accurately. If you would like to make changes to ensure correctness, please let me know.

Thank you,
Kimberly Matthews

APPENDIX F

Initial Email Contact

Dear Dr. _____,

My name is Kimberly Matthews. I am a doctoral student in the School of Education's Urban Services Leadership track at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia. I received your name and email address from Dr. _____ in reference to my dissertation topic. My dissertation title is the Persistence to Doctoral Completion of African American Men at Predominately White Universities in One Mid-Atlantic State.

My plan is to conduct an interview with African American men who have successfully completed doctoral degrees in any discipline. My goal is to explore the experiences of African American men and gather valuable information that will assist current and future African American men to successful degree completion. My plan is to conduct one interview with each participant. The interview will last approximately 60 minutes.

The requirements to participate in the study are: the successful completion of a doctoral degree in any discipline within the last 10 years (2001-2011) from a tradition on-campus degree program.

If you are qualified to participate in the study and are willing to participate, please let know via email and provide me with your mailing address. You will be sent a packet that will include a consent form, a participant information sheet, and the interview questions.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me by email: matthewska@vcu.edu.

I thank you in advance for your help.

Sincerely,
Kimberly Matthews

APPENDIX G

Participation Confirmation Letter

Date

Participant Name
Participant Address

Dear Dr. _____,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study about the Persistence to Doctoral Completion of African American Men at Predominately White Universities in One Mid-Atlantic State. Your contribution to this study will add to the body of knowledge on this topic and will provide current and future African American male doctoral students with information about successfully completing doctoral degrees.

I have enclosed a consent form, a participant information sheet, and the interview protocol. Please send the consent form and participant information sheet back to me using the enclosed envelope. A copy of the consent form will be given to you at the interview.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me by email: matthewska@vcu.edu.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Matthews

APPENDIX H

RESEARCH SUBJECT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

TITLE: Persistence to Doctoral Completion of African American Men at Predominately White Universities in One Mid-Atlantic State

VCU IRB NO.: HM13904

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of African American men who have successfully completed doctoral degrees.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you have successfully completed a doctorate within the last 10 years (2001-2011) at a traditional on-campus program.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AND YOUR INVOLVEMENT

If you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to sign this consent form after you have had all your questions answered and understand what will happen to you.

In this study you will be asked to complete a participant information sheet and participate in one interview to discuss your doctoral student experience. The approximate length of the interview is 60 minutes. The questions that will be asked by the researcher will be provided to you prior to the interview. With your permission, the interview will be tape recorded. You will be given the opportunity to review the transcript of the interview to ensure accuracy.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

Although there are minimal risks involved with participating in this study, it is possible that during the discussion you may feel uncomfortable or embarrassed about describing your doctoral student experience. You do not have to talk about any subjects you do not want to talk about.

BENEFITS TO YOU AND OTHERS

You may not receive any direct benefit from this study. However the information learned from you in this study may help us gain a better understanding of the doctoral student experience and provide strategies to help future doctoral students.

COSTS

There are no costs for participating in this research study other than the time you will spend completing the participant information sheet, discussing your experiences in one interview session, and reviewing interview transcripts.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The information from the study and the consent form signed by you may be viewed or copied for research or legal purposes by Virginia Commonwealth University. Absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed because of the need to give information to this party.

The results of this study may be presented at meetings or published in papers, but your name will never be used in these presentations or papers.

Your answers on the participant information sheet and the interview transcript may be entered into a computer program with no information that could link it to you. With your permission, the interview will be recorded, but no names will be recorded. At the beginning of the interview, all members will be assigned a pseudonym and/or an identification number. The tapes and the notes from the interview will be stored in a locked cabinet in a locked office. After the information from the recording is transcribed, the tapes and notes will be destroyed.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You do not have to participate in this study. If you choose to participate, you may stop at any time without any penalty. You may also choose not to answer particular questions that are asked in the study.

QUESTIONS

In the future, you may have questions about your participation in this study. If you have any questions, complaints, or concerns about the research, contact:

Dr. Susan Dana Leone
Associate Professor
Virginia Commonwealth University
School of Education
Telephone: 804/827-2629

Or

Kimberly Matthews
Doctoral Candidate
Virginia Commonwealth University
School of Education
Email: matthewska@vcu.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact:

Office for Research
Virginia Commonwealth University
800 East Leigh Street, Suite 113
P.O. Box 980568
Richmond, VA 23298
Telephone: 804-827-2157

CONSENT

I have been given the chance to read this consent form. I understand the information about this study. Questions that I wanted to ask about the study have been answered. My signature says that I am willing to participate in this study. I will receive a copy of the consent form once I have agreed to participate.

| | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|------|
| Participant name printed | Participant signature | Date |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|------|

Name of Person Conducting Informed Consent
Discussion / Witness
(Printed)

| | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| Signature of Person Conducting Informed Consent Discussion / Witness | Date |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|

| | |
|------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| Principal Investigator Signature (if different from above) | Date |
|------------------------------------------------------------|------|

APPENDIX I

Interview Email

Dear Dr. _____,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study about the Persistence to Doctoral Completion of African American Men at Predominately White Universities in One Mid-Atlantic State. I have received your signed consent form and the participant information sheet. You will be given or sent a copy of the consent form prior to or at the interview.

I would like to now schedule the interview with you. The interview will take approximately 60 minutes. Please provide me with convenient dates, time, and venues to conduct the interview.

Thank you again,
Kimberly Matthews

APPENDIX J

Peer Debriefing Agreement Form

I, _____ agree to serve as the external peer debriefer for the research study being conducted by Kimberly Matthews. I agree to evaluate the impact of researcher bias and to increase the trustworthiness of the data collected by reviewing transcripts and assisting in identifying emerging themes. I also agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all audio recordings and transcripts.

Peer Debriefing _____

Signature _____

Date _____

APPENDIX K

Participant Profiles: Graduation Years 2001-2011

| Participant Pseudonym | Area of Study | Time to Degree | Age at Graduation | Enrollment Status | Financial Support |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Ray | Education | 5 Years | 35-40 | Full-time | No |
| Ted | Humanities & Sciences | 7 Years | 50-55 | Full-time | Yes |
| Sean | Education | 3 Years | 35-40 | Part-time | Yes |
| Larry | Education | 3 Years | 35-40 | Full-time | Yes |
| David | Education | 4 Years | 25-30 | Part-time | No |
| Mike | Humanities & Sciences | 7 Years | 50-55 | Part-time | Yes |
| Fred | Education | 3 Years | 35-40 | Full-time | No |
| Sam | Humanities & Sciences | 5 Years | 35-40 | Full-time | No |
| Ben | Humanities & Sciences | 7 Years | 30-35 | Part-time | Yes |
| Bill | Humanities & Sciences | 4 Years | 45-50 | Full-time | Yes |
| Brad | Humanities & Sciences | 5 Years | 25-30 | Full-time | No |
| Frank | Humanities & Sciences | 5 Years | 30-35 | Full-time | Yes |
| Aaron | Education | 3 Years | 45-50 | Full-time | Yes |
| Ford | Education | 11 Years | 40-45 | Part-time | Yes |
| Rob | Education | 4 Years | 35-40 | Part-time | No |
| Mason | Education | 5 Years | 30-35 | Full-time | Yes |
| Brett | Education | 9 Years | 35-40 | Full-time | Yes |
| Tim | Education | 5 Years | 35-40 | Full-time | Yes |
| Will | Education | 10 Years | 35-40 | Full-time | Yes |
| Burt | Humanities & Sciences | 3 Years | 35-40 | Full-time | Yes |

VCU Memo

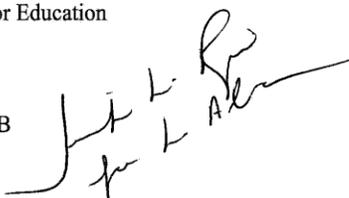
V i r g i n i a C o m m o n w e a l t h U n i v e r s i t y

Office of Research Subjects Protection
BioTechnology Research Park
BioTech One, 800 E. Leigh Street, #114
P.O. Box 980568
Richmond, Virginia 23298-0568
(804) 828-3992
(804) 827-1448 (fax)

DATE: September 22, 2011

TO: Susan D. Leone, EdD, LPC
School of Education, Counselor Education
Box 842020

FROM: Lisa M. Abrams, PhD
Chairperson, VCU IRB Panel B
Box 980568



RE: **VCU IRB #: HM13904**
Title: Persistence in Doctoral Completion of African American Men

On September 20, 2011, the following research study was approved by expedited review according to 45 CFR 46.110 Categories 6 and 7. This approval includes the following items reviewed by this Panel:

RESEARCH APPLICATION/PROPOSAL: None

PROTOCOL (Research Plan): Persistence in Doctoral Completion of African American Men, received 9/6/11, version date 6/1/11

- VCU IRB Study Personnel Roster, received 9/6/11, version date 6/1/11
- Interview Protocol, received 9/6/11, version date 5/31/11
- Participant Information Sheet, received 9/6/11, version date 5/31/11
- Expert Reviewer Comment Form, received 9/6/11, version date 5/31/11

CONSENT/ASSENT (attached):

- Research Subject Information and Consent Form, received 9/6/11, version date 5/31/11, 3 pages

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTS (attached):

- Initial Email Contact, received 9/6/11, version date 5/31/11
- Participation Confirmation Letter, received 9/6/11, version date 5/31/11
- Interview Email, received 9/6/11, version date 5/31/11

This approval expires on August 31, 2012. Federal Regulations/VCU Policy and Procedures require continuing review prior to continuation of approval past that date. Continuing Review report forms will be mailed to you prior to the scheduled review.

The Primary Reviewer assigned to your research study is Mrs. Emily Rossiter. If you have any questions, please contact Mrs. Rossiter at rri@infionline.net; or you may contact Jennifer Rice, IRB Coordinator, VCU Office of Research Subjects Protection, at jlrice@vcu.edu and 828-3992.

[Attachment – Conditions of Approval]

VCU Memo

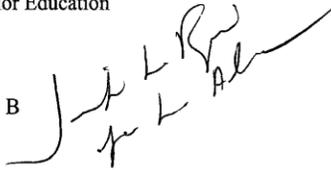
V i r g i n i a C o m m o n w e a l t h U n i v e r s i t y

Office of Research Subjects Protection
BioTechnology Research Park
800 East Leigh Street, Suite 114
P.O. Box 980568
Richmond, Virginia 23298-0568
(804) 827-0868
Fax: (804) 827-1448

DATE: February 22, 2012

TO: Susan D. Leone, EdD, LPC
School of Education, Counselor Education
Box 842020

FROM: Lisa M. Abrams, PhD
Chairperson, VCU IRB Panel B
Box 980568



RE: **VCU IRB #: HM13904**
Title: Persistence to Doctoral Completion of African American Men at Predominately White Universities in One Mid-Atlantic State

On February 22, 2012, the changes to your research study were approved in accordance with 110 (b) (2). The approval reflects the revisions received in the Office of Research Subjects Protection on February 22, 2012. This approval includes the following items reviewed by this Panel:

PROTOCOL (Research Plan): Persistence to Doctoral Completion of African American Men at Predominately White Universities in One Mid-Atlantic State, received 2/22/12, version date 1/18/12

- Interview Protocol, received 2/22/12, version date 1/18/12
- Participant Information Sheet, received 2/22/12, version date 1/18/12
- Expert Reviewer Comment Form, received 2/22/12, version date 1/18/12

CONSENT/ASSENT (attached):

- Research Subject Information and Consent Form, received 2/22/12, version date 1/18/12, 3 pages

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTS (attached):

- Initial Email Contact, received 2/22/12, version date 1/18/12
- Participation Confirmation Letter, received 2/22/12, version date 1/18/12
- Interview Email, received 2/22/12, version date 1/18/12

Please Note: The IRB acknowledges the change in study title from "Persistence in Doctoral Completion of African American Men" to "Persistence to Doctoral Completion of African American Men at Predominately White Universities in One Mid-Atlantic State," at this time of review.

As a reminder, the approval for this study expires on August 31, 2012. Federal Regulations/VCU Policy and Procedures require continuing review prior to continuation of approval past that date. Continuing Review report forms will be mailed to you prior to the scheduled review.

The Primary Reviewer assigned to your research study is Mrs. Emily Rossiter. If you have any questions, please contact Mrs. Rossiter at rri@infionline.net; or you may contact Jennifer Rice, IRB Coordinator, VCU Office of Research Subjects Protection, at irbpanelb@vcu.edu or 828-3992.

Page 1 of 1

VITA

Kimberly A. Matthews attained her Bachelor of Arts in Communication from George Mason University in 1999. She then earned a Masters of Education in Adult Education from Virginia Commonwealth University in 2004. Her interest in pursuing a career in higher education, specifically in the area of student affairs, occurred while working as an academic advisor at Virginia Commonwealth University in the summer of 2003. Since then, Kimberly has made it her mission to encourage and mentor those seeking higher education at any level. Her research interests include college student retention, college men and masculinities, the college student experiences of racial and ethnic minorities, the doctoral student experience, and partnerships/collaborations between student affairs and academic affairs to improve the college experience.