# BLACK WOMEN DOCTORAL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF BARRIERS AND FACILITATORS OF PERSISTENCE AND DEGREE COMPLETION IN A PREDOMINATELY WHITE UNIVERSITY

by

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# ABSTRACT

CATHY DARLENE HOWELL. Black women doctoral students' perceptions of barriers and facilitators of persistence and degree completion in a predominately White university. (Under the direction of DR. MARK M. D'AMICO)

This study explored the experiences of persistence and degree completion for Black women at a Predominately White Institution (PWI). The conceptual framework used to ground the research was Black Feminist Thought (BFT). The participants were 12 Black women who were currently enrolled in their doctoral programs, but had not graduated, in the colleges/schools of arts and sciences, education, health, and computer sciences, and had successfully completed their comprehensive exams. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with women who self-identified as being Black and enrolled in a doctoral program (PhD or EdD). Interviews were conducted face-to-face or over the telephone. Two key informants were interviewed informally to provide contextual information regarding institutional support resources for minority doctoral students. Data were analyzed for emergent themes through manual coding and the use of computer-assisted software.

The findings were organized into personal and institutional barriers and facilitators that contributed to the constructs of persistence and degree completion with primary themes and subthemes. The discussion section linked previous literature to the current study. Institutional barriers revealed significant data related to faculty interactions and key personal facilitators were family and the use of faith. The study findings suggest that Black women do not perceive persistence and degree completion as separate, but rather as a continuum of success.

# DEDICATION

In loving memory and honor of my mama, Annie L. Howell.

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| | |
|---|---|
| BFT | Black feminist thought |
| HBCU | Historically Black Colleges and Universities |
| IRB | Institutional Review Board |
| PWI | Predominately White Institution |
| STEM | Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics |

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This study examined the experiences of Black women doctoral students at a predominately White institution (PWI) and sought to understand: (1) how do personal and institutional characteristics influence the doctoral degree experiences of persistence and (2) how did Black women in the later stages of their doctoral program perceive the personal and institutional characteristics that would facilitate their doctoral degree completion. This chapter offers a brief summary of the statement of the research problem, purpose, research questions, key definitions, research design, and limitations and delimitations of the study. Key themes presented in the literature were included to demonstrate how this study was placed in the scholarly discourse on doctoral student success.

In the United States, 40% to 50% of students who begin doctoral education do not complete their studies (Di Pierro, 2007; Golde, 2005; Lovitts, 2001; Nettles & Millett, 2006). Rationales for high attrition rates included time to degree completion, lack of psychosocial support strategies to enable persistence (Di Pierro, 2007), and the "open-endedness," (p. 4) of programs, which Shulman (2010) characterized as the "deepest flaw" (p. 4) of doctoral education. Hawley (2003) asserted that it was rare for non-completers to make a second or multiple attempts at terminal degree success. Regardless of the disheartening high attrition rates there are encouraging data for degree completion rates. Data from The Condition of Education 2012 showed that women earned 158,558 or 51.7% of doctoral degrees in 2009-10 (Aud et al., 2012, p. 284). Data within race

showed that 65.2% of all Black doctoral degree earners were Black women (Aud et al., 2012, p. 285). However, with nearly half of all doctoral degree students not earning degrees, and women continuing to be underrepresented in many science, mathematics, and engineering (STEM) related fields (Herzig, 2004), the study of Black doctoral women is critically important.

While the present study focused primarily on the facilitators and barriers of persistence and degree completion of Black women in doctoral programs, access was critical to their eventual attainment. The following discussion introduced the access and persistence/completion topics based on the relevant literature.

## Doctoral Student Access

The inequality in enrollment and access has consequences for success, specifically in who can enroll or can earn a degree (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Access to college admission has been the initial step in degree attainment (Anderson, 2002) and has been commonly referred to admission into a postsecondary institution or to a specific discipline or field (Allan, 2011). It has been the first of three thresholds for postsecondary careers (Adelman, 2007). The other two were obtainment of required credits toward credentials, (i.e., participation or persistence, and degree completion referred to as success) (Adelman, 2007).

At the graduate level, issues of access and representation are most salient (Lewis, Frierson, Staryhorn, Yang, Tademy, 2008). Inequities in access included gatekeeping processes (Allan, 2011) that marginalize Blacks and/or women. Inequities in access were manifested with poor academic preparation and continued financial hardships, which were part of the socioeconomic disparity experienced by Blacks (Bonner & Evans, 2004;

Landry, 2003; Thompson, 1999). Kosut (2006) concurred that access and eventual success in doctoral programs were dependent on cultural capital that a student possessed, such as discursive (language), aesthetic (attended an elite institution), cognitive (interaction within the academy), and temporal (time devoted to study). The implications for limited access were the figurative lines that divided America racially and economically (Thompson, 1999). Kosut's (2006) overall thesis was that there were "implicit messages" of "who has a place in the academy and who does not" (p. 249). Therefore, access was hindered for those students from less privileged backgrounds. Beyond privilege there was a disparity in access that centered on race.

According to Ntiri (2001) there was a chasm between Whites and racial minorities (i.e., Blacks and Hispanics) that contributed to create unequal opportunities in college access and successful degree completion for African Americans and Hispanics. Garces (2012) summarized the inequitable access to graduate education for Blacks and Latinos as comprising the "legitimacy and strength of our [academic] institutions" (p. 3). Access to doctoral education had been limited before the 19th century (Crocco & Waite, 2007) due to mythologized beliefs that Blacks were "uneducable" (Bonner & Evans, 2004, p. 4; Bracey, 1999, p. 111) and limited by political and social practices such as segregation that contributed to rationales for prohibiting Blacks from attaining an education (Johnson-Bailey, Valentine, Cervero, & Bowles, 2009).

Change in access began to diversify higher education based on race and gender as a result of the end of World War II and the passage of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which removed discriminatory practices from admissions (Crocco & Waite, 2007; Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Sidanius, Levin,

van Laar, & Sear, 2008), and during the late 1960s the War on Poverty, which facilitated the development of financial aid programs to assist with the cost of an education (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003; Thompson, 1999). Nettles and Millett (2006) concluded that although access to graduate education had increased, only a fraction of the total American population had obtained a doctoral degree. The conclusion of World War II instigated access to higher education based on hierarchal differentiation, (i.e., enrollment based on attendance status part/full-time, liberal arts education, and education for the purposes of employment in a trade or profession) (Geiger, 1999).

Access was important because it demonstrated which students participated based on eligibility of traditional admissions criteria such as standardized test scores and grade point averages that would influence the disparity in enrollment (Allen & Zepeda, 2007). In a Council of Graduate Schools report for Fall 2010 more than 445,000 students as shown in Table 1, were enrolled for the first time in graduate education programs (i.e., certificates, specialist, master's or doctoral programs) (Bell, 2011). Overall, 57.8% of women were enrolled as compared to 42.2% of men as shown in Table 1 (Bell, 2011). Eighty-four percent of first time total enrollees were in graduate certificates or master's degree programs (Bell, 2011). Over half of the 1.75 million students enrolled in graduate programs were in programs of education, business, or health sciences (Bell, 2011).

It was important to distinguish that there was a difference in those students that applied (completed an application) and therefore were eligible for an admission decision, from those that were admitted and enrolled. The distinction clarified how many students are in the academic pipeline for a graduate degree such as the doctorate. In Fall 2010, there were almost 1.77 million applications for admission to graduate programs. Of those

total applicants, 741,000 or 41.9% were accepted.

The acceptance rate as shown in Table 2, for master's and other graduate programs were higher than doctoral programs (51.8% vs. 22.5%) (Bell, 2011). For doctoral degrees 50.4% of applications entered broad fields of social and behavioral sciences, engineering, and biological and agricultural sciences. Conversely, at the doctoral level the acceptance rates were highest in education, 41.0%, and lowest in business, 10.9% (Bell, 2011). It was concluded that although there have been gains in access for minority students (Blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans) they have yet to have equality in degree production (Swail et al., 2003).

## Doctoral Student Persistence and Completion

Previous literature defined the terms persistence and success ambiguously and without consistency. For example, according to Berg and Ferber (1983) success was difficult to determine due to the varied meaning it implied and goals it constituted for each student and the lack of "proper measures." Ballard and Cintrón (2010) used success as a more fluid term for navigation in and to doctoral programs for Black males. According to Gardner (2009) the term "success" has been used to refer to varied indicators such as retention, grade point averages, and degree completion. Gardner (2008) concluded that in order to understand conceptualizations about success a better understanding of the constructs was needed. Success has been linked to degree completion (Gardner, 2008; Laden, 2004; Wolf-Wendel, 1998). Nettles and Millet (2006) concluded that for doctoral studies the focus was on degree completion,

Table 1: First-time graduate enrollment by Institution type, Carnegie Classification, gender, and attendance status, Fall 2010

| Carnegie Classification and Institution Type | Total | Men | % | Women | % | Full-time | % | Part-time | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Public | 445,655 | 187,867 | 42.2% | 257,355 | 57.8% | 297,902 | 67.3% | 145,004 | 32.7% |
| Doctoral/Research Universities | 51,905 | 17,575 | 33.9% | 34,330 | 66.1% | 33,102 | 63.8% | 18,803 | 36.2% |

Note. From *Graduate Enrollment and Degrees: 2000 to 2010* (p. 23), by N. E. Bell, 2011, Washington, DC: Council of Graduate Schools. Copyright 2011 by the Council of Graduate Schools.

Table 2: Applications for Admission to Graduate School by Institution Type, Carnegie Classification, and Degree Level, Fall 2010

| | Doctoral | | | Master's | | | Total | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Carnegie Classification and Institution Type | Total | Accepted Applications | % | Total | Accepted Applications | % | Total | Accepted Applications | % |
| Public | 597,669 | 14,218 | 22.5% | 1,160,537 | 601,008 | 51.8% | 1,768,420 | 740,986 | 41.9% |
| Doctoral/Research Universities | 17,531 | 8,564 | 48.9% | 93,135 | 59,730 | 64.1% | 110,666 | 68,294 | 61.7% |

Note. From *Graduate Enrollment and Degrees: 2000 to 2010* (p. 20), by N. E. Bell, 2011, Washington, DC: Council of Graduate Schools. 

which signified success in the program, the discipline, and to the public. Terrell, Snyder, and Dringus (2009) posited that doctoral success was more than class participation, grades on assignments or projects. That matriculation process was related to persistence or the continued enrollment in a program, whereas there was a defined endpoint or capsulation of the process.

The definition of persistence was similarly inconsistent and ambiguous. Persistence was concluded as a variable that had been extensively studied in higher education, but was difficult to measure (Hensley & Kinser, 2001a). Schwartz and Washington (1999) defined persistence as continued college enrollment in reference to undergraduates, whereas Kowalik (1989) defined persistence as those doctoral students who remained in their academic programs through completion of their degrees. Leppel (2002) extended the definition to include continuation in a particular major at the same university or upon transfer to another. However, Tinto (1993) noted more specifically that persistence was centered on obtainment of minimal academic standards, although not all students would meet the standard and would depart. While both terms, persistence and success, were referenced with variability, there were varying characteristics.

The literature makes noteworthy distinctions between persistence and success that the terms were on the same continuum and inferred a similar definition. Leppel (2002) linked persistence with degree completion, while Griffith (2010) made the connection between persistence and staying in a major. However, some students may have persisted, they may have emotionally or psychologically left their studies even though were physically still present (Golde, 1996, as cited in Herzig, 2004). For example, Black women reported feeling like “casualties of war” in the academic environment (Souto-

Manning & Ray, 2007, p. 281). Leppel (2002) contended that students who leave college before completion of a degree did so voluntarily and, therefore, it confounded the notion that improvement in grades would correlate in persistence. That phenomenon contrasted with the position of the Tinto (1993) model that indicated if integration in the social and academic community occurred then the likelihood of persistence was greater, specifically among undergraduate students. Therefore the implication was that the model did not necessarily encompass a level of satisfaction or strategic navigation, but rather that a student persisted in academia.

In an effort to clarify the use of these terms in the present study "persistence" and "completion" were used as distinct measures of student success. Persistence was operationalized as successful completion of the qualifying and/or comprehensive exam; completion was operationalized as the earning of a doctoral degree. Persistence was a measure for evaluation annually or longitudinally (Dey & Hurtado, 1999). The definition of persistence used for this study was consolidated from the work of Kowalik (1989), Tinto (1993), Nerad and Miller (1996), Schwartz and Washington (1999), and Leppel (2002). The definition for completion corresponded with current research that inferred fulfillment of degree requirements (Leppel, 2002; Most, 2008; Nettles & Millet, 2006; Selmer, Graham, & Goodykoontz, 2011). A "completer" was denoted by glossary in the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System as the recipient of a conferred degree ("completer," n.d.). Degree completion was defined as an institutional measure rate of when an individual completed a degree in a program at a college or university within a specified time frame (Tinto, 1993).

## Statement of the Problem

Previous literature has been challenged with the intersection of Black women (race and gender) thereby it has provided multiple justifications for this current study. First, collapsed or broad terms such as women, minority women, or underrepresented women were used, and did not necessarily reflect a study sample of women who self-identified as being Black women, bi- or multi-ethnic, or of African descent. Rosales and Person (2003) stated that institutions need to understand the different perspective of the "Black woman" was separated from the congealed term "Blacks" and "woman."

Second, the homogenous use of the term women demonstrated an attempt to equalize the academic experiences for all women. In the study conducted by Selmer et al., (2011), the term woman was used to describe the experiences of three doctoral students. However, readers did not know the race of the participants, which rejected the "structural inequalities" in academe and continued to replicate hegemonic ideals (Johnson-Bailey, 2004, p. 333). Demographic terms inferred a different cultural position or context for understanding of respective worlds, White or Black. This was significant in examining the experiences of Black women in higher education that were understood through the dominant cultural normative standard of White women or Black men (Patton, 2009).

Research on Black women allowed for their experiences to "stand apart" from the "androcentric world" experiences of other men and women (Johnson-Bailey, 2004, p. 332-333). That was true more than twenty years ago when Nettles (1990b) indicated that there was a scarcity of research on the experiences of doctoral students and especially on research that focused on racial differences. Further, Alexander-Snow (2010) summarized

previous research that found a critical rationale for the lack of success of Blacks at PWIs related to the lack of "cultural pluralism," specifically that the mission and environment catered to White culture (p. 184). Cultural pluralism values the identified differences in a culture (Williams, 2004).

The academic environment at an institution has contributed to the persistence of Black women both positively and negatively. Examples of the academic environment were alternative routes into a major; (i.e. did a program offer part-time and full-time options, high expectations for success, and development of supportive relationships between students and faculty) (Ong, Wright, Espinosa, & Orfield, 2011).

Third, there are both potential sociological and psychological outcome implications for Black women in higher education resulting from the stress of being considered "other." Even with that additional stress, Black women had proven that they could persist and succeed beyond the bachelor's degree as they exerted independence (Bonner & Evans, 2004). Research centered on women attaining higher education has been based on those who were middle-aged, middle-class, single, and either White women or men (Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Souto-Manning & Ray, 2007); therefore, generalizations of graduate study were made regardless of ethnicity.

The different experiences of Black women from other women and from Black men were significant as they demonstrated the connection to historical legacy and ideology of Blacks in the United States (Howard-Hamilton, 2003). The combined experiences of Black men and women in academia diminished their respective voices and lost the essence of the inherent challenges for each gender (Bonner & Evans, 2004). Research has dealt Black women a disservice by generalizing their academic/institutional

participation experiences with those of faculty, males, and other ethnic groups. Specifically, gender has received minimal attention as it is related to doctoral student socialization (Sallee, 2011).

In addition, socialization for doctoral students has included learning the cultural norms and goals of their departments and the organization (i.e., institution) (Gardner, 2010; Nettles & Millett, 2006; Sallee, 2011). New students socialize formally and informally with faculty and current students to learn the skills necessary to successfully navigate a doctoral program or depart (Gardner, 2010; Nettles & Millett, 2006; Sallee, 2011). Sallee (2011) concluded that socialization was connected to past experiences, gender, race, and social class.

Fourth, the gendered perspectives of minority women and the important features, personal and institutional, that describe their matriculation through doctoral programs has been minimized in academic research. This lack of perspective demonstrated a loss in the academy environment and in missions directed toward increased gender and ethnic diversity (Moyer & Salovey, 1999). In higher education, the experiences of Black women in doctoral programs are marginalized and are positioned to the periphery of enrollment and outcome data at academic institutions (Bonner & Evans, 2004). Black women were understood in the literature as a collective group with minimal intergroup differences, such as with academic preparation, values, and motivators for attainment of higher education. Some scholars (Griffin, Jayakumar, Jones, & Allen, 2010) suggest that the increased enrollment of Black students resulted from gains in the presence of Black females. However, the gains should be considered with caution as the data continued to compare Black women to White women and Black men to other marginalized groups

(Rosales & Person, 2003).

The literature fails to cross reference studies based on gender and race (Johnson-Bailey, 2004), whereas studies that separate the variables would be more beneficial (Moyer & Salovey, 1999). For example, the 2010 Survey of Earned Doctorates provided data on doctoral degree attainment based on field, ethnicity, and gender, but none of the data demonstrated within-group differences. Women may attain a college education at a higher rate than men, but research studies fail to report on the differences due to race and at the graduate and undergraduate levels (Johnson-Bailey, 2004). Leaving the educational pipeline early, being less likely to complete a college degree, and having lower rates for enrollment at every stage of education are the alarming statistics for "minority groups" (Ellison, Smith, & Green, 1987) that are not disaggregated by gender.

Previous studies that focused on gender were important to understanding why women select to attend graduate school; however, there was a dominant focus on undergraduate studies (Johnson-Bailey et al., 2009) and on engineering (Baker, Tancred, & Whitesides, 2002), even when the focus was on doctoral students the aim of studies centered on the STEM fields (Lott II, Gardner, & Powers, 2009). Further, the research questions that have been studied relate to attrition (persistence), and degree attainment (success). However, these studies have provided a basis for further inquiry to understand differences in success across academic programs and universities (Zwick, 1991). Black graduate students were disconnected from the academic experience due to feelings of isolation and marginalization, which impacted their matriculation process while going through the graduate process. There has been scarce research from the perspective of graduate students and faculty in collaboration (Anderson-Thompkins, Gasman, Gerstl-

Pepin, Hathaway, & Rasheed, 2004).

There have been few research studies on the gendered perspectives of minority women that describe the matriculation experiences through graduate programs. However, within the existing literature, there were four relevant themes on Black doctoral students that guide this section and provide a framework for the presentation of literature in Chapter 2. The themes were: persistence/attrition/retention, institutional strategies including mentoring and socialization, and strategies for overcoming barriers to persistence and degree completion (Ballard & Cintrón, 2010). The organization of the literature for this study would align with the themes focused on 1) personal barriers and facilitators of graduate school access for Black women, 2) institutional barriers and facilitators of access, 3) personal barriers and facilitators of success, and 4) institutional barriers and facilitators of success. The following descriptions provide more specifics about the themes that were present during the academic process of persistence with the caveat that time to degree completion was understood as an indicator of graduate program effectiveness (Ehrenberg, Zuckerman, Groen, & Brucker, 2009). The themes, more broadly, were represented as being the intrinsic (personal) experiences, and extrinsic (institutional) environmental characteristics.

Aligned with the first theme on personal barriers and facilitators of access, Leppel (2002) noted that students decided to attend, had access to, or persisted based on the personal influence of family, race, and finances. Access was limited personally by inadequate academic preparation especially in the STEM fields and the ability to overcome obstacles such as sexism and racism (Becker & Price, 2009; Tapia & Johnson, 2009; Johnson, 2007). The ability to engage informal networks, which was where critical

information was exchanged, also inhibited access for groups such as women (Bonner & Evans, 2004; Fischer & Zigmond, 1998).

The second theme, institutional barriers and facilitators of access, was cited as the historical legacy of exclusion that persisted to prevent access to higher education for Blacks that included discrimination (Bonner & Evans, 2004) and systemic disparities (Griffin et al., 2010). Institutionally, it was important to establish a critical mass of Black women faculty, staff, and students on campus to facilitate recruitment and retention of Blacks (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003). There was also a need for the establishment of a critical mass of underrepresented minorities (faculty, staff, and students) to aid in the cultivation of rich perspectives and the creation of a diverse institution to improve access along with the need to improve the institutional environment to promote success of Blacks (Bonner & Evans, 2004).

The third theme, personal barriers and facilitators of success were expressed by Black women as having their positions within the academy devalued as they challenged stereotypes and worked against feelings of "tokenism" (Breihan, 2007, p. 89; Mahtani, 2004, p. 95; Mastekaasa & Smeby, 2008, p. 192), or being the only one (Malone & Barabino, 2008; Souto-Manning & Ray, 2007), and their marginalized positions within the academy (Souto-Manning & Ray, 2007). Black women described their experiences of isolation as invisibility that affected their participation in the classroom (Malone & Barabino, 2008). Personal facilitators were social support systems (Bonner & Evans, 2004), families (Perna, 2004), and the church (Parker, 2009). Brailsford (2010) noted personal motivators as being enablers to doctorate completion included research as a personal interest and a desire to return to formal education, but that the influence of

family and friends impacted the decision. The Brailsford (2010) study was conducted at a university in Australia; however, sample participants were noted as being from overseas with no clarification of specific locations.

The fourth theme, institutional barriers and facilitators of success were exemplified by Johnson-Bailey (2004). The Johnson-Bailey (2004) study used Black feminist thought (BFT) to represent Black women as part of the institutional structure. The women reported that they needed to have someone help navigate the cultural norms, not the "student handbook" in order to be successful (Johnson-Bailey, 2004, p. 340). This "insider's perspective" from another Black was specific information that Black students felt could not be obtained by other sources (Johnson-Bailey, 2004, p. 341). Further, Souto-Manning and Ray (2007) and Rosales and Person (2003) concluded the pluralistic presence of women and Black faculty were critical to graduate student success.

The current study differed from previous studies by intentional focus of Black women in doctoral study at PWIs. There was the discontinued practice of study on the generalized graduate student population and instead definitely honed on the perceived experiences of Black women doctoral students during a defined time-lapsed period within the academy, rather than a broad generalized perspective. The study was atypical in the aim to obtain actual data from participants that have already persisted to a specified landmark in the degree pursuit and can speak to the experience of persistence, yet are living in the uncertainty of degree completion. A comprehensive review of the literature, did not reveal research that concurrently explored the experiences of persistence and degree completion for Black women doctoral students at PWIs or HBCUs.

## Statement of Purpose

This study explored how Black women doctoral students advanced and continued to persist in higher education despite the marginalized conditions in which they had to overcome due to access and other challenges they encountered within the academy. Kowalik (1989) emphasized the need to not only understand why graduate students started their studies, but importantly to assess the role of persistence toward degree completion. The need for understanding doctoral degree exploration was postulated by Thompson (1999), who suggested that the pursuit of a doctorate was not perceived worthwhile for Blacks due to the problems they must confront as a student. Nettles and Millett (2006) argued that doctoral students were "trading off great parts of their present lives against an uncertain future" (p. 37). The focus on Black women is intentional in regard that both race and gender were salient features that contributed to different educational experiences (Zamani, 2003). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to understand the perceptions of personal and institutional characteristics that may have contributed to the persistence and eventual degree completion for Black women in doctoral programs at PWIs.

## Research Questions

The guiding research questions for the present study were:

1. How do Black women perceive the influence of personal and institutional characteristics on their doctoral degree persistence at a PWI?
2. How did Black women in the later stages of their doctoral program perceive the personal and institutional characteristics that would facilitate their doctoral degree completion at a PWI?

To further delineate the focus of the research questions, persistence experiences were explored following completion of comprehensive and/or qualifying examinations.

## Significance

This research sought to contribute to the limited findings on the success of Black women in doctoral programs. This study provided suggestions to university and graduate school administrators that want to better align diversity missions and enrollment plans. The study provided a thoughtful intervention of institutional practices for a specific sub-group. Further, enrollment officers could use this study to understand both the institutional and personal roles that influence the chasm, which existed in this population during doctoral matriculation to degree completion.

This study has a distinct focus within two genres of literature relative to the intersection of gender, race, and persistence. One body of research was grounded in the recruitment, which provided answers for why underrepresented groups, women included, did not participate or rather enter into graduate study. The other body of research addressed rationales for students' persistence or, in some instances, endured in graduate studies and stayed despite obstacles (Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Johnson-Bailey et al., 2009). Johnson-Bailey (2004) focused on women who attended or had matriculated from one institution, or from the College of Education. The study focused on factors that affected participation and retention. The current study explored the experiences of persistence and degree completion of doctoral women who had not yet graduated. Within both of the bodies of research there has been minimal focus specifically on Black women and doctoral study.

King (1995) studied persistence and the doctoral experience of Black doctoral students in sport and exercise science. King (1995) surveyed a total of 106 male and female doctoral students; 74 individuals responded, but King only focused on the experiences of the 20 female respondents who were interviewed. That study yielded valued insights on Black doctoral students especially Black women; however the focus was on students who had already graduated and were retrospectively sharing their experiences that had elapsed for an unknown duration. Griffith (2010) used longitudinal data to examine persistence for women and minority students in STEM majors. Hensley and Kinser (2001b) studied undergraduate persistence from the student perspective of those who re-entered academia. Experiences of women in graduate school were studied, but the participants were of different racial groups and from master's and doctoral programs (Barata, Hunjan, & Leggatt, 2005). Studies that focused on Black student experiences used alumni as their samples (Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Johnson-Bailey et al., 2009). The current study was based on currently enrolled Black women.

The extant literature studies that have been conduced have yet to address the experiences of currently enrolled Black women doctoral students during post-comprehensive or qualifying examinations. This study focused on persistence and degree completion for Black women doctoral students, which separated this study from others found in the literature. This study focused specifically on doctoral students, not the general use term of "graduate" students. This study also differed by inclusion of only Black women who were currently enrolled, and specifically those students who had attained a specific academic standard (completion of comprehensive and/or qualifying examinations).

This study extends the work of Gardner (2008) who sought to understand how the socialization process that doctoral students experienced in their degree programs facilitated or impeded success and degree completion. Gardner (2008) interviewed 40 doctoral students. The sample included males and females: three Asian Americans, one Black, and all others were Caucasian. All students were chemistry and history majors at two research-extensive institutions. In contrast, the current study explored more than just socialized experiences, but allowed the participants to provide a narrative of the experiences that accurately portrayed their continued enrollment in doctoral programs and what they believed would enable degree completion.

## Theoretical Framework

The present study utilized BFT as an opportunity to understand the marginalized ways of knowing and survival among Blacks (Souto-Manning & Ray, 2007). BFT as a critical social theory enabled Black women to become empowered from their oppressed group position in the United States (Collins, 2009). The framework emerged from the lived experiences of Black women, but distinguished among the common experiences to recognize the "individual" Black woman (Collins, 2009, p. 208). Specifically, that Black women shared common challenges, but not necessarily the same experience or to the same degree of significance (Collins, 2009). According to Johnson-Bailey (2004), BFT "sets forth the idea that daily living of Black women has produced a collective consciousness that resists being defined as 'less than,' resists negative stereotyping, while seeking to define and empower its members by encouraging Black women to celebrate their survival as a significant phenomenon" (p. 333). A critical feature of BFT

understood that while there existed similarities in the experiences of Black women, there were also differences (Patton, 2009).

BFT was used to guide this study due to the intentional perspective of centered Black women's voices and experiences. It was through the BFT lens that discourse "de-centers traditionally accepted White, male-dominated power structures" (Patton, 2009, p. 516). Through the use of feminist theory gender became central to data analysis (Mansfield, Welton, Lee, & Young, 2010). Specifically, the goal was to allow for the women to tell their experiences and be positioned in the literature from an insider's context rather than from someone on the outside (Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Patton (2009) exerted that use of a feminist lens was significant because it allowed for "richer discussion" (p. 515) that went beyond race and recognized the intersectionality of race and gender on the lives of Black women. Banks (2005) argued that BFT has "problematized the tendency on the part of researchers to generalize women's experiences" (p. 11). The problematization was further supported as critical to understand the individual and institutional oppression that impact academic success of Black women (Souto-Manning & Ray, 2007). The BFT framework allowed for the analysis of data to be based on how Black women understood their academic matriculation.

## Definitions

Black or African American. "A person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa" ("Black or African American," n.d.). For the purposes of this study the term Black was used for consistency.

Degree completion. To remain consistent with the literature, for this study, the term 'degree completion' referred to the completion of degree requirements for a specific doctoral program (Leppel, 2002; Most, 2008; Nettles & Millet, 2006; Selmer et al., 2011).

Persistence. The literature defined the term as enrollment toward degree completion (Kowalik, 1999; Schwartz & Washington, 1999; Weddle-West & Bingham, 2010/2011). For this study, persistence referred to completion of the doctoral comprehensive and/or qualifying examinations, a student success progress measure.

Success. The current literature denoted success as being an institutional measure of degree achievement, which could be extrapolated to infer degree completion (Berg & Ferber, 1983; Laden, 2004; Most, 2008; Perna, 2001). The term included multiple measures, used in the literature that included persistence and degree completion. For this study success was the overarching term for the two measures of persistence and degree completion.

## Research Design

The present study sought to focus on Black women in doctoral programs at a PWI. All Black women doctoral students were from one institution in order to enable the interpretation and summarization of meaningful data from transcribed participant interviews. The institution selected had a total official Fall 2012 enrollment of over 25,000. The graduate enrollment was over 5,000 with more than 600 continuing doctoral students. The inclusion of one institution allowed for a richer analysis based on the consistent institutional and programmatic understanding of the structural and psychological influence relative to persistence and degree completion.

The research is a "basic interpretative qualitative study" guided by the BFT epistemological framework (Merriam, 2002, p. 37). Constructionism is a critical tenet of basic interpretive qualitative study where "individuals construct reality based on interaction with their social worlds" (Merriam, 2002, p. 37). The participants provide a "truth" from their reality that is socially constructed based on multiple perceptions of reality. Twelve Black women were selected from one PWI in the Southeastern part of the United States from the colleges/schools of arts and sciences, education, health, and computer sciences. For the current study, participants were selected from previously indicated disciplines that included, education, the discipline of the majority of Black women doctoral students (Hamilton, 2004; Thompson, 1999), and from STEM, where women were least likely to matriculate (Bell, 2011).

Potential participants were identified by a report generated from a graduate school dean, who provided email addresses of Black women enrolled in doctoral programs by Fall 2011. Participants included in the sampling frame must have begun doctoral study at least two years prior and successfully completed the qualifying and/or comprehensive examinations to allow the researcher to explore issues related to persistence. The designated time frame denoted a period when participants could reflectively consider how they had persisted and their plans to continue based on achievement of a defined hallmark within their respective programs.

Institutional review board (IRB) approval was obtained to conduct the study. Participants responded to a semi-structured interview protocol that was based on the literature review. Questions were broad and allowed for open-ended conversation. The intent of unstructured interviews was not to obtain specific answers from predetermined

questions, but to become informed by participants of their perspectives (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). The interview questions were used as a guide and were based on the literature review of personal and institutional experiences and from the themes in Table 4. Questions were expanded on how participants perceived their plans of persistence and degree completion while enrolled in their present program.

Requests to digitally audio record interviews were made as part of the informed consent. Information was also obtained from the transcribed interviews and researcher noted observations (field notes) that refined or provided supplemental data. Archival institutional data were collected that represented completion of comprehensive or qualifying examinations. The institutional website provided data on resources offered to doctoral students. A short interview regarding program related information would be conducted with key informants. These were individuals that worked in offices that provided outreach programs or services to doctoral students. Examples of these offices, included although not official titles, may be diversity, multicultural center, or graduate student services. Key informant interviews were only conducted to collect program information, not to study their personal experiences with persistence or degree completion.

Data were analyzed by coding transcribed verbatim interviews for emergent themes. Trustworthiness of collected data was achieved through "member checks," a common strategy used in qualitative research (Merriam, 2002, p. 26). Some participants were asked to provide feedback on data findings to access if the interpretation captures the essence of their perspective. The quality of the data analysis was ensured through debriefing with the research dissertation committee methodologist for verification of

coding and themes. Qualitative thematic analysis was applied to the interview data and the major themes were drawn.

The premise for the current dissertation research was a pilot study conducted in Fall 2011. The pilot study focused on Black graduate women at one institution in one academic college within the health disciplines, whereas the present study centered on the experiences of Black doctoral women at one institution in multiple academic colleges. The pilot study helped to inform the present study in the development of research design and methodology. The themes of socialization and faculty interactions were consistent with the literature findings. In the current study, Black women were interviewed to understand the characteristics that they perceived as hallmarks to attaining their academic standing (i.e., completion of comprehensive and/or qualifying exams and what was most salient to them as significant to reaching this academic achievement) and what they perceive as helping them toward doctoral degree completion.

## Limitations

The results of this study were limited in that they are based primarily on self-reported data and on the ability of the participants, Black women, to reflect thoughtfully on their doctoral experiences. Responses may have resulted from personal or academic events that were negative or positive, for example encounters with faculty or family. This form of qualitative data was dependent on participants' willingness to be reflective, open, and honest. This study was based on current Black female graduate students who, regardless of educational and racial inequities have been successful in gaining entry to graduate school (Johnson-Bailey et al., 2009) and persisting with enrollment with the expectation of degree completion. The aim was that current students would have the

most recent accounts of access, persistence, and intentions toward success; however, they may have been limited in the ability to reflect on key events of their academic trajectories. Participants may be too enmeshed with the experiences to articulate the untenable situations they are or have experienced. Participants may have preconceived ideas about disclosing personal information to a research study, due to the historical legacy of Blacks and research.

Additional research may be necessary to further critically examine within group differences of Black women regarding racial identity. This study examined the experiences of Black women at a PWI, which may differ from those at HBCUs. Chapter 2 elucidates the rationale for why PWIs are the focus of this study and not HBCUs. Additionally, participants self-identified as being Blacks, but did not seek to examine the differences of those who were bi- or multi-racial and yet still identify as being Black as compared to those that may identify as being White. This study may have different results when applied to differing female ethnic groups such as Asians and even those who identify as being from the continent of Africa.

Another limitation was that this study similar to Nettles (1990b) did not include those students who had dropped out or with less than one year of study in their doctoral program. Inclusion of those students would have led to variations that would have been difficult to explain and the academic understandings of first-year students from second- and third-year students can vary considerably. The study also does not delineate those students that have dropped out of one program and now have started a different doctoral program.

## Delimitations

Many studies focus on persistence for the undergraduate population. This study was delimited to women who were enrolled at least by Fall 2011 in a graduate program at the doctoral level, not a certificate or post-baccalaureate program. Women were full- or part-time students and the designated institution of study. The focus on Black women has potential benefits for faculty, staff, admission counselors, and other personnel at colleges and universities, specifically in understanding how to improve enrollment. The need to understand more about the unstable attrition rates of Black women as compared to other ethnic groups has importance for improvement of diversity initiatives.

This study was not intended to focus on international women attending graduate school, who also have varied graduate school experiences. The aim of this research was not to discount the findings or credibility of previous research related to persistence, but to position this study as being relevant for a defined population and to postulate the contribution that it has in the overall body of literature.

## Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 examined the critical features of persistence and success for Black women in graduate programs. The introductory section began with a description of literature that existed and how this study differentiated by linking gender, race and characteristics that contribute to successful persistence in graduate study. Chapter 2 provides a more in-depth review of the literature. It includes a synthesis of the significant studies related to persistence and success. Chapter 3 details the methodology and qualitative interpretive research procedures employed. Results are presented in Chapter 4 of the dissertation, and Chapter 5 concluded with outcomes and recommendations for

future research. The overall purpose of the present study was to better understand the personal and institutional barriers and facilitators of success experienced by Black female doctoral students. The current study provided qualitative data that informs graduate school institutional policies related to student engagement, particularly among Black women, and decrease racial and gender inequities in higher education and graduate departments. Further, as predicted by Kowalik (1989) faculty and staff could strategically support doctoral students more effectively to complete degree requirements if they understood the factors that influenced persistence and how they contributed to success.

## Summary

Chapter 1 detailed the need for research on a subgroup of the population in higher education that has been minimally studied. Black women doctoral students have been homogenized in the literature, which further marginalized their experiences. There existed a high attrition rate for the doctoral attainment. The study sought to understand the institutional and personal characteristics that contributed to Black women's persistence and degree completions. Chapter 1 outlined the research purpose, research problem, research questions, significance of the problem, limitations, delimitations and definitions. The use of BFT was the theoretical framework identified as the guide for the current study.

# CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

## Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of Black women doctoral students at a PWI to understand: 1) How do Black women perceive the influence of personal and institutional characteristics on their doctoral degree persistence at a PWI and 2) How did Black women in the later stages of their doctoral program perceive the personal and institutional characteristics that would facilitate their doctoral degree completion. The study used qualitative interpretative research design. Chapter 2 focused on the literature related to access and success for doctoral students and those studies that were inclusive of Black women doctoral students.

## Overview

Chapter 2 included four themes that were consistent throughout the literature: 1) personal barriers and facilitators of access, 2) institutional barriers and facilitators of access, 3) personal barriers and facilitators of success, and 4) institutional barriers and facilitators of success. The literature that has been synthesized in the literature based on the themes shown in Table 3 differs from Table 4, which showed how the literature for Chapter 2 has been presented. Table 4 included the primary themes, subheadings and primary authors. Table 4 was more representative; organization reflected the literature that was central to access and success and it identified some of the heterogeneity that existed within the broad categories of Table 3.

The research that followed was important to contextualize the experiences of Black women in academia that have been framed by exclusionary practices and oppression. Some of the context blurred between the designation of the themes and in some instances could have been in multiple thematic sections, which demonstrated the fluidity access and success. The themes were not characterized as being rigidly constrained to one section. The literature primarily focused on graduate students at PWIs with exceptions only in cases where the literature did not explicitly indicate the sample used. Cleveland (2009) noted that the accepted terminology for a primary and/or all-White institution of higher learning was Primarily White Institutions (PWIs), therefore the rationale of the use of the term henceforth.

Minimal research has been conducted on the experiences of Black female doctoral students (Grant, 2012). The research on persistence was primarily informed from undergraduate studies, which led Tinto (1993) to further research specific to graduate persistence, as it would be dissimilar to that of an undergraduate. The experiences of Black graduate students at HBCUs were not the aim of this study. "HBCUs have played an important role in educating African Americans" (Perna, 2001, p. 268). Wilson (2008) concurred and the Higher Education Act of 1965 defined HBCUs as institutions established before 1964 to educate Black Americans in higher education. Institutionally, HBCUs aim to serve "underserved or marginalized groups" and are thought to better understand the backgrounds of the students they serve (Zamani, 2003). The experiences of Black women who attend PWIs or HBCUs may indeed be similar, but the historical missions of the institutions and culture vary, thereby contributing to distinctly different experiences. Those differences such as access to mentors, a college environment

Table 3: Primary research topics on doctoral education

| Topic | Citations |
|---|---|
| Attrition | Lott II et al., 2009; Lovitts, 2001 |
| Comprehensive Examinations | Hartnett & Willingham, 1979; Herzig, 2002 |
| Environment | Rosales & Person, 2003; Tinto, 1993 |
| Experiences | Gardner & Holley, 2011; Holmes, 2008; Ong et al., 2011; Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Johnson-Bailey et al., 2009; Offerman, 2011 |
| Faculty | Barnes, 2009-2010; Gardner, 2009; Griffin & Reddick, 2011; Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010 |
| Funding | Baker et al., 2002; Nettles & Millett, 2006; Perna, 2004 |
| Mentoring | Bhatia & Amati, 2010; Grant, 2012; Patton, 2009; Patton & Harper, 2003; Roberts & Plakhotnik, 2009 |
| Race and gender | Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Malone & Barabino, 2008; Perna, 2004; Sallee, 2011; Souto-Manning & Ray, 2007; Thompson, 1999; Zamani, 2003 |
| Socialization | Gardner, 2008; Herzig, 2010; Sallee, 2011 |
| Student success and persistence | Ampaw & Jaeger, 2011; Berg & Ferber, 1983; Cockrell & Shelley, 2011; Felder, 2010; Leppel, 2002; Kowalik, 1989; Nettles 1990b; Tinto, 1993 |
| Theoretical frameworks | Collins, 2009; Few, Stephens, & Rouse-Arnett, 2003; Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Ballard & Cintrón, 2010 |

*Note*. Data in Table 3 are organized in alphabetical order by topic

anchored with a critical mass of Black faculty and students, interactions with faculty, and meaningful engaged forms of socialization influence persistence and degree completion.

The study of Blacks in higher education could be easily isolated within the lens of HBCUs. The limitations of research would be confined to that micro subsection of scholars and any implications for outcomes and policy beyond the HBCU setting would lack authenticity. Freeman (1998) argued that when programs are developed or research was conducted it resulted from the origins of the commissioned studies. Consequently, if the aim was to provide systemic or programmatic change for HBCUs then study from that context; however, the intent of this study was to explore the Black woman's doctoral experience at PWIs. That does not negate that PWIs and HBCUs must cope with similar issues, and can learn "…from the experiences, strategies, and programs that are unique to each" (Derrick & Jordan, 2007, p. 174).

Blacks at PWIs must be able to persist while being able to confront feelings of isolation, racism, and marginalization due in part from not being part of the dominant culture and normative environment (Watson, 1998). The experience for Blacks at PWIs was denoted as frustration, disillusionment, rejection, individual, and institutional racism (Bennett, 1998). Conversely, at HBCUs Black students were supported and encouraged that contributed to stronger feelings of academic confidence and success, which led to greater satisfaction within academia (Watson, 1998). Therefore, it can be extrapolated that the culture at HBCUs to support Black students was part of the structural institutional ethos, which is not present at PWIs.

The Black student experience at HBCUs was overall richer in quality based on effort, environment, and educational gains (Watson, 1998). Contextually the experiences

at HBCUs and PWIs were noted as being different due to the culture, historical mission, and professional practice of promoting success in Black students (Hirt, Strayhorn, Amelink, & Bennett, 2006; Lewis et al., 2008). These experiences provided the rationale for the current study, which focused on core cultural institutional difference. The premise was to address the neglected area of structural and contextual factors related to persistence and success at PWIs for Black women doctoral students. The study noted the parity in educational opportunity for success: "…policy makers and institutions must put forth more effort into strategies that address how to keep African-American students in the education pipeline once they are admitted" (Derrick & Jordan, 2007, p. 171). PWIs must be intentional in the development of best practices and policy decisions that are integral to the persistence and success of Black women doctoral students.

Hallmarks of the PWI experience were "inequity, unfair treatment, misjudging, isolation[,] and marginality" (Grant, 2012, p. 104). The intent of the present study was to explore the experiences of Black doctoral women within the context at a PWI and the context and analysis were specific to the doctoral education experience for this population. Therefore, this study primarily was situated within the major topics of doctoral student success, race, and gender; however, success can only be understood by including many of the other related topics. The synthesis of literature that guided the present study was organized by the primary themes listed at the beginning of this chapter, and synthesized in Table 4. All of citation references were not exclusive to doctoral education, as much of the literature chose collapsed terms such as "graduate" without the classification of master's or doctoral. The references included in both tables were able to

aggregate research within higher education that were reflective and contributory to the core themes of doctoral education for Black women.

## Personal Barriers to Access

Parker (2009) concluded that the Black woman's experience at PWI was a paradoxical journey. Black women had gained access into the educational spaces that prior to the nineteenth century had excluded them however, the "interactive spaces" experiences within a PWI were not "gender and race neutral" (p. 120). The context for access was significant for this study as it provided context for understanding the precursors of persistence and degree completion.

Blacks traditionally have sought out venues to receive an education based on historic values, beliefs, and mythicized qualities regarding the power of education (Allen, Teranishi, Dinwiddie, & Gonzalez, 2002; Zamani, 2003). Blacks have believed that education was "the key to upward economic mobility," although it has failed to create parity in economic and social mobility with White Americans (Thompson, 1999, p. 29). The "struggle for access to and success in higher education" for Black Americans has been symbolic of the greater effort toward parity in "personhood and equality" (Allen et al., 2002, p. 441).

Education for the Black community has been about a "liberated future that must be better than the oppressive past" (Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 2002, p. 160). The doctorate degree for Black scholars symbolized personal success, against marginalization, attainment within larger society, and a measure of national strength in terms of economics (Willie, Grady & Hope, 1991). Thompson (1999) argued that the disenfranchisement Blacks had with the education structure in the United States and the

lack of manifested economic growth contributed to the lack of candidates in the doctoral pool. Bonner & Evans (2004) cited the *Minorities in Higher Education 2001-2002: Nineteenth Annual Status Report*, published by the American Council of Education Office of Minorities in Higher Education, that regardless of increases in degrees earned by students of color (Blacks, Asia Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Native Americans) when Blacks where extrapolated the "disparities in educational access, opportunity, and attainment [were] pervasive" (p. 7).

Context of History as Personal Barrier

Access to education prior to the nineteenth century was not intended for Blacks, especially women, due to preconceptions that they were less than human (Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Black women were viewed as subordinates to White men and women and Black men (Howard-Hamilton, 2003). The mentality of Black inferiority supported efforts to deny women educational opportunities. During the antebellum period it was a statutory crime to educate anyone of African lineage (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997; Lucas, 1994). The practice of uneducated females was reflective of the larger American system that did not provide formal education to women during the first two hundred years of the United States (Zamani, 2003).

Historically, during the 1880s and 1890s Black women in southern schools had only one choice regarding their education, training to become a household servant (Rushing, 2002). There were differences in the form of education that women would receive based on race. The education that was accessed would be transformational in its own way independently for each race. For Black women who became educated, primarily in home economics, they would organize as social and political activist for

better working conditions and wages (Rushing, 2002). Overall for women of the nineteenth century, education functioned as a mechanism to offer "an alternative to the

Table 4

Synthesis of literature on the barriers and facilitators of doctoral success among Black women

| | Barriers | Facilitators |
|---|---|---|
| Personal-Access | Context of history (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997; Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Hamilton, 2004; Lucas; 1994; McMahon, 2012; Rudolph, 1968; Rury, 1986; Rushing, 2002; Zagumny & Pulsipher, 2008) | Catalyst of Black higher education (Al-Hadid, 2004; Banks, 2005; Dubois & Dill, 1910; Perkins, 2005; Perkins, 1997) |
| | Political and social practice limitations (Amotte & Mattaei, 1996; Anderson, 2002; Bowman & Smith, 2002; Johnson-Bailey et al., 2009; Kersey-Matusiak, 2009; Thelin, 2004) | Social support systems (Bonner & Evans, 2004; Carter, 2002; Hensley & Kinser, 2001b; Parker, 2009; Perna, 2004) |
| | Gender portrayal of Black women (Berry, 2004; Bonner & Evans, 2004; Castañeda, 2009; Holmes, 2008; hooks, 1981; Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Patton, 2009; Sallee, 2011; Zamani, 2003) | Intrinsic motivation (Baker et al., 2002; Brailsford, 2010; Carter, 2002; Griffith, 2010; King, 1996; Perna, Gasman, Gary, Lundy-Wagner, & Drezner, 2010) |
| | Race as an intrinsic barrier (Holmes, 2008; Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Kohli, 2008; Milner, 2004; Parker, 2009; Rosales & Person, 2003; Sidanius et al., 2008; Souto-Manning & Ray, 2007; Tapia & Johnson, 2009) | |
| | Background and academic preparation (Baker et al. 2002; Becker & Price, 2009; Berg & Ferber, 1983; Bonner & Evans, 2004; Breihan, 2007; Cho et al., 2008; Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Kersey-Matusiak, 2009; Leppel, 2002; Mansfield et al., 2010; Tapia & Johnson, 2009; Thompson, 1999; Weddle-West & Bingham, 2010/2011; Weiland, 1998) | |
| | Lack of "fit" and belonging (Bonner & Evans, 2004; Buck, Leslie-Pelecky, Lu, Clark, & Creswell, 2006; Gardner, 2008; Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Mahtani, 2004; Tinto, 1993) | |
| Personal-Success | Normative message (Elliott, Strenta, Adair, Matier, & Scott, 1996; Nettles, 1990b; Ohland et al., 2011; Patterson-Stewart, Ritchie, & Sanders, 1997; Patton, 2009; Weddle-West & Bingham, 2010/2011; Widnall, 1988) | Position within graduate education (de la Garza & Moghadam, 2008; Leppel, 2002; Tinto, 1993; Zamani, 2003) |
| | Doctoral attrition (Lovitts, 2001) | Role of mentorship (Antony & Taylor, 2009; Golde, Bueschel, Jones, & Walker, 2009; Griffin & Reddick, 2011; Hill, 2003; Herzig, 2010; Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Mansfield et al., 2010; Mayes, 2003; Patton, 2009; Patton & Harper, 2003) |
| | Psychological impact (Gray et al., 1997; Holmes, 2008; Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Johnson-Bailey, 2004); Kelly and Torres, 2006; Mansfield et al., 2010; Patton, 2009) | Race and mentor-mentee relationship (Mansfield, Welton, Lee, & Young, 2010; Patton & Harper, 2003; Patton, 2009) |
| | Race and marginalization (Altbach, Lomotey, & Kyle, 1999; Johnson, 2007; Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Johnson-Bailey et al., 2009; Kohli, 2008; Mahtani, 2004; Malone & Barabino, 2008; Tate & Linn, 2005) | |
| | Positioning as the "only one" (Antony & Taylor, 2004; Anderson & Swazey, 1998; de la Garza & Moghadam, 2008; Johnson, 2007; Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Lovitts, 2001; Malone & Barabino, 2008; Price, 2009; Souto-Manning & Ray, 2007) | |
| | Multiple roles (Barata et al., 2005; Berg & Ferber 1983; Buck et al., 2006; Cockrell & Shelley, 2011; Johnson, 2007; Souto-Manning & Ray, 2007) | |
| Institutional-Access | Institutional process (Al-Hadid, 2004; Allen & Zepeda, 2007; Baker et al., 2002; Bhata & Amati, 2010; Brazziel & Brazziel, 2001; Breihan, 2007; Carter, 2002; Gaff & Pruitt-Logan, 1998; Heggins III, 2009; Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Lovitts, 2001; Nettles, & Millett, 2006; Parker, 2009; Tinto, 1993; Zusman, 1999) | Personal connections (Baker et al., 2002; Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Tapia & Johnson, 2009) |
| | Gendered socialization (Baker et al., 2002; Mastekaasa & Smeby, 2008; Sallee, 2011) | Legal and social actions (Altbach, 1999; Berman, 2012; Geiger, 1999; Gladieux & King, 1999; Gumport, 1999; Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Tapia & Johnson, 2009; Sandler, 2000) |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | Affirmative action (Allen et al., 2002; Altbach et al., 1999; de la Garza & Moghadam, 2008; Holmes, 2008; Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Olivas, 1999; Thompson, 1999) |

Table 4 Continued

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Institutional-Success | Participation (Bonner & Evans, 2004; Nettles, 1990b; Nettles & Millett, 2006; Perna, 2001, 2004; Zamani, 2003) | Expectations of academic standards (Lovitts, 2001; Martinsuo & Turkulainen, 2011; Milner, 2004; Perna et al., 2010) |
| | Doctoral attrition (Lovitts, 2001; Lott II et al, 2009; Gaston-Gayles & Kelly, 2004; Tinto, 1993) | Participation factors (Denecke, Frasier, & Redd, 2009; Gardner, 2008; Gaston, 2004; Johnson-Bailey et al., 2009; Lovitts, 2001; Nettles, 1990b; Roberts & Plakhotnik, 2009; Sallee, 2011) |
| | Environment constraints (Earl-Novell, 2006; Herzig, 2002; Johnson-Bailey et al., 2009; Holmes, 2008; Kosut, 2006; Lovitts, 2001; McGlynn, 2009; Milner, 2004; Prosper, 2004; Souto-Manning & Ray, 2007; Tapia & Johnson, 2009; Tinto, 1993; Weddle-West & Bingham, 2010/2011) | Funding (Baker & Vélez, 1996; Berdahl & McConnell, 1999; Bonner & Evans, 2004; Carter, 2002; Gilbert, 2009; Herzig, 2004; Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Leppel, 2002; Mansfield et al., 2010; Nettles, 1990b; Nettles & Millett, 2006; Slovacek et al., 2011; Teddlie & Freeman, 2002; Zusman, 1999) |
| | Disciplines of opportunity (de la Garza & Moghadam, 2008; Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Johnson-Bailey, 2004; King & Watts, 2009; Lott II et al, 2009; Mahtani, 2004; Nettles, 1990a; Poock & Love, 2001; Rosales & Person, 2003; Salle, 2011; Souto-Manning & Ray, 2007) | Faculty/student interactions (Barnes, 2009-2010; Carter, 2002; Chapman & Sork, 2001; Cheatham & Phelps, 1995; Lovitts, 2001; Lyons, Scroggins, & Rule, 1990; Mansfield et al., 2010; Sallee, 2011; Slovacek et al., 2011) |
| | Cultural considerations (Alexander-Snow, 2010; Altbach et al., 1999; Barata et al., 2005; Calafell, 2009; Cole, 1998; Costner, Daniels, & Clark, 2010; Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Johnson-Bailey et al., 2009; Malone & Barabino, 2008; Milner, 2004; Patterson-Stewart et al., 1997; Rosales and Person, 2003) | Expectations between advisors and advisees (Barnes, 2009-2010; Gilbert, 2009; Johnson, 2007; Martinsuo & Turkulainen, 2011; Widnall, 1988) |
| | | Paradox experiences (Ballard & Cintrón, 2010; Cockrell & Shelley, 2011; Lovitts, 2004; McAlpine, Paré, & Starke-Meyerring, 2009; Milner, 2004; Tapia & Johnson, 2009; Williams, 2004) |
| | | Role of graduate coordinators (Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Malone & Barabino, 2008) |
| | | Role of mentors (Blackburn, Chapman, & Cameron, 1981; Carter, 2002; Clark, Harden & Johnson, 2000; Crawford & Smith, 2005; de la Garza & Moghadam, 2008; Golde et al., 2009; Griffin, & Reddick, 2011; Holmes, 2008; Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Mansfield et al., 2010; Neumark & Gardecki, 1998; Ong et al., 2011; Patton, 2009) |
| | | Mentor and advisor differences (Fischer and Zigmond, 1998; Golde et al., 2009; Lovitts, 2001; Milner, 2004; Patton, 2009) |

*Note.* Table organized based on the order that topics are presented in literature review.

brutalities of fieldwork, the harshness of domestic work, and the drudgery of textile mills" (Rushing, 2002, p. 176).

The nineteenth century education for White women was connected to gender stereotypes and the curriculum was gender based that females were trained predominately in domestic arts such as childrearing and housekeeping (Zagumny & Pulsipher, 2008). The aim of an education for White women was to serve men and society (McMahon,

2012). Primarily their role was to be acceptable companions and influencers of moral conduct (McMahon, 2012). However, White women had to proceed with caution when becoming educated due to the social stereotypes of the era. The poorly educated women was perceived as being "coquettish" or "too sexualized," while too much education was deemed inappropriate and detracted from physical appearance (McMahon, 2012, p. 9).

During the Progressive period (years between the Spanish-American War and World War I, 1890s-1920s) (Rudolph, 1968) women entered into professional charity professions, (i.e., social workers and teachers) (Rury, 1986). Women could transition into the teaching profession after men of the colonial era had hailed it as a minimal income source with scarce accolades and recognition of their efforts. The academic field of choice for women, education–especially Black women who entered feminized fields–has not changed significantly in contemporary times (Hamilton, 2004; Rury, 1986).

The concept of the "forgotten woman" was once used during the late 1800s to early 1900s to garner support for the right of White women's access to public higher education (Rushing, 2002, p. 171). Emphasis was placed on access to education for White women in regard to the ability and power it would yield, specifically continued superiority over Blacks yet remaining subordinate to White males, which would far exceed that of their Black counterparts (Rushing, 2002). Rushing (2002) questioned longitudinally the concept of who would be the "forgotten women" due to the disparity in what opportunities an education would bring for the different racial groups.

### Political and Social Practice Limitations as Personal Barrier

Access to doctoral education has been limited by political and social practices such as segregation that contributed to rationales for prohibiting Blacks from educational

attainment with derogatory and inflammatory statements such as those regarding stereotypes (Johnson-Bailey et al., 2009). In higher education, systemic social practices influenced educational access. Anderson (2002) concurred that the foundation of the American higher education system was structured on the evolution of "ideologies of racism and class subordination" (p. 3). The myth of intellectual stereotypes have existed for centuries that have invalidated the competence or intelligence of people of color, thus perpetuating the concept of an inferiority due to race and predicating a structure of exclusion (Anderson, 2002).

Socialized stereotypes rooted in conservative traditions included an inclination of violence, preference of entitlement programs such as welfare (seeking handouts) and communities that could be characterized as inner city, ghetto or poverty stricken (Bowman & Smith, 2002; Kersey-Matusiak, 2009). Anderson (2002) gleaned that as of 1968 segregation practices had excluded Black students for 332 years from colleges and universities. The segregated experiences of all women regardless of race may be a result of domination by a White patriarchal system as examined by Amotte and Mattaei (1996). An example of an accepted social practice was that the complexion of skin tone could impact entrance into college for Black women. At elite White colleges, access was due to oversight, primarily as a result of the applicants light complexion, but when discovered it created controversy on campus and in newspapers. The colleges that openly admitted Black women, limited admission to those from established professional families in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Baltimore, Washington, and New York City (Thelin, 2004).

Gender Portrayal of Black Women as Personal Barrier

Black women faced the same male control that prevented White women from educational attainment. Holmes (2008) emphasized the intersectionality of gender and race by reference of how gender politics and race relations were construed to ignore the marginalization of Black women. Women are presented in the literature as a "singular group," and not noting the specific differences within the subgroups (Holmes, 2008, p. 101). Holmes (2008) refers to the negative portrayal of Black women as Jezebel and Mammy, which portray either an over sexualized or asexual being (Holmes, 2008; hooks, 1981). According to Collins (2009) the Mammy image was "central to intersecting oppressions of race, gender, sexuality, and class" (p. 80). These images were countered in the early nineteenth century by Sadie Alexander to prevent the Daughters of the Confederate from constructing a Mammy image due to the "servile" ideology that would be represented (Banks, 2005). Both images, Jezebel and Mammy, were rooted in slavery, but sublimely Black women try to distance themselves from the negative gender identification. The images co-constructed negative images that threatened the Black professional identity and yielded the additional "double whammy" strain (Gilkes, 1982, p. 290).

Sallee (2011) noted that women doctoral students received unwanted romantic advances from classmates and that men characterized women negatively while in an engineering laboratory. Holmes' (2008) assertion was that White women were able to divulge into gender politics without having to separate or outlive a "legacy of race relations in the United States," which "precludes some men and women from interacting

and developing casual social relationships" (p. 114). The assumption that all women are responsible for man's sexuality has a long anecdotal history (Barata et al., 2005).

Black women must confront the dualism or multiplicity of their identities and minority positions (Bonner & Evans, 2004; Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Patton, 2009; Zamani, 2003)--the double jeopardy of being female and Black (Bonner & Evans, 2004; Castañeda, 2009). Berry (2004) explained that Black women differed from traditional feminist due to the inability to separate gender and race, but rather the two positions of marginalization had to work in harmony for doctoral students as they clarified misnomers about Black culture.

Race as an Intrinsic Barrier

The Black women in the Johnson-Bailey (2004) study perceived that race contributed to the obstacles that they would encounter as graduate students, but it was an inherent part of their lives. The daily pressures that existed while being a Black and a woman in a society that was not receptive acted as a deterrent to the application process and selection of a major (Rosales & Person, 2003). Black women were not valued for their academic contributions, but felt they were perceived as cartoonish "charcoal caricatures" that were silenced or invisible (Holmes, 2008; Souto-Manning & Ray, 2007, p. 119).

Systemic racism was determined as the most egregious obstacle faced by Black women in higher education (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003). However, symbolic racism was determined as the more prevalent form of contemporary discrimination (Sidanius et al., 2008). Symbolic racism has been demonstrated in the ideology that Blacks do not experience discrimination, but rather their lack of progression has been due

to lack of self-motivation, and that they have already been rewarded adequately (Sidanius et al., 2008). Kohli (2008) concluded that structural racism was an artifact that allowed for stereotype messages of White superiority over minority students (i.e., Black, Latina, and Indian, in education that funneled perspectives and deterred college aspirations).

Milner (2004) determined that Black graduate students became stressed and anxious as they sought to resist and challenge race-based stereotypes, which was demonstrated as working twice as hard or being exceptional based on the measure of "White exceptionalism," unnecessarily, to prove they belonged in the academy (Parker, 2009, p. 124). For Black women it was important that stereotypes were resisted so that they would not be reproduced and that mechanisms of control were being deconstructed (Parker, 2009). Tapia and Johnson (2009) concluded that Black students deferred from STEM fields because they doubted they cognitive skills to succeed at the graduate level and they had few peers or faculty to which they could relate or could counterbalance their experience.

Background and Academic Preparation as Personal Barrier to Access

Although a historical legacy of exclusion was noted by Johnson-Bailey (2004) as a rationale for why contemporary Black women were reluctant to apply to a doctoral program at PWIs, academic preparedness was also a barrier. Doctoral enrollment included those students who meet admission requirements that may include the results of aggregated outcome data such as grade point averages where the applicant was underprepared academically to meet the rigor or college and doctoral course work (Bonner & Evans, 2004). Disparities in access were demonstrated personally due to educational deficits that would have a direct impact on student ability to perform

academically at the doctoral level (Breihan, 2007; Thompson, 1999). Women were especially cognizant of their educational inadequacies and, therefore, were selective about their graduate school choice (Berg & Ferber, 1983). Weddle-West and Bingham (2010/2011) noted that there were differences in the academic preparedness of different racial groups and that minority groups were less likely to be as ready for college as their White counterparts.

Johnson-Bailey (2004) found for Black women, enrolled into master's and doctoral programs despite their past academic preparation and lack of family support. Leppel (2002) noted how the race and K-12 preparation contributed to the disparity in educational pathways to college. Those early academic experiences were formative and developed feelings of inadequacy that would linger and denature self-confidence levels (Leppel, 2002). Women tended to be insecure about their ability to continue their education at the graduate level and were hesitant about requesting obtaining letters of recommendations (Baker et al., 2002).

The doctoral women who entered into the academy frequently entered as first-generation students and had to learn the expectations through a series of trials and errors (Mansfield et al., 2010). Minorities (i.e., Blacks, Native Americans, and Hispanics) have experienced a history of under education at the K-12 level that discourages college enrollment and creates a difficult passageway for advanced graduate study due to the weakness in preparation, especially in the STEM disciplines (Becker & Price, 2009). The pre-college characteristics such as the backgrounds of Black women contributed to their commitment to their college education and to the necessary integration (Schwartz & Washington, 1999).

These were students who did not have families or peer groups that had the complex knowledge of graduate study not necessarily due to just their race, but also due to their socioeconomic position (Kersey-Matusiak, 2009; Mansfield et al., 2010; Tapia & Johnson, 2009; Weiland, 1998). For students who were first-generation, meaning the first in their immediate family (i.e., parents, siblings or grandparents) to attend college, access was hindered by lack of knowledge and preparation (Cho, Hudley, Lee, Barry, & Kelly, 2008). Johnson-Bailey (2004) surmised lack of nuanced knowledge associated with the application process that was an additional obstacle.

Lack of "fit" and Belonging in the Academe as Personal Barrier to Access

According to Gardner (2008) some women believed they did not "fit the mold" of a traditional graduate student, which was White and a single male (p. 126). Souto-Manning and Ray (2007) concurred that graduate women do not fit the "scholar-in-training model," which was "[W]hite, male, middle-calls, single, and childless" (p. 282). Black students at PWIs experience a lack on "student-institution fit" due to an incompatibility and inability to socially integrate into the academic and social systems (Bonner & Evans, 2004; Tinto, 1993). The participants were aware of their differences from the dominant group as Black women, older, had children, and were enrolled part-time (Gardner, 2008). Yet, the enrollment in graduate programs has evolved to include more women (Gardner, 2008). Conferences, social activities, the academic pace and rigor for graduate students were not conducive for those with family responsibilities and children (Gardner, 2008).

The concept of being accepted into graduate studies was a personal barrier that many Black women had to overcome (Johnson-Bailey, 2004). The emphasized construct

was on the larger issue that parlayed in society centered on access or entry into professional organizations, clubs, or society in general that made women feel "unwanted, unappreciated, and unwelcome" (Mahtani, 2004, p. 93). Black women enter higher education defiantly against past school assessments and without familial or social support (Johnson-Bailey, 2004). The option of not being a fit was associated with a student being isolated in a department (Buck, Leslie-Pelecky, Lu, Clark, & Creswell, 2006).

## Personal Facilitator of Access

### The Catalyst of Black Higher Education

The "first wave" of Black students, faculty, and administrators came from a HBCU, working and middle-class families, and from those already at PWIs (Al-Hadid, 2004). Perkins (1997) referred to a1900 study conducted by Black scholar W.E.B. Dubois on Black college students, as finding that "it was easier for a Black male" to attend a White men's college as compared to the "unyielding" opposition of White women's colleges to accept Black women (p. 719). Dubois and Dill (1910) focused on "Negro college graduates," their success, and the attitudes of the institutions sampled (p. 23). The study highlighted that while admission was not denied, it was not sought by admissions officials for Black students (Dubois & Dill, 1910).

In 1921, Eva Dykes, Sadie Tanner Alexander, and Georgiana Simpson made history by becoming the first Black women to receive doctoral degrees (Banks, 2005; Perkins, 2005). All attended PWIs, Radcliffe, University of Pennsylvania, and University of Chicago respectively; however, Dykes had an undergraduate degree from Howard University (Perkins, 2005). The degrees were in English for Dykes, economics for Alexander, and German philosophy for Simpson (Banks, 2005). These women were

advantaged being from privileged and educated families that were considered middle and upper class (Perkins, 2005; Perkins, 1997). These women were the pioneers of doctoral degree attainment and persisted during a time in the United States of oppressive race conditions such as Jim Crow laws (1865-1965) (Al-Hadid, 2004).

### Social Support Systems as a Personal Facilitator

Although in previous sections the family background was noted as a barrier the counsel and support that Black students seek was concurrent as they made decisions about their academic existence (Bonner & Evans, 2004). Families may be instrumental in providing funding or the assessment of a family's resources may influence the decision of continued education (Perna, 2004). The family functioned for Black women as a source of empowerment and motivation (Carter, 2002). The family, friends, and others who support the return to college were known as "reinforcing agents" (Hensley & Kinser, 2001b, p. 90). The church or intrinsic dependence on spirituality was noted as a critical narrative for providing "answers, explanations, and focus toward the future" for Black women (Parker, 2009, p. 125). The spiritual lives of Black women were a source of empowerment and were integral in the academic lives (Parker, 2009).

### Intrinsic Motivation as a Personal Facilitator

There were several characteristics noted as motivators for women seeking access to advanced degrees. King and Chepyator-Thomson (1996) noted motivational factors as the "attitudes, beliefs, and values" which lead to individual achievement (p. 171). Brailsford (2010) concluded that personal motives for doctoral degree attainment for men and women were career advancement or changes, personal motivations to continue academic pursuits, motivated by peers or friends who had completed the doctoral process.

Access into programs such as STEM was precipitated by a reported expressed interest in the subject (Griffith, 2010). For some Black women access was due prompted by dissatisfaction in their current career or seeking advancement (Carter, 2002). Women did consider graduate education earlier in their careers than did men, specifically in the first two years as an undergraduate (Baker et al., 2002). Women and especially those in minority subgroups, American Indians/Alaskan Natives, Blacks, and Hispanics need to improve their economic position through participation in advanced degree attainment (Perna et al., 2010).

## Institutional Barriers to Access

### Institutional Processes as Barrier to Access

Lovitts (2001) described the application decision-making process as a "fit" between the student and the graduate program (p. 50). Tinto (1993) acknowledged that inaccurate information provided during the application process contributed to early departure and the mismatch between program and student expectations. Part-time attendance was viewed as a lack of seriousness and dedication to a program and therefore contributed to an inability to obtain information about a program (Johnson-Bailey, 2004).

Academic institutions would mail attractive catalogs and brochures captioning their best features and/or hosting talented students for campus visits (Lovitts, 2001). When potential adult Black graduate applicants would come to campus it was important that they met with the program director rather than other students as it reflected the serious nature of the investment the applicant was making and the formality of experience from the programs perspective (Breihan, 2007). There was a mismatch in the desired fit for a graduate program versus the larger institution, which led to attrition due

to a dichotomy in the macro- and micro- level missions (Lovitts, 2001). The use of media was used strategically to emphasize messages of adult Black graduate learners in studious settings such as at conferences or in the classroom instead of as tokens in a random image (Breihan, 2007).

Standard admission processes into graduate and professional schools include the use of standardized aptitude tests, e.g., Graduate Record Exam, Medical College Admissions Test, and Law School Admissions Test (Al-Hadid, 2004). These are tests that historically Blacks have not performed well on and have been an obstacle for minorities and low-income students (Al-Hadid, 2004; Allen & Zepeda, 2007). Brehihan (2007) noted the cost of taking the test and test preparation as a barrier for students of color. These tests were not only critical for admission, but also contributed to decision making in funding such as fellowships; high GRE verbal scores corresponded to a positive effect on fellowship awards in education, sciences, mathematics, and the social sciences (Nettles & Millett, 2006).

Lack of funding was a rationale for why Blacks did not attend graduate school and higher education (Al-Hadid, 2004; Zusman, 1999). Funding was critical to not just the conjoined relationship of graduate school access and college choice (Cho et al., 2008). According to King (1996) an institutional factor of graduate admissions for funding and some scholarships and grants was connected to test scores on the GRE.

The turn-around time in application processing and the ability to not defer applications to next semester were barriers in access (Breihan, 2007). Underrepresented groups unfamiliar with the application process frequently decided to apply late, which often led to applications deferred to the following semester (Breihan, 2007). The

disparity in knowledge of the application process was prevalent in the needed funding for access.

Minority students would be detracted from science and engineering programs due to anxiety from paying educational loans and debts from baccalaureate study (Brazziel & Brazziel, 2001). The researchers postulated that minority students viewed a doctoral degree as a teaching degree after a long academic tenure, which was inaccurate due to poor mentoring and the inability to secure assistantships or fellowships (Brazziel & Brazziel, 2001). The aim was to prepare a doctorate-holding faculty member, not a teacher, to develop research that was applicable to both science and society (Gaff & Pruitt-Logan, 1998; Heggins III, 2009). The financial support through teaching and research assistantships provided access to faculty and was considered by Black women as more beneficial (Carter, 2002).

The admission process into graduate school suggested that it may be hindered by gendered expectations. Women described the admission experience into engineering as one of "discouragement" (Baker et al., 2002, p. 42). The academic institution as a whole does not represent a gender- or race- neutral space, but as argued by Parker (2009) one that has been shaped by the discourses of gender, race, and class. The social attitudes of what it means to be a man or woman has blocked access for women into engineering and has perpetuated the misconception that it is an inappropriate field of study (Bhata & Amati, 2010).

Gendered Socialization as an Institutional Access Barrier

The gendered socialization of men and women has generated external pressure to lead men to "overestimate their mathematical competence" and propel women into

traditional disciplines (Mastekaasa & Smeby, 2008, p. 191). Sallee (2011) suggested that traditional gender socialization informed sex role theory (i.e., the conventional gender roles for males and females, and therefore assumes that an individual has characteristics of only one gender). "Gender [was] not a static attribute," but one that must be "constantly and actively constructed by men and women on a daily basis" (Sallee, 2011, p. 192). It has been the expectations of masculinity and femininity, which informed expectations of career and professional roles (i.e., gendered professions).

## Institutional Facilitator to Access

### Personal Connections as a Facilitator to Institutional Access

Both men and women found it difficult to obtain information about applying to graduate programs and funding, with men finding it somewhat easier; there was consensus with both genders that the application process lacked information (Baker et al., 2002). The absence of personal contacts, departmental secretaries, peers, and faculty members were a barrier for women; whereas men utilized the same resources, including the Internet as a facilitator (Baker et al., 2002).

Encouragement to apply to a program from the graduate coordinators and program officials was important in the establishment of an inviting and welcoming community (Johnson-Bailey, 2004). It was the needed extra encouragement that extended beyond traditional non-personal recruitment strategies that were necessary for Black women to believe that once they were enrolled at an institution they would be well treated (Johnson-Bailey, 2004). The "human factor" should be significantly underscored as important in the application decision-making process for women (Baker et al., 2002, p. 45).

To encourage women to pursue graduate study, institutions should identify and advise top students early, hold information sessions from the perspective of women, have professors in class discussing their research, stress the importance of respectful interactions with students, provide information on research opportunities in print or electronic form, and provide a standard procedure for requesting letters of recommendations (Baker et al., 2002). All of those suggestions were geared toward alleviating some of the anxieties that women may feel toward applying to graduate school. The progression into a doctoral program involved unknowns for most minority students, who did not have peers or relatives with an advanced degree to provide the knowledge of the transition from an undergraduate to graduate program (Tapia & Johnson, 2009). Thus, faculty members communicated the promotion of the doctoral degree and distinguished differences and benefits (Tapia & Johnson, 2009).

Legal and Social Actions as a Facilitator to Institutional Access

Institutions became more diversified in an effort to meet the student population that consisted of women, racial, ethnic minorities, and different socioeconomic groups (Altbach, 1999). Policies that affected access for education attainment for Blacks were related to political movements such as the 1964 Civil Rights Act, development of financial aid programs, and federal legislation (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003). The diversification of academic institutions resulted from outcomes of historical events such as the end of World War II, which propelled a large influx of veterans into the college system due to the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 (the GI Bill) and an increase for demand to access and enrollment to minority groups (Altbach, 1999; Tapia &

Johnson, 2009). The federal government supported the increase of student access by enactment of the Education Amendments of 1972 (Geiger, 1999).

The first enactment was commitment to the Federal Pell Grants (not for doctoral students), which supported low-income students (Geiger, 1999). Second was the need to improve the presence in higher education by minorities and women under federal policy Title IX, which prohibited discrimination sex in education programs or activities that received federal funding (Berman, 2012; Geiger, 1999; Gladieux & King, 1999; Sandler, 2000). Federal support for research funding to increase doctoral education access specific to science and engineering was student aid in the form of fellowships, institutional funding for students as traineeships, and project grants to assist faculty (Gumport, 1999). The need for generic access shifted in the 1990s as the government underscored the need for access to quality academic programs (Gladieux & King, 1999).

Affirmative Action as a Facilitator to Institutional Access

Affirmative action has provided the greatest rights to education for Blacks and Latinos (de la Garza & Moghadam, 2008). Through Executive Order 11246, mandated by President Lyndon B. Johnson, affirmative action was an attempt to address dual oppressions experienced by Blacks due to slavery and "Jim Crowism" (Allen et al., 2002, p. 443). However, neither affirmative action nor any equal rights programmatic efforts addressed success; the efforts only provided the opportunity to access "and the opportunity to succeed–or fail on one's own merit" (Allen et al., 2002, p. 441). Thompson (1999) agreed with the assertion that affirmative action had opened access, but it did not dispel "inequalities in earnings" (p. 36) that could occur post degree completion. One aim of affirmative action was to reduce the educational attainment gap

between Blacks and Whites, but the tenets broadened to include White women, Asians, Chicanos/Latinos, the physically impaired, and those that English was a second language (Allen et al., 2002; de la Garza & Moghadam, 2008).

Affirmative action has been wrought with legal challenges primarily in the states that contain high numbers of Blacks, which has had a negative effect on actions to decrease the higher educational achievement gap (de la Garza & Moghadam, 2008). Once affirmative action shifted from "being a legal remedy or legal compensation for a distinct history of legally sanctioned racial discrimination to its being viewed as a tool for increasing diversity or improving the representation of underrepresented groups," the impact that it had for Blacks decreased (Allen, Teranishi, Dinwiddie, & Gonzalez, 2002, p. 444). The effect has been low participation of minorities, particularly women in pursuit of higher education. This translates into low economic earnings and poor social opportunities for the Black and Latino populations (de la Garza & Moghadam, 2008).

Holmes (2008) debunked the myth that the legal incentive of affirmative action to increase the presence of Black faculty assisted institutions to meet the federal requirement. If affirmative action practices were successful in goal attainment then academic institutions enrollment would reflect higher numbers of Black women faculty members, which was not the case (Holmes, 2008). A tenet of affirmative action was the need for a critical mass of Black women, faculty, staff, and students on campus (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Critical mass was significant to access and success; however, it remained a subjective construct. The Supreme Court has recently noted that the lack of a defined numerical qualifier made legal enforcement difficult (Schmidt, 2012).

"White beneficiaries of racial practices often assume that they have reached their station in life on their merits and that minority communities have advanced only through bending the rules" (Olivas, 1999, p. 228). Johnson-Bailey (2004) noted that, for Black women, although they were enrolled in a master's or doctoral program their classmates questioned the validity of admission and if it was through a special initiative or affirmative action program. The women were questioned about the authenticity of the Blackness by being asked why there seemed to be discrepancies in the tone of their writing appearing to be Black while the sound of their voice was White (Johnson-Bailey, 2004). Affirmative action policies may have provided access, but it did not necessarily improve the cultural fit for underrepresented groups (Altbach et al., 1999). The issue of affirmative action needed to be examined, although not the focus of this study, due to the influence it had on enrollment. Affirmative action was a noteworthy historical influence, negative or positive, on the higher educational pursuits of Blacks.

## Personal Success: Barriers to Personal Success

### Normative Messages as a Barrier to Personal Success

Doctoral education has served to address a need--university teaching and scientific research (Geiger, 1997). Black students were able to persist in graduate programs despite having to overcome inadequate academic preparation during the K-12 and undergraduate years (Weddle-West & Bingham, 2010/2011). Black students received negative messages about their academic abilities prior to the doctoral process and had feelings of incompetence perpetrated by faculty (Patterson-Stewart et al., 1997). Supported literature findings prior to Weddle-West & Bingham (2010/2011) concluded the value of the college preparation coursework as pivotal to graduation outcomes (Elliott

et al., 1996; Ohland et al., 2011). Education exemplified a progressive continuum moving students from a preset of curriculum skills to professional capabilities (Widnall, 1988). That continuum was personified as persistence toward successful completion (Patterson-Stewart et al., 1997). They found that Black students educational opportunities--equal to White's--were critical for persistence through the doctoral process (Patterson-Stewart et al., 1997).

The experiences of Black women in higher education are understood through the dominant cultural normative standard of Caucasian women or Black women (Patton, 2009). That was true more than 20 years ago when Nettles (1990b) indicated that there was a scarcity of research on the experiences of doctoral students and especially, those which focused on the racial differences. There were both potential sociological and psychological outcome implications for Black women in higher education resulting from the stress of being considered "other."

Doctoral Attrition as a Personal Barrier to Success

Due to doctoral attrition the loss of highly educated individuals that are important to the labor market and the lack of persistence was a detriment that can ruin lives due to the impact on one's finances and personal and professional lives (Lovitts, 2001). Terms used by those who do not persist or complete their respective degrees to describe the psychological feelings associated with leaving their programs as "gut-wrenching," "really shaken up," "shell-shocked," "depressed, " and some feeling suicidal while others have succeeded with their suicidal inclination (Lovitts, 2001, p. 6). Doctoral attrition has been most severe for women (McIlveen, George, Voss, & Laguardia, 2006).

Students who did not complete degrees have to reconstruct lives during a time when they feel demoralized, are financially unstable, and lack employment options and support from friends and family (Lovitts, 2001). In the study, Lovitts (2001) included men and women with a sample that was 88% White and 61% male, which was important to provide a context for the experiences. Asians were the largest ethnic group at 8%, Blacks 2%, and Hispanic/Latinos 1%.

The Lovitts (2001) study provided tremendous insight to the attrition issue, but not how it was impacted by minorities. The disciplines sampled were in doctoral programs of liberal arts and not professions such as education and social work where minority groups are more prevalent (Lovitts, 2001). Black women have proven that they can succeed beyond the bachelor's degree that most literature focused on, and that they were able to persist in graduate programs.

Psychological Impact as a Barrier to Personal Success

Self-esteem contributed to a segment of psychosocial development that women described as evolving in their doctoral process (Gray et al., 1997). Women experienced times of self-doubt and the authenticity of their admission to the doctoral program, yet had moments of confidence (Gray et al., 1997). Self-esteem was an intrinsic belief that Howard-Hamilton (2003) viewed as a contributor to the internalized challenges that Black women convey to college. Kelly and Torres (2006) focused on emotional health of White women and the decline in self-esteem while in college.

The decrease in self-esteem was aided by decline in the overall environment including issues of safety, sexual harassment, and socialization (Kelly & Torres, 2006). The decline could be enabled in part by what Gray et al. (1997) noted as self-discovery,

which was an increase in cognition of not only strengths, but also weaknesses and a greater awareness of the enormity of stress involved in a doctoral process. The women reported feelings of being unsafe due to being a woman in society (Kelly & Torres, 2006). The implications for emotional well-being are potentially more profound for Black graduate women who are experiencing the same issues, but potentially from multifaceted dimensions of gender and race.

Perceptions of identity that intersect race, ethnicity, gender, social class, and marital status contributed to Black women's struggle with multiple identities and self-esteem issues that influenced the doctoral experience (Mansfield et al., 2010). The intersectionality and marginality experienced by Black women was significant in the inclusion of a feminist theoretical framework to understand the processes of academic success. BFT promoted resistance of negative stereotypes and being less than. It sought to empower members by the experiences of survival (Johnson-Bailey, 2004). The basis of BFT was to give voice to Black women and their experiences by creating an intersection for a group standpoint (Patton, 2009). Holmes (2008) would argue that BFT was a critical framework due to the unique position that Black women held in society and how analysis of their experiences from a social and political context were not consistently shared with White women and men or Black men.

Race and Marginalization as a Barrier to Personal Success

The indirect message of who belongs in the academe further marginalized and alienated Black women (Mahtani, 2004). For some Blacks the feelings of identity were meshed with their identity of being Black. For example Malone, and Barabino (2008) noted that Black students perceived their discourse in the classroom as negated; however,

the same thoughts were positively supported when restated by a White peer. The response at the discomfort of the underrepresented group was acceptance of the intolerance and the causal overture that the perpetrator "meant no harm" (Altbach et al., 1999, p. 35). The notion of racism has been an issue of reoccurrence in higher education. Kohli (2008) reasoned that race and racism were social constructs that were unstable. The terms in the United States were marked to "include and exclude certain groups from equal participation, resources, and human rights" (Kohli, 2008, p. 181). Examples of racism included use of derogatory racial epithets, humiliation, intimidation, and insulting humor (Johnson, 2007; Johnson-Bailey et al., 2009). Malone and Barabino (2008) argued that the racial meanings in the educational setting impacted "daily interactions" and how "microinteractions reflect macrodiscourses and the ultimate impact of such layered interactions" (p. 501).

Black women were bounded by gender and race and may experience the additional pressure of being judged due to negative stereotypes, which can cause them inadvertently to underperform (Tate & Linn, 2005). The women participants in the Malone and Barabino (2008) study were frustrated as science majors that they were asked questions about their hair, culture, or any of the myriad of points that differentiated them from the dominant group. There was an adaptation or assimilation necessary to persist in doctoral studies. Johnson-Bailey (2004) noted how Black women had to learned how to write in a style more accepted by professors.

Positioning as the "Only One" as a Barrier to Personal Success

Black graduate students were challenged with the prospects of being the "only one" of their race in a class (Malone & Barabino, 2008, p. 485; Souto-Manning & Ray,

2007). Black graduate women had to function in professional academic dimensions, such as conferences, where intellectual legitimacy and pedigree were important (de la Garza & Moghadam, 2008). Representation at academically recognized events such as conferences conveyed a form of symbolic capital to those who had the networks and identity necessary for participation (Malone & Barabino, 2008). Antony and Taylor (2009) argue that socialization required assimilation for Black doctoral students as they morphed into the expected and accepted professional academic member where frequently they were the only one of their race. Those results concurred with earlier findings of Anderson and Swazey (1998) that concluded the "divestiture" process, which occurred during graduate school socialization, was one that Black graduate students found unappealing (p. 9).

Lovitts (2001) argued that engagement in the academic community exhibited an acceptance of the dominant norms and processes of the field. Lovitts (2001) further noted that those doctoral students who did not accept the normative values were less likely to experience "normlessness," and therefore distanced themselves from the academic community (p. 41). Isolation for Black graduate women created a situation where there was reluctance to speak in the classroom environment due to concerns about how comments would be interpreted (Malone & Barabino, 2008). The research of Johnson-Bailey (2004) included the use of BFT to counterbalance the negativity of being "other" and resisted the stereotyping of Black women.

Black female graduate students were in the margins of academia and had to work from their marginalized positions for strength to overcome feelings of oppressions (Souto-Manning & Ray, 2007). The challenge was opting to resist the misconceptions

that stereotypes incorrectly communicated about the tone of speech and skin color of Black women (Souto-Manning & Ray, 2007). Price (2009) argued that the engagement in discourse was deployment of "different frames of reference" that demonstrated a different form of cultural capital in speech patterns and verbal communication (p. 170). Black women who were not light complexioned reported feelings of isolation, having been socially conditioned not to draw attention to themselves (Johnson, 2007). The outward manifestations for some dark-skin Black women were examples of avoidance by other students (Johnson, 2007). Through use of BFT and the concept of resisting stereotypes; Black female graduate students within the framework see living in the Black culture as in opposition (Johnson-Bailey, 2004).

Multiple Roles as a Graduate Student as a Personal Barrier to Success

Black female students find that there is a trade-off for their respective roles as student, spouse, parent, and caregiver to attain academic success (Souto-Manning & Ray, 2007). The commonly characterized trade-offs for graduate students included the time commitment to degree completion and a life that would require a "single-mindedness" (p. 57) focus that was not appealing (Golde, 1998). The lifestyle would be unbalanced and the end gain was not necessarily substantial to the sacrifice given (Golde, 1998). Black women found that there was a need to exchange being an engaged member of one entity in order to attain a graduate degree. The traditional educated model for a graduate student in training was typically a single, middle-class White male with no children (Souto-Manning & Ray, 2007). In STEM, the traditional model was affirmed as being White, middle-class, and male (Buck et al., 2006; Johnson, 2007). Black female students without additional responsibilities were exceptionally difficult to find as was one who

was not struggling to find balance with numerous roles (Souto-Manning & Ray, 2007).

The normative process of contemporary doctoral students of today has been to multi-task commitments that include work, family, being a part-time student with classes on campus and on online (Cockrell & Shelley, 2011). Women in the academy have been confronted with the "double bind" phenomenon that positioned them as being professional and womanly (Cotterill & Letherby, 2005) or the challenge of confronting the dualism of sexism and racism (Ong et al., 2011). There has been a mythicized belief that women can have it all, but the balance professional and private lives have caused some women to choose less substantial degrees, delay or opt to not have children (Barata et al., 2005). Berg and Ferber (1983) noted that women were more timid and tended to set low aspirations for themselves. The lower academic goals may be accounted for due to the need to manage childcare, find time for study skills, without the necessary support of family, friends, and colleagues (Hensley & Kinser, 2001b).

## Personal Success: Personal Facilitators of Success

### Position within Graduate Education as a Personal Facilitator to Success

Tinto (1993) argued that persistence was related to a student's commitment to the institution. Black women were positioned along the fringes of postsecondary education due to their presence in low numbers, which developed a sense of invisibility (Zamani, 2003), and that emphasized that persistence was confounded by race (Leppel, 2002). These women have to locate and implement strategies during their graduate education that will aid in successful degree attainment. Graduate and professional educational opportunities that can be seen as moving within the overall population has greater significance in diminishing the harmful effects of racism and economic and social

disparities in America (de la Garza & Moghadam, 2008).

## The Role of Mentorship as a Facilitator to Personal Success

The origins of the term mentor were derived from Greek mythology. Mentor was the name of the friend selected by Odysseus to watch over his son, Telemachus, while he fought in the Trojan War (Patton & Harper, 2003; Lyons et al., 1990). Mentors could function in a multiplicity of roles; however, while there was importance in identification of a "good mentor," Hill (2003) stressed the value of being equally "good protégé(s)" (p. 157). It was critical that both mentors and mentees conceptualize the investment and shared responsibility of their roles and partnership.

The mentorship relationship could function both institutionally and personally toward degree completion. Mentor was first described as the person to facilitate teaching, provide supervision, and counsel to a less experienced person (Patton & Harper, 2003). Johnson-Bailey (2004) concluded that mentors or role models (Mansfield et al., 2010) provided the factual or realistic knowledge that made the difference in success for Black women. Mayes (2003) concurred that while mentors may be identified under different nomenclature (i.e., teacher, friend, advisor, or confidante), they should not be deflected from their mission, which must be addressing the question of what was expected and what can be gained from the relationship. Mentors have the task of taking their expert knowledge, and making it transparent and achievable through simulations, practice and assignments revolving around common doctoral tasks such as writing for publication (Golde et al., 2009). The presence of successful role models for Black doctoral students was personified as faculty and peers and aided in reduction of "intellectual isolation" (Antony & Taylor, 2009).

For women, mentoring reflected qualities that were maternal or "semi-familial" with open discussions regarding daily life (Griffin & Reddick, 2011, p. 1045). Patton (2009) stated that Black women graduate participants described mentors from the context of a familial model, where mentoring was defined as "form of mothering" (p. 512). In the literature "othermothering" was a reference to exemplify the expanded student-centered relationship with faculty (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010, p. 312) and focused on the needs and expectations of Black students at PWIs (Guiffrida, 2005). Othermothering had origins in slave history and the "women who assist[ed] bloodmothers by sharing mothering responsibilities" (Collins, 2009, p. 192). Guiffrida (2005) noted that othermothering symbolized "a longheld tradition of education within the African American community...[to address] the needs of some African-American students who attend PWIs" (p. 703).

Alternative mentors included friends and relatives, maternal relatives such as grandmothers, aunts, sisters, who would provide appropriate psychological bolstering, encouragement, and motivation (Patton, 2009). Black women recognized that their mothers lacked the knowledge to understand the challenges of the politics of the academy (Patton, 2009). Mentors also included peer Black doctoral students who felt the impetus to support and encourage others (Herzig, 2010). Mentorship within academe was important and was included as part of the discussion in institutional facilitators.

Race and the Mentor-Mentee Relationship as a Facilitator to Personal Success

When the mentors of Black women were White, study participants found it difficult to be authentic because they did not believe the White mentor would understand their position and there were trust constraints that the mentee never felt comfortable

(Patton, 2009). Patton and Harper (2003) summarized that when mentoring occurred across race and gender lines that an awareness of differences in positionality should be recognized in shared identities and experiences (Mansfield et al., 2010). Rationales for the positive benefits of Black female mentors was the advice that was given that may not be provided via other relationships and the lack of pretense, which contributed to honest and open dialogue that kept women "grounded" (Patton, 2009). Other Black women graduate students viewed White mentors as gatekeepers to vital information that was essential to success (Patton, 2009). Due to the amount of time that was involved in the mentor-mentee relationship, White mentors were found to have more time to spend with Black women than the one or two Black faculty members in a department (Patton, 2009).

## Institutional Success: Institutional Barriers to Success

### Who Participates in Graduate Education?

In the twenty-first century the composition of those attending college changed to include higher numbers and an increase in racial, gender, and socioeconomic diversity (Zamani, 2003). The process of graduate education attainment was critical for Black women both on personal/micro levels and global/macro levels. Only 0.3 percent of Blacks as compared to 1.1 percent of Whites earned Ph.Ds (Nettles & Millett, 2006). Black doctoral degrees have been predominately limited to access in non-science disciplines such as education (Nettles, 1990b; Bonner & Evans, 2004). During the 1970s, more than half of the doctorates awarded were in education followed by degrees in social sciences, psychology and the humanities (Thompson, 1999). Large numbers of doctoral degree recipients for Blacks in education still persisted in 2010, with 89% of degrees being in a field of education (Survey of Earned Doctorates, 2010). An issue with data in

Table 5 has been the lack of analyzed differences in enrollment based on gender and race, possibly due to the small numbers for a non-White sample (Perna, 2004). The data in Table 5 do not demonstrate differences within the intersection of race and gender, but rather differences of females by ethnicity. According to Perna (2001, 2004) Blacks are underrepresented at all levels of higher education, however markedly at the doctoral level.

Persistence and success were difficult to quantify due to a lack of focus on the potential influence of one variable on the other and specifically on the within-group differences of a demographic group (Hensley & Kinser, 2001b). Further analysis demonstrated that Blacks earned 3.5 percent of doctoral degrees, yet they represented 11.6 percent of the population.

Doctoral Attrition as an Institutional Barrier to Success

Attrition was noted as being the greatest during the first year (Lott II et al., 2009). According to Tinto (1993), the higher the degree sought, the greater the rate of non-completion in more selective institutions with 35 and 40% attrition and 50% at the most selective institutions. The issue of attrition, being approximately 50% (Lovitts, 2001), was significant to doctoral persistence due to the relevance of the problem being connected to the institution specifically due to focus on autonomy of student work, lack of effective support systems for student subcultures, and the lack of transparency of graduate education (Lovitts, 2001).

Table 5

Number of degrees conferred, percentage distribution of degrees conferred, and percentage of degrees conferred to females, by level of degree and race/ethnicity: Academic years

1988-99 and 2008-09

| Level of degree and race/ethnicity | Number | | Percentage distribution | | Percent conferred to females | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1988-99 | 2008-09 | 1998-99 | 2008-09 | 1998-99 | 2008-09 |
| Doctoral | 44,077 | 67,716 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 42.9 | 52.3 |
| White | 27,838 | 39,648 | 63.2 | 58.6 | 47.1 | 56.9 |
| Black | 2,136 | 4,434 | 4.8 | 6.5 | 59.1 | 66.5 |
| Hispanic | 1,302 | 2,540 | 3.0 | 3.8 | 52.0 | 57.0 |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 2,299 | 3,875 | 5.2 | 5.7 | 41.8 | 54.3 |
| American Indian/Alaska Native | 194 | 332 | 0.4 | 0.5 | 52.6 | 58.4 |
| Nonresident alien | 10,308 | 16,887 | 23.4 | 24.9 | 27.3 | 36.6 |

*Note*. From *The Condition of Education 2011* (NCES Report No. 2011-033, p. 236), by S. Aud, W. Hussar, G. Kena, K. Bianco, L. Fohlich, J. Kemp, and K. Tahan, 2011 Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. In the public domain.

Lovitts (2001) noted three factors that contributed to doctoral student attrition. First, doctoral students not completing were a result of the structure of programs (Lovitts, 2001). Specifically students do not enter or progress through a program as an intact cohort. As attrition occurred a "camouflage" was in place to cover which students were missing since there was no clear vision of a class of doctoral students (Lovitts, 2001, p. 9).

A second structural defect was in advising. Lovitts (2001) noted that faculty responded to questions regarding advising as if it was about the number of doctoral candidates they advised, suggesting that faculty again have a minimal picture of the number of pre-dissertation students are in a class. Programs had a core set of required courses and then it was independently left to the student to determine the remainder of their curriculum if they did not receive intentional career guided advising (Gaston-Gayles & Kelly, 2004; Lovitts, 2001). Another structural issue was that departments were incentivized for departments to maintain high enrollments and not necessarily retention Lovitts (2001).

Finally, students "silently" leave by not registering because exiting does not require students to give formal written notice of departure or interviews (Lovitts, 2001, p. 32). The silent withdraw from an institution could be characterized as a narrative of oppression whereas the student felt isolated and unable to communicate discontent. Attrition functioned as a barrier to success due to the ability to deflect attention from the progress of an individual student. Institutionally, graduate programs aim to propel the "best of the best" toward degree completion (Lovitts, 2001, p. 36).

Environment constraints as an institutional barrier to success

The issue of student success for degree completion for institutions must be a strategic effort, but has been approached without intentional coordination (McGlynn, 2009). The message of racial isolation and the need for improved programs such as mentoring to alleviate the effects of alienation has been replete in the literature; however, institutions appear to persist in the development of new task forces to investigate the scope of the issue instead of intentional investment into effective mentoring programs;

not addressing the problem of isolation despite the literature findings suggest lack of leadership (Tapia & Johnson, 2009). According to Grant (2012), more literature has been published relative to mentoring; however, "few (if any) traditional mentoring models identify specific standards and components of mentoring for African American female doctoral students at PWIs" (p. 103).

Departments broadly create environments of culture through displays of labeled photographs of faculty, staff, and students with their interests along with notices of important events, which now may be communicated more effectively through electronic communications (Lovitts, 2001). Additional evidence of the department culture was office doors being open, student and faculty engagement, and places for socialization such as lounges with reading material (Lovitts, 2001).

Within the classroom, discussions that occurred were opportunities to marginalize and negate Black students. Their experience as part of graduate discourse was one of polarization confounded by perceived lack of acceptance due to lack of respect, not being valued, and an environment that was negative, which contributed to feelings of alienation and isolation (Johnson-Bailey et al., 2009; Milner, 2004). Part of the experience as studied by Milner (2004) and Kosut (2006) was the graduate school normative discursive (language) that minority students, such as Blacks may lack in part due to limited cognitive capital (interaction with the academy). There may be an imbalance in Black graduate students' method of communication that included the ability to connect scholarly work to the pragmatic reality of their lives, which was opposed by the "empirical" method that was interlaced with the traditional accepted method of research as a way of understanding (Milner, 2004). The lack of positive interaction within the

classroom had an influence on the psychological well being of Black women outside of the classroom.

Black female students experience the classroom in terms of a being battle weary with reports of feelings of isolation and marginalization being common (Souto-Manning & Ray, 2007). The double burden of proving worth and value as a woman and racial minority is an ongoing challenge for Black women framed in the backdrop of having to outperform their peers just to obtain equal status (Prosper, 2004). Holmes (2008) would conclude that Black women experience the "double whammy" based on gender and race in higher education that has no value for either trait (p. 104).

The ecosystem or institutional climate could negate Black students. The campus climate had an important role to establish an inclusive environment to enable the successful persistence and degree completion of students (Weddle-West & Bingham, 2010/2011). The impersonal environments and lack in professional support increase the likelihood of women not completing a degree (Herzig, 2004). According to Tinto (1993), doctoral persistence denoted a stage in the process leading to completion of a doctoral degree as being shaped by the interactions with faculty. For example, the completion of doctoral exams was recognized as academic competency to the stage leading to candidacy as judged by faculty members (Tinto, 1993). However, in mathematics, qualifying exams were termed as a "mechanism for weeding out students" that cannot succeed in math nor analysis or contextualize large amounts of information (Herzig, 2002, p. 189). The exams were inconsistent with the coursework and an unreasonable measure of the ability to conduct research (Herzig, 2002). Contrasted with the responses from a mathematics study with a sample of 4 women and 16 men--one Black participant

who noted the qualifying exam as an opportunity to demonstrate competence and to engage in meaningful dialogue (Earl-Novell, 2006).

A racially insensitive campus environment was a predictor to the retention and participation of students on campus, which facilitated personal feelings of doubt and low self-esteem (Johnson-Bailey et al., 2009). Nettles (1990a) highlighted the finding that underrepresented students believed that racial discrimination was a salient feature in doctoral institutions. The reoccurrence of negative experiences within the campus culture or systemically indicate the presence of an issue for organizational change (Lovitts, 2001).

Disciplines of Opportunity as an Institutional Barrier to Success

Women frequently select the feminized disciplines such as education and social work to pursue doctoral study (Souto-Manning & Ray, 2007). Women who sought degree attainment of a doctorate could expect the academic environment to be male dominated and to have exclusionary gate-keeping practices (i.e., limited access to mentors and professional development opportunities) (Souto-Manning, 2007). Ivy League colleges were known for gate-keeping practices to maintain a level of exclusivity into fields of law, medicine, business, and public affairs (de la Garza & Moghadam, 2008). Sallee (2011) suggested the prevalence of "invisible masculinity" where in a department such as Aerospace and Mechanical Engineering it was constructed with the normative practices and experiences that oppose gender neutrality.

Programs in education appeared to be safe harbor for many doctorate-seeking women. A challenge with research has been tracking student data relative to higher education administration due to the various departmental nomenclatures (Poock & Love,

2001). Historically, Black women who were able to attend college did so to become teachers (Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Black men and women received more advanced degrees in education than in any other field (Johnson-Bailey, 2004). Other disciplines of choice for Black students have included social sciences and business (Nettles, 1990a). Black students reported being more satisfied with their program of choice than both Hispanic and White students, although Black student grade-point averages were lower (Nettles, 1990a).

Institutionally, Hughes and Howard-Hamilton (2003) concluded that the lack of critical mass contributed to psychological stress experienced by Black women. A critical mass among groups such as Black women was important to degree completion in that it functioned to reduce isolation related to demographics (Lott II et al., 2009). The lack of faculty of color at institutions (i.e., Black, Asian, and Hispanic), would deter students of color from enrollment (King & Watts, 2009). The lack of critical mass reduced the chances for success for Black women (Rosales & Person, 2003). A balance or measure of critical mass was based broadly on representation at the institution and program levels (Rosales & Person, 2003).

Hughes and Howard-Hamilton (2003) discouraged the ideology that Black women should be placed into a one-size-fits all framework, especially for all Black people, because it ignored within differences. Institutional inattentiveness to underrepresented group needs served to inflate issues that were detrimental to degree completion. The generic approach to assist Black women students does not curb perceptions of isolation and stress resulting from a lack of critical mass of Black women (Myers, 2002).

In a graduate program such as geography women reported that they felt "unwanted, unappreciated, and unwelcome" (Mahtani, 2004, p. 93). To further increase their marginalization, women of color (i.e., Black, Latina, and South-Asian), women in geography were the "token" representatives to write papers on the minority experiences rather than selected based on their scholarly competence (Mahtani, 2004, p. 95). Hughes and Howard-Hamilton (2003) noted that institutions choose to take a "generic approach" to the isolation and marginalization that had been studied as a result of the lack of critical mass (p. 98).

Cultural Considerations as an Institutional Barrier to Success

A critical mass functioned as a resource for knowledge focused on the cultural mores of graduate study, such as which courses to take, which professors, and what was necessary to persist (Johnson-Bailey, 2004). Black students were aware of the effort to recruit them into programs such as the STEM fields, but they also recognized the institutional lack of interest in their isolated situation after they were enrolled (Malone & Barabino, 2008). This was concurred by Ballard and Cintrón (2010) that admission into a doctoral program was insufficient if the opportunity "…is given begrudgingly" (p. 19) without a mentor to successfully guide the process.

Calafell (2009) and Alexander-Snow (2010) concurred that PWIs lacked in "cultural pluralism," noted as the tendency to disseminate an academic curricula from the dominant and consistent perspective of "Eurocentric interests" (p. 184). The selection of course materials and projects that enrich the classroom environment through inclusion of the perspectives of diverse groups such as Black women created opportunities to neutralize feelings of being an outsider (Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Calafell (2009)

argued that it was the faculty responsibility to create courses that were "more socially and personally relevant" to the students and to allow for critical discussion (p. 99). A caveat to the inclusion of a cultural-sensitive curriculum was that a course offering identified as being an option delineated it as being less programmatically important (i.e., the course could benefit a student personally, but not necessarily professionally) (Costner, Daniels, & Clark, 2010).

For Black women, their struggle in academia was magnified as a result of what Rosales and Person (2003) noted as "monoculutural curricular offerings, and institutional artifacts and traditions" (p. 56). Milner (2004) surmised graduate classrooms should offer opportunities for more divergent thinking and problematizing of issues for all students; however, the choice by professors to not address the disrespect of Black students was unacceptable. Institutional departments had curricula that were deficient in text by women or the ability to broaden the classroom discourse to include a gender and/or race analysis (Cole, 1998). Institutional officials view racial issues as individual issues to be addressed by "ad hoc" committees rather than examining them with careful scrutiny because race becomes a distraction (Altbach et al., 1999, p. 449).

Avoidance by faculty makes the concept of positioning oneself within an academic department problematic. The message that Black graduate students received was that they were not wanted and that there was not a place for them at the institution. Conversely, Rosales and Person (2003) found that faculty, staff, and other students had perceptions of Black women as being "independent and aggressive," which ironically were characteristics that were construed as masculine and therefore a norm in academia (p. 57). Hughes and Howard-Hamilton (2003) agreed with the perception of Black

women as being "strong and independent," however postulated that it was due to a lack of support systems and the impact of stress (p. 100). The university structure and traits are inherently masculine with competitiveness as a cornerstone (Barata et al., 2005). The trait of competitiveness was oppositional to feminized characteristics of "intuitiveness" (Barata et al., 2005, p. 240).

Black graduate students indicated perceptions of faculty avoiding them outside the classroom, when in reality they appear to be opportunities when other students are positioning themselves with faculty for important relationship building that leads to research, teaching and other professional opportunities (Johnson-Bailey et al., 2009). An example was the awareness by women graduate students of a faculty member discussing the need for abstract submissions to all other science students in a laboratory except for the only Black female (Malone & Barabino, 2008). Black students believed that they were excluded from opportunities to engage in research and professional activities that they viewed White students as receiving (Patterson-Stewart et al., 1997).

## Institutional Facilitators of Success

### Expectations of Academic Standards as Facilitators of Institutional Success

Lovitts (2001) denoted that, along the pathway to degree completion, doctoral students must complete various requirements such as completion of coursework, implementation of a dissertation committee, and passing preliminary or qualifying exams. The faculty had a role to bolster student achievement and to promote and expect standards of success and best pedagogy (Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Perna et al., 2010). Martinsuo and Turkulainen (2011) determined that the amount of invested time spent each week on doctoral studies was an important persisting practice. Doctoral students

were required to maintain a least a B average and promoted to write for publication (Lovitts, 2001). Faculty must make clear their expectations of success and the underlying rules to institutional success, which often silently dictate policies (Milner, 2004). Black graduate student success at PWIs needed to become more explicit and transparent of the political nature of programs and the necessary specific skills necessary to navigate through to graduation (Milner, 2004).

Participation Factors as Institutional Facilitators for Success

Social experiences were the most important factor to impact performance in graduate school (Nettles, 1990b). It was those experiences that doctoral students used as a guide for learning the normative behaviors of their field, expectations of faculty, and the norms associated with gender (Sallee, 2011). The more extant literature of Sallee (2011) provided the basis that socialization was a variable experience and impacted characteristics such as gender, race, and personal background. Socialization acted to bring together individuals of different backgrounds, experiences, gender, races, and socioeconomic classes (Sallee, 2011). Socialization was seen as a contributor to the overall success of Black students, especially in doctoral programs (Johnson-Bailey et al., 2009). Expounding on the form and type of socialization that was beneficial would have been enlightening, as it appears to be a term that needs to be operationalized to highlight the true meaning. Sallee (2011) noted that it was interactions with both faculty and advanced students that were important, specifically denoting that social conversation was valuable. Socialization provided greater insight into the research interest of faculty and reflected areas of common interest shared by peers (Sallee, 2011). Conversely, Nettles (1990a) reports feelings of alienation and isolation as being problematic for Black

students and reasons for dissatisfaction.

Socialization in higher education at the graduate level became an important element of the institution due to the layered nature of its function. Gardner (2008) posited that socialization contributed to the rationale of why doctoral students persisted or departed from programs. Socialization toward inclusion could be exemplified by the outward culture of a department such as facilitation for interactions at events such as "colloquia, brown bags, and happy hours" (Denecke et al., 2009, p. 51; Lovitts, 2001). These were strategies of professional development that enabled degree completion and reduced attrition by buttressing programs with forums for discussions and inclusion with research experiences (Denecke et al., 2009).

Gaston (2004) noted that doctoral education included an "unwritten curriculum" that Black students should participate in that included service on committees, writing for publication, attendance and presentation of papers at professional meetings, and teaching and research experience (p. 35). Those opportunities may provide assistantship or other monetary awards. Professional development could be termed a social capital or an investment to the accumulation of opportunity benefits such as attendance of conference and the development of meaningful professional relationships that served a dual function as a support system (Roberts & Plakhotnik, 2009).

Funding as a Facilitator of Institutional Success

The goal of producing more doctoral degrees for Black students required more specific institutional strategies (e.g., research institutions, PWIs, or HBCUs), and most significantly a commitment of financial funding in the form of stipends for students and increase in salaries for new hire of Blacks with doctorates (Teddlie & Freeman, 2002).

Minorities received less financial assistance than other groups, which meant they had to meet the unmet financial need through part-time work (Slovacek et al., 2011). Table 6 shows the disparity between race and gender, with the doctoral debt for Blacks being greater than for Asians, Hispanics, or Whites. The lack of adequate funding for historically underrepresented ethnic groups and low-income students excludes them from higher education and contributed to the disincentive to progress in doctoral education (Zusman, 1999). More White students (54%) received research assistantships, compared to Blacks (38%) (Nettles, 1990b).

Funding in the form of teaching or research assistantships provided access to faculty and facilitated the critical interaction between the student and faculty member and enabled learning of the academic norms (Carter, 2002; Herzig, 2004). It was funding according to Nettles and Millett (2006) that lead to degree earning "milestones and milestones lead to funding in many ways at different times" (p. 187). Black doctoral students, 28 percent, were least likely to be research assistants, as compared to 62% Asian Americans, 44% Hispanics, 51% Whites, and 61% international students in the 1996 study (Nettles, & Millett, 2006). Gilbert (2009) concurred that the "hidden curriculum" inferred "knowledge, beliefs, values or practices" that were not effectively or strategically conveyed to doctoral students (p. 56).

Students who were from higher socioeconomic (i.e., affluent) backgrounds are more likely to persist in college (Baker & Vélez, 1996). The economic impact was demonstrated in an undergraduate study that indicated that it takes four students to leave before their sophomore year to recoup the tuition of one student that stays for four years (Leppel, 2002). Minority groups need the assistance of the academic institutions to

obtain access and the necessary financial assistance; otherwise, enrollments decline as resources shift and are redistributed (Berdahl & McConnell, 1999).

Inadequate funding was a reason that Black women did not fully integrate into academia (Bonner & Evans, 2004). Funding was even more problematic for women in that it is connected for research assistantships that not only ease some financial hardships, but the method of obtaining them is connected to faculty willing to include Blacks in on their research (Carter, 2002). Funding was the reason that some Black women chose to accelerate the pace of their program so as to lessen the amount of education debt (Johnson-Bailey, 2004).

Table 6
Education-related debt of doctorate recipients, by sex, and race/ethnicity: 2010

| | Sex | | | | Race/ethnicity (U.S. citizens and permanent residents) | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Debt level | Male | | Female | | Asian | | Black | | Hispanic | | White | |
| Cumulative debt Mean | $18,302 | | $22,860 | | $13,639 | | $47,334 | | $32,346 | | $24,496 | |
| | Number | Percent | Number | Percent | Number | Percent | Number | Percent | Number | Percent | Number | Percent |
| No debt | 12,804 | 54.5 | 10.246 | 49.8 | 1,703 | 62.2 | 428 | 22.3 | 578 | 32.3 | 9,943 | 43.3 |
| $10,000 or less | 2,340 | 10.01 | 1,856 | 9.0 | 251 | 9.2 | 169 | 8.8 | 184 | 10.3 | 2,169 | 9.4 |
| $10,001-20,000 | 1,959 | 8.3 | 1,733 | 8.4 | 199 | 7.3 | 150 | 7.8 | 199 | 11.1 | 2,430 | 10.6 |
| $20,001-$30,000 | 1,446 | 6.2 | 1,225 | 6.0 | 156 | 5.7 | 142 | 7.4 | 149 | 8.3 | 1,771 | 7.7 |
| $30,001-$40,000 | 968 | 4.1 | 968 | 4.7 | 93 | 3.4 | 128 | 6.7 | 112 | 6.3 | 1,257 | 5.5 |
| $40,001-50,000 | 825 | 3.5 | 769 | 3.7 | 77 | 2.8 | 108 | 5.6 | 90 | 5.0 | 1,048 | 4.6 |
| $50,001-60,000 | 599 | 2.5 | 633 | 3.1 | 65 | 2.4 | 83 | 4.3 | 80 | 4.5 | 815 | 3.5 |
| $60,001-70,000 | 517 | 2.2 | 586 | 2.8 | 32 | 1.2 | 102 | 5.3 | 81 | 4.5 | 714 | 3.1 |
| $70,001-80,000 | 392 | 1.7 | 486 | 2.4 | 33 | 1.2 | 94 | 4.9 | 68 | 3.8 | 540 | 2.4 |
| $80,001-90,000 | 454 | 1.9 | 531 | 2.6 | 32 | 1.2 | 122 | 6.4 | 47 | 2.6 | 631 | 2.7 |
| $90,001 or more | 1,207 | 5.1 | 1,550 | 7.5 | 96 | 3.5 | 391 | 20.4 | 200 | 11.2 | 1,640 | 7.1 |
| Total | 23,511 | 100.0 | 20,583 | 100.0 | 2,737 | 100.0 | 1,917 | 100.0 | 1,788 | 100.0 | 22,958 | 100.0 |

*Note.* Data reproduced in part from National Science Foundation, National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (2012, Table 38)

A broader issue of funding related to how and where the information was accessed. A problem for women doctoral students was access to information related to research opportunities that were not readily available or posted (Mansfield et al., 2010). Women believed that the relationships that male students had with other male faculty

members provided them with more access to opportunities and connections to funding options (Mansfield et al., 2010).

Faculty and Student Interactions as an Institutional Facilitator of Success

The interaction between the student and faculty member provided an opportunity for meaningful engagement related to common research interests. Sallee (2011) found that the interactions or socialization that occurred between doctoral students and faculty were opportunities to learn the mores of the discipline. Carter (2002) concluded that Black women noted the importance of the relationship with faculty as the "catalyst" for publications and presentations at conferences. For doctoral women professors were able to provide key information on discounted rates for conferences, volunteer, and job opportunities (Mansfield et al., 2010). The student-faculty interaction acted as an intermediary between the academic/scientific communities and navigated through institutional issues such as class registration, financial aid, the "red tape" of any institution (Slovacek et al., 2011). There was a scarcity of research on relationships between faculty and doctoral students of color (Herzig, 2004).

Barnes (2009-2010) contended from previous research (Chapman & Sork, 2001; Cheatham & Phelps, 1995; Lyons et al., 2010; Lovitts, 2001) that the advisor impacted the socialization process for doctoral students. The advisor, as Barnes (2009-2010) summarized, exemplified behaviors that were similar to a mentor. The advisor was crucial to success by providing academic support, research opportunities, and support through encouragement and praise (Barnes, 2009-2010). Lovitts (2001) found that in the science disciplines that selection of an advisor occurred ideally by the end of the first term or by the end of the first year and would serve as the conduit for the dissertation. In

the humanities and social sciences the selection of an advisor may not occur until after successful completion of qualifying examinations with the students receiving less support than those in the sciences (Lovitts, 2001). The critical caveat to an advisor-advisee relationship was articulation of goals.

Expectations Between Advisors and Advisees as Institutional Facilitator of Success

The expectations of advisors to doctoral students needed to be mutual and clearly delimitated otherwise it may contribute to attrition (Barnes, 2009-2010). For example, doctoral work required a vast time commitment and advisors had to convey the expectation that the process could be accomplished with a commitment to do work with personal and research integrity (Barnes, 2009-2010). That implied that while the student had expectations of the advisor, the advisor also had expectations of the student to be committed to the degree process due to the amount of time and energy that would be expended (Barnes, 2009-2010). Martinsuo and Turkulainen (2011) concurred that the going beyond four years, with degree completion as the goal, was negatively associated with progression and lower student satisfaction. There were also expectations by advisors that advisees would utilize the opportunities within the department to become integrated to the department and professional activities (Barnes, 2009-2010). The behavior was noted as being a "good departmental citizen" and contributing to the structure of the academic community (Barnes, 2009-2010, p. 337).

Socialization was an element of the "hidden curriculum" where a student was implicitly expected to learn the attitudes and gain experience associated with a particular discipline (Gilbert, 2009; Widnall, 1988). Faculty were not explicit in verbalizing the expectation of student participation in professional experiences; thereby, the ability of

doctoral degree completion was achieved without necessarily being equipped for post-graduate career options (Widnall, 1988). For example, Johnson (2007) noted the value of students taking advantage of opportunities offered by faculty to ask additional questions, and speaking with professors outside of the classroom were inadvertent attempts to gain recognition which could be valuable for later request of letters of recommendations for employment.

Paradoxical Experiences as Institutional Facilitator of Success

The graduate school experience has been described as a "hazing" (Jones, 2000 as cited in Milner, 2004, p. 25), a "rite of passage" (Milner, 2004, p. 25), and a "furious passage" (Al-Hadid, 2004, p. 205). The experience was described as intense due to the structure and pace of the curriculum (Tapia, & Johnson, 2009). Minority students frequently cited the graduate experience as one of isolation (Tapia, & Johnson, 2009). However, at its core, doctoral education has been historically framed as being "isolating, autonomous, scholarly work" (Cockrell & Shelley, 2011, p. 470). Within the doctoral process the message that doctoral students received was a paradox, they would "sink or swim" as it related to persistent struggle for funding, the need for publications, and the pervasive message from faculty that this was "the best years of [their lives]" (McAlpine et al., 2009, pp. 46-47). The implications were that some students lacked the "right stuff" (Golde, 1998, p. 25) and thus the need to "weed out" (Lovitts, 2004, p. 133) were analogies used as part of internal departmental divisive systems that arbitrarily push out the bright students that they admitted out.

Students who were admitted into the lower half of a class or cohort were anticipated to weed themselves out due to their "poor-quality" in comparison to other

students (Lovitts, 2004, p. 9). Lovitts postulated that the contention of how to deal with the methodology of the doctorate was influenced by "societal drivers, institutional demands and disciplinary expectations" (p. 50). Regardless of the descriptor and despite the somewhat negative connotations the doctoral process has never been a solo effort, but one that required commitment of time and the inclusion of other people such as the advisor (Ballard & Cintrón, 2010; Williams, 2004).

Role of Graduate Coordinators as Institutional Facilitator of Success

Upon finding their way into a discipline for study the concern becomes the ability to stay in the face of oppression. Being afforded feelings of value and that as Black graduates that they were deserved access to education was important to their overall success (Malone & Barabino, 2008). According to the Johnson-Bailey (2004) study, women indicated that support from the graduate coordinators was pivotal (2004). These women needed additional encouragement that they were welcomed and wanted at their respective institutions. As noted in the study, sometimes it only takes one faculty member at a vital point to recognize and acknowledge competency that could make all the difference (Johnson-Bailey, 2004).

Role of Mentors as Institutional Facilitator of Success

The nature of effective mentoring was based in values and personal relationships (Crawford & Smith, 2005). There are too few Black faculty to satisfy the needs of every Black student (Patton, 2009). Even if there were adequate Black faculty, they should be allowed the academic freedom to choose if they want to engage in the mentoring process due to additional responsibilities and burden that this places on them and reshapes their perilous academic experiences (Crawford & Smith, 2005). An alternative in some

research was to identify mentors not in academia to serve in place of the frequently hard to identify or locate Black faculty member, who could provide necessary needed educational and emotional support (Golde et al., 2009; Patton, 2009).

Patton (2009) used BFT to conceptualize the practice of mentoring for Black women. BFT dispelled the notion of a monolithic Black female experience and recognized the individual characteristics (Holmes, 2008). Mentorship was found to be a formal or informal process and graduate students with a mentor are more secure and committed to their academic goals (Mansfield et al., 2010; Ong et al., 2011). For example women, mentors contributed to the decision-making process of graduate school, selection of a doctoral program, and to persist or depart from a program (Ong et al., 2011). Use of mentors also aided in the struggle that women doctoral students felt regarding the balancing or juggling act of their lives (Mansfield et al., 2010).

Identification of appropriate mentors for Black women to build relationships was difficult (Patton, 2009). One notable characteristic was that Black women were only 2.2 percent of full-time faculty (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Another factor is the low number of Black faculty in comparison to the number of students (Patton, 2009). Black faculty were caught in the proverbial "catch-22" as they attempted to manage the additional responsibility of mentorship to Black students, while appreciating the search for familiarity and advocacy, even though it placed a high stress load on the faculty member as they attempted to remain on par with their White colleagues (Holmes, 2008, p. 113; Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Black faculty tended to have a more relational approach to mentoring than that of their White colleagues, who view it more pragmatically and focused on the scholarship, which was linked to their professional

advancement and did not detract from their tenure tract (Griffin, & Reddick, 2011).

In doctoral programs, support through relationships with faculty and mentors were most important to satisfaction and successful completion of graduate programs (Nettles, 1990b). Repeatedly in the literature, the nature and characteristics of the mentorship were more vital than just the identification of a mentor/mentee relationship and were shown as being critical for success. However, Neumark and Gardecki (1998) cited the lack of empirical evidence to suggest that mentoring was an ineffective method of reducing the disparity in academic success of women. Neumark and Gardecki (1998) stated that mentoring during the third year was most crucial, during the dissertation process.

The mentor relationship extended power beyond the classroom. Professional development allows for a level of growth that may not necessarily be available for Black graduate women in any other way (de la Garza & Moghadam, 2008). The professional guidance of mentors was instrumental in strategic development of long-term goals (Clark et al., 2000), career trajectory and a suggested cloning effect within the mentor process (Blackburn, Chapman, & Cameron, 1981; Crawford & Smith, 2005; Patton, 2009). Black graduate students expressed alienation at this level of academia where it was perceived they had limited guidance and lacked the in roads to navigation of resources and knowledge that was necessary for success (Johnson-Bailey, 2004). Mentors aided in positioning on publications, grants, and professional meetings, especially for programs such as engineering (Carter, 2002).

Mentor and Advisor Differences as Institutional Facilitator for Success

In the Patton (2009) study participants stated that there was a difference in a mentor from an advisor; however, the distinction was not characterized. The mentor was recognized as being a trusted confidant with the ability to provide networking opportunities (Patton, 2009). An example was Black women mentors wanted their protégé to be taken seriously within academe; therefore, they conveyed messages of how important physical appearance was to an overall professional look and the importance of eluding confidence (Patton, 2009). Milner (2004) noted a difference between the advisor and mentor as the advisor accepts the assignment of faculty "service" to advise a Black student, whereas a mentor relationship was one that was intentional and meaningful that might not otherwise develop (p. 27).

Lovitts (2001) suggested that the selection of an advisor inferred that a prior interaction with the mentee had occurred. In doctoral education the apprenticeship relationship of "apprentice" (student) and "master" (advisor) was a cornerstone strategy and tradition (Golde et al., 2009, p. 54). The relationship between a dissertation advisor and student was analogous to an apprenticeship in research (Widnall, 1988). The advisor of the dissertation was the "primary gatekeeper for professional self-esteem of the student, the rate of progress toward the degree, and access to future opportunities" (Widnall, 1988, p. 1743).

The student-advisor relationship was devised to be a close working one with the advisors charging students with high expectations and standards (Golde et al., 2009). Widnall (1988) noted that women met less frequently than men, and that advisors commented on whether their work was right, not to the importance. Students were

unlikely to report any problems in the relationship due to "fear of professional reprisals" (Widnall, 1988, p. 1743). Lovitts (2001) concluded the advisor for doctoral students was the "single most important decision" made toward degree completion (p. 131), which concurred with the previous findings of Fischer and Zigmond (1998) that it was critical to select a suitable advisor.

## Summary

Existing literature indicated that there were a number of personal and institutional characteristics that were associated with access and success of Black women graduate students. They were affected by the pluralistic impact gender, race, a multi-layered marginalized doctoral experience due to attendance at a PWI, and/or resulting personal or institutional background. Women were motivated to participate in higher education at the doctoral level, however the literature speculated on what might account for the differences in experiences from men and women of other racial groups. Chapter 2 characterized the most salient differences in persistence were at the institutional level, which may be due to the prevalence of availability of data, and the focus of studies at the macro level on the broad college experience.

The literature in Chapter 2 informed the study by providing an in depth review of extant literature and contributed to understanding the inequity in doctoral education for Black women. The literature review synthesized the current studies relative to persistence and success, while providing context to barriers and facilitators of access. Chapter 2 provided a basis for understanding the oppression and systematic marginalization of Black women graduate students as it related to access, persistence, race, and gender. The literature highlighted the tendency of Black women to emerge

from the margins of the academy to assert their positionality as scholars. Chapter 2 noted the tendency of research to focus broadly on the themes within Table 3; however, to further the literature, this study focused specifically on persistence and success, defined as degree completion as organized synthesis of the disparate research in Table 4. The new organization of themes was significant to the development of the interview protocol; coding will be discussed in more depth within Chapters 3 and 4. Use of the new thematic scheme contributed to the development of the interview protocol and a starting point for coding.

# CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of Black women doctoral students at a PWI to understand personal and institutional characteristics that influenced persistence and degree completion during the later stages of their doctoral program. The study focused on a specific stage, after completion of comprehensive and/or qualifying examinations to better explore issues of persistence, and a specific subpopulation, Black women, within the doctoral community. Chapter 3 provides a rationale for a qualitative interpretative research study and describes the data collection methods and analysis.

The research study was grounded on the seeking an understanding of the two research questions. The questions were fundamentally focused on identifying the personal and institutional characteristics that enabled persistence and which characteristics the doctoral students believed to be important to their ultimate degree completion. Based on the material presented in Chapter 1 and the in-depth literature review of Chapter 2, persistence and degree completion were understood to be two separate constructs, thus supporting the rationale for two research questions.

## Research Design

Qualitative research is a broad discipline of inquiry that aims to distinguish the socially constructed reality of participants and the meaning or value on experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 2002). A fundamental of qualitative research is the connection or relationship among the participants, setting, and experiences (Ezzy, 2002).

The goal was to understand the constructed reality as experienced by Black women doctoral students based on the deeper meanings of social phenomena, and practices from the participant perspective with emphasis on the interpretive process (Ezzy, 2002; Merriam, 2002; Silverman 2000).

There are numerous approaches and methods within the discipline of qualitative research including case study, participatory inquiry, and interpretive analysis. The research design guides the researcher to attend to issues of representation and legitimation or understanding of the process in the empirical world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 2002). The design informs the data collection procedures and data analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This study was a "basic interpretive qualitative study" (Merriam, 2002, p. 37) that intended to understand the meaning that people have constructed relative to their experiences.

## Research Setting

The research site was a large university located in the Southeastern part of the United States. The institution was selected based on the institutional student population diversity and doctoral programs. Olympic University--a pseudonym, represented a public co-educational institution with over 25,000 total students. It was classified as a Carnegie "Doctoral/Research University." The graduate school enrollment has more than 5,000 students and more than twenty doctoral programs in seven academic colleges. One institution will enable a richer understanding of attrition and persistence through the diversity of program offerings and student population.

Previous research studies related to this topic have taken place at one institution (Gardner, 2009; Golde, 2005; Sallee, 2011). The inclusion of one institution enabled a

more focused understanding on the perspective of the institutional and departmental norms and how they influence persistence and degree completion. The study sought to include three colleges within the institution. The use of one institution assumed a common macro connection in which to frame the student experiences while not ignoring the departmental effects that could influence persistence and degree completion outcomes. Based on data collected, the variation in experiences within the single institutional context was isolated, and findings were reported herein. Further, there was an established relationship within the university to facilitate cooperation of student public information for recruitment such as email addresses.

Olympic University has collaborative programs with different countries, which contributed to the overall richness of student diversity. The institution has as part of the diversity plan a commitment to recruit and graduate a diverse student body that addresses the state's need to increase access to higher education for historically underrepresented groups according to the institutional web page. Surveys were included in the diversity plan as a mechanism for departments to examine underrepresented student experiences at Olympic University to improve the academic climate. This intentionality toward diversity contributed to the overall institutional site selection (Merriam, 2002).

The site selected was representative and access to participants was being facilitated through established relationships the researcher had within the institutional setting (Gay et al., 2009). The colleges/schools selected within Olympic University offer variation to knowledgeable participants. The decision for inclusion of one institution was guided by the review of literature in Chapter 2, an assessment of potential research participants, and the personal subjective judgment of the researcher guided by the

dissertation committee.

To protect the identity of the institution, information that could directly identify it was not included. The study did not purport to represent the experiences of persistence and success of all Black women doctoral students. It did demonstrate the congruent and dissimilar experiences of a selected sample at a similar institution.

## Participant Sample Selection

The criteria for sample size was based on the site selected, the number of potential participants, narrowed to those that where within the specific colleges, and were within the academic phase of interest for this study. A sample of 12 participants was needed representing the colleges/schools of arts and sciences, education, health, and computer sciences. Based on a review of institutional data, there were fewer than 75 Black women doctoral students enrolled by Fall 2011 and they were predominately concentrated within the education college. However, it was uncertain how many of those women were post-comprehensive and/or qualifying examinations; therefore, the intended sample of 12 participants was a reasonable projection based on data.

The sample size for the current study was based on purposeful selection (Patton, 2002) and obtaining participants from whom the most can be learned (Merriam, 2002). The aim was not to determine "how much" or "how often" (Merriam, 2002, p. 12) the experiences occur, but rather to understand. Gobo (2004) concurred that the sampling for social studies was based on representativeness as a practicality rather than a statistical process because the intent in qualitative studies was to examine the "social significance of samples instead of a statistical logic" (p. 436). The intent was to obtain participation that would enable information rich data from participants that understood the nature of

their commitment to the study, and those that have the knowledge and experience to discuss the phenomenon of study (Gay et al., 2009; Patton, 2009). Gay et al. (2009) caution against the idea that sample selection of more participants means greater generalizability. It was noted as "seductive trap" and should be resisted unless more participants would strengthen the understanding (Gay et al., 2009, p. 429). In this study the intent was to obtain participation from each college indicated and not to have over saturation of any program area such as education, although it is the largest.

The IRB protocol for Research with Human Subjects was approved for the study in August 2013. Women included in the analysis were selected as a purposeful sample from enrollment records, which were provided from the associate dean of the graduate school that were used to identify Black doctoral students, based on enrollment status, by Fall 2011, in the colleges/schools of arts and sciences, education, health, and computer sciences. The purposeful sample began with sixty-two women who were identified as being enrolled either part-time or full-time Black doctoral students. The women would have self-identified as being Black based on their initial graduate school application. The enrollment data did not include those women who identified as being Black along with other races. The women were selected from the college/school of arts and sciences, education, and computer sciences at Olympic University to represent a broad range of experiences. The other colleges/schools at the university were not included as they did not have enrolled Black women doctoral students or they were not enrolled as of Fall 2011.

Each participant selected met the criteria below and was able to enrich a deeper understanding and perspective of the research questions.

- Self-identified as being Black;
- Enrolled in a doctoral program (Ph.D. or Ed.D.);
- Had completed their comprehensive and/or qualifying examinations.

Black women were the focus of this study due to the limited research that had been conducted specifically on this subpopulation at the doctoral level and the tendency of literature to collectively analyze the woman experience as referenced from Chapter 1. Research that had previously been conducted, post-baccalaureate, had selected to use the term "graduate" without distinguishing the differences of the experiences between doctoral and masters students. The doctoral experience had numerous periods that were beneficial to research, such as first year, post-graduation, and during the process; however, the specific phase of particular interest for this study were post-comprehensive exams to degree completion, which had not been previously studied. This time frame was not necessarily the "all but dissertation" time frame, but may have included remaining coursework and the dissertation.

The aim was to gather a heterogeneous cohort of Black women from the different colleges previously identified. Interest generated from recruitment endeavors beyond what was needed was reduced to those participants that first met all of the criteria. Final participation selection was based on the overall representativeness from the diversity of programs, those that were willing to be digitally audio recorded, and then those that could be interviewed with the least delay.

## Participant Recruitment Criteria

The author recruited 12 participants from Olympic University during Fall 2011 through their university email account to participate in the study. The email addresses

were obtained from a graduate school associate dean. The recruitment email (see Appendix A) was sent in September 2013. The email disbursement was sent from the associate dean as a method intended to reduce the incidence that potential participants would perceive the email communication as a spam email, but rather an official university communication. The associate dean sent two emails, which generated primarily responses from students within the college/school of education. The email included a brief description of the study and criteria for participation including being a doctoral student who met the demographic requirements, had completed comprehensive and/or qualifying examinations, and a willingness to be interviewed (see Appendix A). Within the email was a request to refer potential participants to the researcher (Herzig, 2002; Patterson-Stewart et al., 1997).

Participants selected for the study were followed up through email and/or telephone call to ensure their appropriateness for the study and to schedule a time for the interview that was convenient. The interviews occurred face-to-face in a private location or over the telephone, whichever was preferred by the participant. Participation in the study was voluntary and there was compensation of a $10.00 Barnes & Noble gift card for the completed interviews.

Due to concerns of over sampling within the college/school of education if a third email was sent, the researcher contacted the graduate program coordinators in the college/schools of arts and sciences and computer sciences for support in recruiting potential participants. The intent was to request the coordinator to also forward the email communication to Black women doctoral students who met the enrollment criteria and who were listed on the enrollment report.

The coordinator for one discipline did not want to contact students. The coordinator stated that their position could yield undue influence on a study that he/she did not endorse. Further, the coordinator stated that if two email communications had been distributed that was evidence that Black women within their discipline did not want to participate. However, another program coordinator for a different college forwarded the email to Black women in his/her program based on the researcher's request. It is noteworthy, that the researcher did have an established previous collegial relationship with that coordinator, which may or may not have contributed to the willingness of support.

A total of 19 women responded to the researcher via email. Three were eliminated due to not completing their comprehensive exams, which was a requirement of the study; however, the women expressed support and offered to share the email with women that they thought might meet the recruitment criteria. Of the remaining 16 women, one woman was eliminated due to her concerns about the time for the proposed interviews, two did not meet the study requirements of doctoral program admittance by Fall 2011, and the remaining three were from the same program in the college of education where there were already six participants, thus oversampling of that college was a concern, therefore 12 participants were included as a part of the study sample.

## Participant Interview Procedures

Twelve semi-structured interviews were scheduled based on their availability. Three were conducted on the telephone and nine were scheduled face-to-face at an agreed upon location from September to October 2013. Participants signed the informed consent form (see Appendix E) and were provided a copy of the signed document. The

researcher shared some basic introductory information about herself to establish a rapport such as program of study, time in program, personal demographic information, an example of a barrier, and an important facilitator to persistence and degree completion. The semi-structured interviews (see Appendix D) were between 37 minutes and one hour and 44 minutes.

The participants were asked all ten questions from the interview questionnaire (see Appendix D). Questions 4 – 7 had particular significance to persistence and degree completion, as the questions focused on the facilitators and barriers to both constructs. The researcher was clear to communicate prior to the interview that the focus would be on persistence and degree completion. When questions shifted from one construct to another the researcher tried to underscore the difference with either tonal inflection and/or restating the question. The other questions were important and provided contextual information that was relevant such as background and perceptions of doctoral degree experience; however, a significant portion of the analysis was based the responses from questions 4 – 7.

## Participant Compensation

Participants were compensated with a $10.00 gift card from Barnes & Noble. The participants all signed a photocopy of the gift card they received. A few of the participants were surprised at the compensation, although it had been noted in the recruitment email. One participant refused to accept the gift card because she strongly felt that she and the researcher were colleagues and her support of the study did not warrant compensation. All interviews were digitally audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher.

## Participant Data Summary

The participants came from Olympic University located in the Southeastern part of the United States. The women were enrolled both part-time and full-time in the college/schools of education, computer sciences, and arts and sciences. Five of the women had an educational background at an HBCU and six reported being a first generation college and/or doctoral degree student.

All of the women reported being from family unit; none reported being an only child or being alone without any type of family or extended family support. The women ranged at an estimated age of 25 to 60, with the majority of the women averaging at approximately 30 years of age. The women primarily selected Olympic University due to proximity for the family and current employment. The women did discuss that the university was a good institution, but did not specify what constituted a good university.

The opportunity for financial support was important, but was not indicated as a primary consideration for selection for Olympic University with the exception of participants from the college/school of computer science and one from the college of education. Many of those women had multi-year funding that was determined prior to their enrollment and was not directly associated to Olympic University. A few of the participants in the college/school of education and arts and sciences also had multi-year funding resources, but those were provided contingent upon enrollment at Olympic or applied for when they enrolled. Funding did not heavily influence the decision to enroll at Olympic for the majority of women. All of the participants indicated that at the time of their interview they either were funded or had previously received funding. Funding was

noted as being school loans, philanthropic awards, fellowships, and/or graduate assistantships.

Participants were ensured confidentiality; however, it was difficult to provide specific demographic information within the analysis to protect participant's identities (Herzig, 2002). For example, a participant of a specific age, in a certain program may be easily identifiable due to the limited numbers that Black women represent in doctoral programs. The discipline was expected to impact how much demographic information could be disseminated without comprising the privacy of the participant. Participants were invited to select a pseudonym to further protect their identities.

The interviews were generally very open conversations. To a certain extent the participants did self-censor their responses, which may have been related to knowing the researcher or uncertainty about how much information to disclose. There were at least three occasions were the interviews became intensely personal where the women were tearful in sharing experiences that elicited a deeper emotive response that was a valuable source of insight to the deeper conflicted meanings embedded in the experiences. The women also vocally and facially displayed frustration and temperament over topics when discussing related to faculty and race. Table 7 shows information about the participants. All of the women were at various stages of their doctoral degrees. All were post-qualifying comprehensive examinations. Five of the women discussed specifically in some capacity their comprehensive exam experiences. Some had reported that they had completed their comprehensive examinations within one month of their scheduled interview and a few participants were close to graduation, with the remainder of the women being an estimated 3 to 6 months or greater from their examinations.

## Key Informant Recruitment Criteria

Key informants were invited to participate in a short interview, which provided basic information about the current status of programs and support services available to minority doctoral students at the institution. The aim was to obtain representation from one or more offices within the institution that can speak to services provided toward doctoral student success. The informants worked in offices delineated as academic student affairs and from the graduate school. The informants possessed knowledge about the program offerings within their specific division. The informants were asked to discuss informally resources for persistence and degree persistence and degree completion of doctoral students and especially those in marginalized groups. Those conversations were included as a method to fact check accessible institutional resources. No questions were asked regarding key informant personal opinions or experiences.

Table 7: Participant information

| Name | Program | Interview |
|---|---|---|
| Casey | Computer Science | Face-to-face |
| Annabella | Computer Science | Face-to-face |
| Nadia | Computer Science | Telephone |
| Paige | Arts & Sciences | Face-to-face |
| Darlene | Arts & Sciences | Telephone |
| Judith | Arts & Sciences | Telephone |
| Jessica | Education | Face-to-face |
| Justine | Education | Face-to-face |
| Monroe | Education | Face-to-face |
| Lyndsey | Education | Face-to-face |
| Kelly | Education | Face-to-face |
| Jae | Education | Face-to-face |

## Key Informant Interview Protocol

The key informant interview protocol (Appendix F) was used to obtain information about the institutional structures that promoted doctoral student persistence and degree completion. The specific intent was to collect information to be included in the research data that can further illuminate the services provided to students. Informant data was an informal interview; however, it was not recorded, but notes were taken. Informants were able to provide insight into the programmatic endeavors such as professional development, dissertation writing, socialization opportunities or other-related resources of their respective offices, but not speaking to the experiences of Black women doctoral students.

It was important to distinguish the informant interview from the Black women participant interview, which was recorded. The key informants were only asked to provide additional information about the programmatic resources that are offered to students and how those services may or may not directly impact Black women doctoral students. The interviews with Black women reference their perspectives of the doctoral experience. Informants were not asked to verify or confirm attendance of any of the Black women participants who may or may not have attended offered programs.

### Key Informant Procedures

Two key informants were informally interviewed to aid in the triangulation of data. The interviews were not recorded; however, notes were taken, and occurred on the campus of Olympic University. The key informant process could occur either face-to-face or over the telephone. The conversations were intended to be informal thus there was not a scheduled time and place, but rather occurred organically. Participation was

completely voluntary; no compensation was given, as these were university employees. The informal conversations took less than 30 minutes to complete. The advantage was that the questioning could be modified and the information obtained could provide interesting recommendations; however, a disadvantage was that it would not be recorded; therefore, the researcher notes were the only source of data information from the encounter.

The informants were asked to respond to questions (see Appendix F) related to their understanding of the programs and services that were provided from the offices which they represented. It was stressed that their responses should not be their opinions or beliefs, but specific the services provided to students. To protect the identities and the specific offices from which information was obtained, only limited data can be provided. As a broad generalization one informant came from a division within the graduate school and the other from a division within academic affairs. Interviews occurred separately and both were brief, taking between 5 – 10 minutes to complete.

## Theoretical Considerations

It was important to have a theory that would enable the experiences of Black women to be central to the data analysis and not circumspect to theories based on more privileged groups. BFT was introduced and described in Chapter 1 as the theoretical framework for this study. The theoretical base provided a position that signified the oppression of gender and race and the inequalities in the doctoral program that make it difficult to persist to degree completion. The interviews were accepted as truth; there was not an attempt to rationalize or explain away participants' stories. A key tenet of BFT employs a method for Black women to resist being 'othered' or 'less than.' The

theory has implications for critically understanding the voices of the participants from places of pluralistic marginalization and the intersection of race and gender (Collins, 2009). BFT represented a mechanism to understand the struggle of Black women in academia while confronting injustice (Collins, 2009). The inclusion of a feminist framework underscored the nuanced perspective of Black women and provided a lens to consider their layered identities to continually juxtapose the dialogue of their experiences of persistence through oppression and while confronting a dominant ontology (May, 2002). This theoretical framework was selected to facilitate the interview protocol and aided in the development of the codes used to understand the experiences of the participants.

## Data Analysis Procedure

All transcribed interviews were read multiple times to identify key themes, and to consider the perspective of participants, and the interactions within the academy. The inductive process was used to analyze participant interviews. Qualitative "thematic analysis" (Ezzy, 2002, p. 83) was a deductive form of content analysis that was applied to the interview data to extrapolate codes, patterns, and themes. In this study, preliminary coding categories could be generated from Table 4 that presented a more organized and in-depth exploration of primary themes and subheadings. The aim was to understand the meanings and shared experiences of participants, through reflection, review of themes, and field notes (Patton, 2009). It was anticipated that the responses would yield both similar and dissimilar experiences.

The analysis included the use of computer assisted qualitative data analysis and research software ATLAS.ti. Use of electronic software enabled the management of data

and contributed to the data analysis and coding (Merriam, 2002). However, this did not preclude the researcher from performing due diligence in understanding the theory considerations or having a poorly designed and implemented study (Mitteness & Barker, 2004).

Transferability of the findings was applicable based on the theoretical propositions of Black women doctoral students attending PWIs. According to Merriam (2002), transferability of qualitative research was based on the reader's ability to determine what was applicable from the presented study to their current situation. The researcher must include sufficient detail (i.e., thick description, of the study's context for the reader to make possible connections) (Merriam, 2002). This was a challenge for this study due to the need to maintain the anonymity of participants respective to their discipline. The researcher needed to carefully negotiate the balance of providing a holistic detailed description of the institution. This study could generate findings that are transferable to other contexts; however, they were based on a close match of the researchers study and the reader's situation (Merriam, 2002).

The analysis revealed minimal differences in participant responses between persistence and degree completion. During the development of the study it was believed that there would some differences; however, as noted in Chapter 2 there was fluidity between the themes of success, thus being suggestive of demonstrative continuity between persistence and degree completion. The participants frequently made comments that indicated the repetition of their thoughts with the use of phrases "again" or "as I have said earlier." Their use of language to indicate the repetition demonstrated that the women did not interpret the questions of persistence and degree completion significantly

different. Due to this real alignment based on how the participants responded to the interview questions, the themes were separated to address the research questions based on a more critical understanding of the overall context of their responses. For example, responses that were grounded in narrative about the classroom experiences were connected to persistence (i.e., Research Question 1); whereas, experiences that discussed the writing phase or post-comprehensive exams were related to degree completion (i.e., Research Question 2).

The thematic analysis of coded data provided an in-depth understanding of the perceptions of Black women doctoral students as they emerged from the semi-structured interviews of participants. Those data triangulated with key informant data, institutional archival data (i.e., website information), and previous literature construct data laden responses to the research questions posed.

## Interview Transcription Procedures

Two hundred and thirty-six pages of interview data were transcribed verbatim by the researcher, which enabled greater depth of familiarity with data content. All participants provided pseudonyms with the exception of one participant who requested the researcher to provide one. Excerpts from participants' interviews were used in this chapter to illustrate their perspectives. The use of quotes from the original transcripts to support emerging themes allowed for the use of rich and descriptive data that centered the participants' realities (Johnson-Bailey, 2004). Participant quotes that have been provided in the analysis were truncated for clarity and readability with words such as "um" and "uh" removed. Personal identifying information was removed.

To protect the participants' privacy limited information is provided, such as the specific programs in which the women were enrolled. In some cases participants were the only one within a program although the college may be large with many Black women. For example, the college/school of education has many different disciplines; however, the selected participant may have been the only Black female or one of two Black females within that discipline, which would have made it difficult to protect her anonymity.

## Coding Procedures

Data were analyzed to identify emergent themes and concepts across the women's stories (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002). The interviews were read multiple times, printed and manually coded prior to using the computer-assisted ATLAS.ti software. The manual paper/pen open first round of coding was initially completed and then a second round of coding was completed in ATLAS.ti. The software enabled the open coding of each interview or primary document, for content, section-by-section and line-by-line that was similar to the paper/pen coding. This essential double-round coding process, paper/pen and ATLAS.ti coding, of the interviews allowed for thoughtful consideration of the meanings of the rich interview narratives and what meanings or themes could be assigned across the multiple interviews. The second analysis of the coding addressed inconsistencies in the coding scheme and revealed patterns that were beginning to emerge across the interviews.

## Use of ATLAS.ti

ATLAS.ti version 7.1.8 was used as a repository for transcribed interviews. The interviews were stored as primary documents (P-Docs). Each document was coded

utilizing the open coding and in vivo coding features. ATLAS.ti allowed for the use of a highlight feature to denote text segments, referred to as quotations, which were coded (Smit, 2002). Codes were based on words, phrases, sentences, and/or sections. The electronic software allowed for data to be organized and managed and for the documents to be compared and contrasted. ATLAS.ti enabled the use of memos; spaces were reflective notes that the researcher had about a particular word, phrase, sentence, or segment of narrative. Memos could be visually distinguished from codes in ATLAS.ti and could be linked through the analysis procedures with quotations, which enabled the overall understanding of the narrative.

Once the data were coded, analysis queries were run using the co-occurrence options across primary documents. The network view manager was also used to conceptually understand the data trends. Through the trial and error and multiple iterations of queries there was an in depth understanding of the data codes and emergent themes. It was through interview transcription, the use of pen/paper coding, data storage and sorting in ATLAS.ti, and multiple iterations of charts that the researcher was sufficiently immersed in the data to meaningfully code the data and then provide thematic interpretation.

Code Assignment

Codes were initially assigned broadly to reflect personal and institutional barriers or facilitators and persistence or degree completion; however, some of the more nuanced responses that the women articulated were not necessarily being infused within the codes. Therefore, new thematic codes were developed and applied so that a more complete

coding scheme was developed. Initial codes and themes were identified from Table 4. Broader themes were synthesized and are presented as part of the analysis.

## Credibility of Data

Interviews concluded with the researcher debriefing with each participant for approximately five to ten minutes to clarify any discrepancies based on notes or thoughts that occurred during the interview. The debriefing period was an initial member check for participants to share any additional thoughts or concerns following the recorded interview. The process of member checking was a measure to ensure the trustworthiness of collected data and to validate the data and interpretations (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Merriam, 2002). The continued member checking process was important to the overall context of the participants' rich narratives and ensured that their perspectives were not skewed.

Each participant received a copy of her verbatim interview transcription via email. Participants were requested to review the transcription and provide feedback. One participant sought clarification regarding the use of her name and the use of others during the interview process. The participant was reminded that she would be identified by her pseudonym and that any names used during the interview process would be removed. During the coding and subsequent transcription process two participants graduated from the university.

The interview data were triangulated checking for themes across the interviews, the use of informant data, and institutional data. The triangulated data reduced the chances of researcher biases by grounding the perspectives to data obtained from multiple data sources.

## Sources of Data

Primary sources of data for this "basic interpretive qualitative study" (Merriam, 2002, p. 37) came from participant interviews, key informants, and institutional and participant documentation. The following sections provided details of the related sources of data.

### Interview Source of Data

#### Structure of Interview Protocol - Black Women Interview Protocol

Interview design was semi-structured and was anticipated to be a maximum of two hours to complete with the intent to understand the phenomenon of persistence and degree completion from the perspective of the participant. According to Merriam (2002) interview questions should be developed to seek "meaning, understanding, and process" (p. 19). Use of a semi-structured protocol encouraged dialogue from participants (Mansfield et al., 2010) and functioned as a guide to "stimulate and guide discussions...to follow important emergent threads, enrich the experience for participants, and gather more detailed qualitative data" (Malone & Barabino, 2008, p. 493). The participant interview protocol (Appendix D) listed several key interview questions that explored different aspects of the participants' experience and perceptions. The protocol served as a guide and time may not permit for all questions to be asked.

#### Interview Process

The individual interviews were anticipated to take no more than two hours to conduct with a plan for an additional follow-up interview to address any discrepancies from the initial interview, if needed. The interviews commenced after the researcher reviewed the informed consent (Appendix E) with the participants, gave them a chance to

read it, ask questions, and then sign the form. The request was made that interviews would be digitally audio recorded and then deleted after being transcribed verbatim for use with the data analysis. The interviews took place at an agreed upon location or over the telephone between the researcher and each participant. The interviews attempted to identify what participants perceived as influencing their persistence and progress toward degree completion. The inclusion of questions directed toward persistence and degree completion contributed to the analysis process and enabled the participants to consider the two constructs separately.

A strategy of basic interpretive qualitative design was that the researcher was the "…primary instrument for data collection and data analysis" (Merriam, 2002, p. 5). The researcher cannot presume to "…speak for all aspects of the Black [culture]" as it related to persistence; however, there was the ability to connect with the participants and had a cultural framework to analyze the narratives (White, 1998, p. 95). Therefore, similar to the Tisdell (2000) study, the researcher shared with participants some of her academic and personal background to establish a rapport and create a natural "shared conversation" rather than from an oppositional "othered" or marginalized experience (p. 69).

Document and Observation Sources of Data

Prior to the interview, each participant, who indicated an interest and willingness to participate, was emailed to confirm that she successfully completed her comprehensive and/or qualifying examinations. Originally, the intent was to request for participants to provide documentation verifying the successful completion of examinations; however, it was determined that there was no gainful incentive for dishonesty and the compensation for the interviews was relatively low.

Data related to the institution was taken from the respective webpage, which was another document source. The webpage provided access to institutional media information, including promotional materials, student handbooks, and student organizations. According to Merriam (2002) on-line data collected from web pages could be a source of data that was interwoven into the rich description. For example, according to a 2007 minority report available online at Olympic University, the diversity was second only to that of another state institution. According to the same report improvements were still needed to understand why minority students fail to matriculate. That information was useful in understanding the resources available to students and avenues of access to the sample population. The information available on the institutional webpages contributed to the overall triangulation of data.

Field notes that the researcher took were included as both a document source of data and were included as observations noted during the face-to-face interviews. Informal observations may note body language during interviews or general notes of the setting. These notes will include data relevant to the phenomenon being studied and could provide insight to the topic (Merriam, 2002).

Triangulation of data

The multiple sources of information contributed to the trustworthiness of the data. In this current study, triangulation of data included multiple sources: participant and key informant protocol interviews, documentation from participants, and the review of institutional web pages; member checks of transcribed data by participants and inviting their review of emerging data findings, and observations noted by the researcher while conducting interviews. Triangulation emphasizes the broader context of a complex

phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 2002).

Trustworthiness of the data was ensured through member checks (Guba & Lincoln, 1982) with interview participants, triangulation of data, and the assumptions, biases and understandings of the researcher. In this current dissertation study a "peer review process" (Merriam, 2002, p. 26) was systematically built in to allow for review of data and coding procedures to determine if research findings are plausible. Collectively the sources of data provided a holistic image of persistence and degree completion.

## Summary

Chapter 3 focused on the methodology of the current research study. A rationale for the use of qualitative case study was provided. The study sought findings that contributed to a richer understanding of persistence for Black women's doctoral students and their personal and institutional perceptions of contributors for persistence and completion. Chapter 3 provided an overview of the intended sample, setting, data collection and analysis procedures. One institution was selected for this study. The sample included 12 women from the schools of arts and sciences, education, and computer science. Data collection came from participant and key informants, institutional documents and webpages, field notes maintained by the researcher, and coded thematic categories. The data from participant interviews were digitally recorded and then transcribed. The analysis procedures included triangulation of data, member check of findings with participants, and peer review with members of the dissertation committee. Data were coded to identify themes and make connections to the theoretical framework, BFT. IRB approval was obtained for this study.

The transferability of the findings was limited to similar described samples and

settings. The findings were anticipated to be valuable to the limited body of research on Black women in doctoral programs and their experiential perspective of persistence and degree completion. The multiple data sources within this current study lent to the credibility of the findings and counterbalanced the small sample.

# CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of Black women doctoral students based on the following research questions: 1) How did Black women perceive the influence of personal and institutional characteristics on their doctoral degree persistence at PWIs, and 2) How did Black women in the later stages of their doctoral program perceive the personal and institutional characteristics that would facilitate their doctoral degree completion at PWIs? Chapter 4 provides the findings from the thematic analysis of data collected through semi-structured interviews from 12 Black women doctoral students at Olympic University during Fall 2013.

## Findings

Thematic analysis revealed that, across the disciplines that there were not significantly different responses from the participants when asked questions related questions related to persistence and then degree completion. There was great synergy between the narratives when examined based on conditional relationships. Themes such as 'time management' and 'faculty interactions' were discussed across both research question constructs. The thematic interpretations of some of the data were not categorically confined, but flowed from one defined standpoint such as persistence to another spatial time (i.e., degree completion). Therefore, suggesting that participants may not necessarily perceive persistence as temporal, but rather as longitudinal and that the concepts were strongly interrelated.

In order to contribute to reader clarity and precision to follow the robust data findings, two data tables were provided. Table 8 showed the themes and subthemes related to the first research question and the construct 'persistence'. Table 9 showed the themes related to the second research question and the construct 'degree completion'. The tables may be suggestive of content analysis rather than thematic analysis; however, they do reveal prevalence within the responses across interviews. Thematic analysis is more nuanced than just counts and frequencies; the tables provide the reader with a reference for the forthcoming data. The interpreted data were categorized into themes to address the guiding research questions for this study.

The first thematic analysis focused on the participants' personal and institutional characteristics that contributed to their persistence generated one theme for the personal barrier and three themes for the institutional barriers. Lack of self-confidence was identified as the one personal barrier theme for the first research question. The subthemes associated with lack of self-confidence were (a) academic ability, (b) questioning or doubting, (c) feelings of isolation, and (d) social and cultural capital. There were three primary themes associated with institutional barriers: (a) inadequate funding, (b) access to information, and (c) faculty interactions (see Table 8). There were two subthemes for funding, (a) general funding and (b) cheap labor. The subthemes for faculty interactions were (a) navigate and negotiate, (b) classroom experiences, (c) advisor relationships, and (d) absence and presence of Black faculty. All four major themes and sub-themes will be explained below with specific exemplars.

The second research question had three themes (a) time management as a personal barrier, (b) belief in self as personal facilitator, and (c) extended advisor support and

accountability for institutional facilitators. A subtheme to time management was juggling roles and competing interests. Institutional support resources were a subtheme to extended advisor support and accountability. No unifying institutional barrier for degree completion was identified; however, variations in narratives were provided to demonstrate the individualist perceptions of Black women. The themes are presented in Table 9. Progressing forward data will be discussed relative to Research Question 1 initially, and then Research Question 2.

Table 8: Research Question 1: Contributing characteristics to persistence

| Barrier or Facilitator | Theme | Subtheme | Frequency | Interviews |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Personal Barrier | Lack of self-confidence | A. Lack of academic ability | 14 | 7 |
| | | B. Questioning or doubting | 15 | 8 |
| | | C. Feelings of isolation | 15 | 7 |
| | | D. Social and cultural capital | 7 | 6 |
| Institutional Barriers | Inadequate funding | A. General funding | 33 | 10 |
| | | B. Cheap labor | 16 | 4 |
| | Access to information | | 19 | 7 |
| | Faculty interactions | Navigate and negotiate<br>A. Faculty and advisor control<br>B. Socialization | 71 | 11 |
| | | Social prejudice in classroom experiences | 25 | 11 |
| | | Advisor relationships | 27 | 9 |
| | | Absence and presence of Black faculty | 23 | 10 |
| Personal Facilitators | Family support | | 46 | 11 |
| | Faith and spirituality | | 20 | 6 |
| Institutional Facilitators | Cohort or peers | | 28 | 10 |

| Table 9: Research Question 2: Contributing characteristics to degree completion | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Barrier or Facilitator | Theme | Subtheme | Frequency | Interviews |
| | | | | |
| Personal Barrier | Time management | Juggling roles and competing interests | 57 | 12 |
| Institutional Barrier | N/A | | | |
| Personal Facilitator | Belief in self | | 32 | 12 |
| Institutional Facilitator | Extended advisor support and accountability | Institutional support resources | 33 | 12 |

## Findings Related to Research Question 1

The following addresses the first research question and provides findings from the participant interviews. How do Black women perceive the influence of personal and institutional characteristics on their doctoral degree persistence at PWIs? The question primarily examined persistence for Black women. The emergent themes are described and the narratives included affirmed the following findings.

First, it was important to note that at least two of the women framed meaning to the term persistence that was different from the operationalized defined meaning associated with this study. Jae, who is in the college/school of education, contended that "95% of the time that persistence is going to come from [a Black woman's] internal mechanisms, that internal drive that keeps her going." This statement suggested that persistence might stem from intrinsic values and beliefs of doctoral students. Monroe, also in the college/school of education, concurred with Jae's assessment of persistence, "when it comes down to it, it comes out to the individual person. It's something that's within us" that was the determinate of doctoral degree persistence.

Personal barriers to persistence

Lack of Self-Confidence

The lack of self-confidence emerged from the data analysis to address a dynamic intrinsic issue of beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions that students had relative to their doctoral experience and how it related to persistence. The need for self-confidence was understood as a personal adjustment that was necessary to enable Black women to transition and integrate within their respective doctoral programs. The participants notably expressed a lack of confidence in some instances, specifically characterized by a lack of academic ability, questioning or doubting of self, feelings of isolation, and distantly connected to family education. Eight of the twelve women discussed issues of self-confidence as a personal barrier to persistence (see Table 8).

A. Lack of academic ability

The first example of lack of confidence was thematically demonstrated as doubt of individual academic ability. Even though stated with humor, the statement from Paige, "if I was smarter, I would be farther along, I really would be" related to perceptions of ineptitude. Judith expressed that a "refresher" course may have been helpful for her due to her program being "kind of massive statistics intensive . . . I should have had more stats background . . . before this program." When asked if she knew prior to enrolling about the amount of statistics required, Judith stated, "I found that out after I got in." Jae who found her program difficult from the onset expressed a similar narrative of self-doubt. Her particular narrative became more complex as she discussed concerns positioned within the broader context of race. Another layer of Jae's narrative was that she discussed feeling "very inadequate" due to a personal issue, which other participants

noted as nuanced to their discourses. However, Jae acknowledged that because she had been recommended for her program of study "I didn't set out to prove anything."

[T]he first course that I took . . . made me want to pack up and leave . . . it was a very, very rigorous course . . . I was overwhelmed. I didn't know . . . the technology . . . I felt . . . completely lost . . . [did faculty] think that . . . I measure up . . . there's always that question of . . . are you good enough . . . I would have to prove myself.

B. Questioning or doubting

A second example of the lack of confidence was through questioning or doubting of enrollment such as was the case for Monroe, Casey, and Jessica. In particular, Monroe and Casey were enrolled in different programs and displayed different personalities, yet shared a highly cohesive discourse across disciplines related to their sense of belonging within their programs. Monroe expressed feelings of anxiety. "I was always fearful of looking like why, why did [my advisor or faculty member] pick [me]. I mean [I'm not] smart. I feel like people will . . . find a way to tear you down . . . I've been told I can't write . . . you always want to be the top of your game."

Externalized social pressures impacted the internalized perceptions for Black women doctoral students and was demonstrated as being deficient in concrete behaviors such as writing skills, lacking personalized agency, and affective dimensions (i.e., "overwhelmed" or "fearful"). This contributed to the questioning of a personal sense of value including issues of trust and respect. The lower levels of confidence do not necessarily equate to low grades, but do result in psychosomatic turmoil that impacts the level of satisfaction in a program. Women may become at risk for persistence due to diminishing levels of confidence.

Similarly, Casey shared "I always look at it like well maybe [my advisor or faculty member] said something and that's how I got into the program." The women articulated the marginalized existence of Black women while giving a glimpse into the realities of non-acceptance from their perspective. The women had an internalized awareness of not being accepted, which would only magnify emotions related to lack of confidence. The doubt could be understood as contributing to the lack of confidence by contributing to the destruction of both cognition and psychological well being and contributed to lack of confidence by allowing the participant to internalize a negative discourse of belonging. Jessica discussed feelings of doubt that included race and gender.

…I believe that since as a Black woman I am so out numbered. That I probably have had more doubts that creep in. More questions about whether or not I should be here. Can I do this? Do I deserve this?

The narratives alluded to the contention that Black women doctoral students experienced psychological stress when they perceived being less qualified. There were continual questions and emotions about whether or not their admission was legitimate and whether the women should have positive feelings in accordance with being admitted. Jessica's narrative was tearfully conveyed as she continued to discuss her concerns related to her low socioeconomic status (SES). She felt that it was important to not only successfully persist, but recognized future options that her terminal degree would provide her. Jessica stated, "I want to have the knowledge that I feel like I . . . have gained . . . throughout this process, but I also want to be different from . . . the stats and the stereotypes." Consequently, this was also a shared narrative that Justine connected with,

"my own self doubt, needing to get out of my way." This was a similar narrative to Kelly who talked about her doubts leading up to comprehensive examinations.

> …I started doubting myself . . . like, okay, can I finish this? Will I be able to pass? What if I don't pass? Will I be able to go back to what I used to do? . . . I really started getting discouraged . . . it was overwhelming . . . it was amplified . . . because it was [a] . . . make or break type thing.

The challenge that resonated for the women was that there was a tremendous amount of self-talk occurring that was creating more anxiety and contributing to academic pressure.

The sense of questioning is prevalent across all disciplines. Annabella discussed how she had been placed on academic probation during her first semester before taking any classes. She explained that it was due her standardized test scores, but she felt that "if [the standardized test] scores are low, why admit me in?" Annabella stated that she would have been fine not being admitted because she was already doing research, but she disliked having to do extra promotional things for her program when she didn't see any of her colleagues doing the same and it left with a "little bit of a bad taste."

Monroe in the college/school of education discussed how she was aware that as a Black woman there were differences in perception of competence.

> …when you are a . . . White man . . . no one questions you . . . you have that presence about you that kind of commands respect . . . you could be like the dumbest person, but everyone just thinks that you know before you even open your mouth they just give you this credit . . . this ability . . . being a Black . . . woman . . . I can't mess up . . . I'm very hard on myself. [Due to an obstacle of public speaking] I'll kind of like stutter or I'll blank out . . . I'm like oh crap they're going to think I am this dumb Black

girl {laughs}.

Thematically the quotation from Monroe transcends the other interviews that identified issues related to lack of confidence and specifically addressed the within issue of questioning or doubt. Her narrative presented the complexity of Black women doctoral students that acknowledged the real differences in interactions on both the racial and gender levels and further the intrinsic shaming practices that Black women apply to themselves through layered interpretive self-talk assertions such as 'dumb' and overwhelming pressure to succeed. There is also an attempt to equalize the academic world, but Monroe explains in her quote the difficulties of doing that when there is a feeling of lack of respect from the onset. The quote is demonstrative for Monroe of the pressures that she feels as a Black woman to perform academically and the psychological strain that is exerted.

C. Feelings of isolation

A third example of self-confidence was magnified by feelings of isolation and being the only one. This was especially noticed in the college/school of computer science, where more so than any other discipline, the women are frequently enrolled from undergraduate to doctoral students. The women in computer sciences do not follow the traditional academic trajectory of undergraduate, master's, and then doctoral. There seemed to be inadequate transition or guidance for these women from undergraduate into doctoral programs. These women were frequently much younger and are in disciplines that are characterized as White male or international dominated fields. Both Casey and Annabella were in the college/school of computer science and shared similar experiences and narratives. Casey first explained how difficult it is to be a female.

> …I felt like I started to give up cause it felt like it was just so much . . . I guess I felt like…I didn't want to look dumb or I didn't want to look like . . . [I] . . . should know this and I think that's just something . . . inside of me because I don't know . . . I think that is a barrier and yeah having the confidence basically in general so not even um not only going to speak to him [advisor] um I would know in our . . . lab meetings . . . I'm the only girl.

Casey frequently patterned her discourse with "I don't know." Linguistically it was not that she did not understand, but rather it appeared to emphasize the uncertainty and discomfort that she felt. From the section above, Casey acknowledged a difference in her interactions than those of her male colleagues. Casey by far was the most open in her discussion related to the lack of confidence. Lack of confidence was problematized as a salient subtext for gender and racial and issues. Casey continued to explain how her lack of assertiveness was an issue.

> I see the other guys they'll say something like well wouldn't it be a good idea because and he [advisor] would be like oh, oh okay but I just feel like I don't know. I, it's . . . not my place I just, I don't know, I guess, I don't have the confidence enough or the assertiveness to just, I don't know, to just go back and forth I guess . . .

Casey discussed how the inability to engage in discussions within the academic setting may have stemmed from being at a PWI. She provided at least two references within her narrative to support her contention. First, she felt like White students were more confident because they had the backgrounds that supported their base or that they had the cultural capital that made their academic rationales seem reasonable. "I feel like being at

a . . . predominately White institution . . . I don't know how to say this. I feel like they're more confident in . . . what they say."

A second reference was that Casey stated that "I didn't really worry about my color, but it wasn't until I came here . . . like was I smart enough." Casey had previously provided in an earlier section of her narrative an example where she felt "weird" about being seen with only Black students. The researcher queried the statement that there was a need for the inclusion of someone White. Casey stated, "I try to include somebody else." She continued to discuss how it was important to her to not contribute to stereotypical racialized caricatures. "I don't want them [faculty] to think I am just like 'oh girl.'" Her statement of "oh girl" was made with colloquial nuanced vocalization and head bobbing movements. The overall contention that Casey asserted was that she was aware that "judgments" were being made of her and that while they may not be "as bad as I am thinking" she did not want to subtly contribute in anyway to them, "I'm not this stereotype. I am cautious about if I do this little thing, will they think I am the stereotype, you know."

Annabella echoed the sentiments expressed the anguish of being the "…only one . . . being a female . . . and Black . . . in the class and predominately White male classes when group projects came up . . . you're the last kid who gets to be picked." Her narrative alludes to the awareness of 'tokenism' and the frustration of how both race and gender were used decisively to contribute to the emotive of isolation. At times it was difficult to discern if a lack of confidence was the primary issue or if it functioned as a coping mechanism. Annabella discussed how she was aware of the lack of other Blacks in her department who were faculty or students so she felt like she was "in this bubble"

by herself and if she just put her head down and "just focused on the work" the isolation would be tolerable. The expressed notion of "keeping her head down" seemed to be an unintentional representation of an internalized lack in confidence that may not be the actualized reality of her life. Those experiences caused for Annabella to feel more isolated and created awareness that "little boundaries" would be important for her; whereas Casey's experiences eroded her confidence and created enormous self-doubt.

Sallee (2011) suggested that interaction behaviors such as heated intellectual discussions and conflict were linked to notions of hierarchy and gendered as masculine traits. Faculty encouraged students to use competition as a method to push each other's research forward (Sallee, 2011). The notion of competitiveness in the form of academic banter may have confounded Casey as an expected classroom normative experience.

D. Social and Cultural Capital

A fourth example was scarcity of social and cultural capital such as minimal family education. This example was distantly related to personal self-confidence; however, many of the women were first-generation college and/or doctoral students who lacked the family backgrounds that supported knowledge of advanced degrees. Jessica discussed how it "…would have been an easier process if . . . some [family] had gone through [the doctoral process]." During the interview, Jessica stated that the lack of having someone within her family to "shepherd" her through the process was a disadvantage of persisting within a program. The ability to understand that there may be passive information that is relayed within an educated family structure is vitally important to the continuation of women doctoral students.

Conversely, the lack of social and cultural capital inferred that participants entered into their respective programs at a slight disadvantage. Judith stated that culturally, Black women did not go to school to receive a doctoral degree, that there was a greater emphasis for women to become a wife and mother. In the case of, Judith and Monroe, their narratives were frequented with expectations regarding cultural norms. For Monroe there was a greater expectation to follow the guidance of her father regarding which institution she attended. The women expressed levels of independence, but foundationally they were originated from social and cultural capital starting points that placed women and high levels of education at low thresholds.

Institutional: Barriers

Inadequate Funding

A. General funding

General funding was discussed by 10 of the 12 participants (see Table 8). Inadequate funding was a mechanism that linked students to institutional resources and specifically the research aspects of being a doctoral student. Ten of the women discussed challenges related to the limitations of funding in general terms; four participants focused specifically on how funding was devised as means of "cheap labor."

At least two of the women had to modify their enrollment status due to the scarcity of financial support. The women had to change from full-time to part-time status for at least one term. Funding according to Judith was "not only about the money, it [was] about the relationship to the institution." Funding was understood as an integral and nuanced link with a professor. Funding issues were a common challenge to negotiating the costs of tuition (Ong et al., 2011). According to Gaston (2004) Black

students without funding that supported the development of teaching and research skills during doctoral programs, reduced the changes of obtaining and succeeding in a tenure-track faculty position. The lack of that relationship according to Judith meant that students were "clueless . . . about what you should be doing." Judith in the college/school of arts and sciences expounded that she believed at other institutions, doctoral students who were admitted received funding. This may be a very troubling message for non-funded students in programs especially Black women who may already feel uncertain about their presence in a doctoral program. Their perception of lack of funding may or may not have a correlational relationship to additional resources. Within her college/school of arts and sciences, Judith explained that the director of the program "funded people [that the director believed] would be successful in the program" and that if a student did not receive funding it was analogous to the director stating that an "investment" of resources would not be good for that student.

The change in economic circumstances was a disheartening realization to doctoral matriculation. Lyndsey, in the college/school of education, explained that "downsizing" from a larger salary to a much smaller one and "coming from a stable income . . . to working part-time that becomes very, very taxing, especially if you've accrued adult bills and so many times we second guess if it is even worth it. Like should I continue this program…" Jae, also in the college/school of education, recounted a similar narrative regarding a reduced salary, "there is never enough money…even as a graduate assistant…it was an okay salary, but when you go from [high salary] to [low salary]…that's a gap there." Funding resources may not duplicate those that participants previously had, but it was important to secure funding that would cover tuition costs. An

important caveat for both Lyndsey and Jae was that both of them had a spouse who may or may not have contributed to their doctoral expenses. Not all of the participants mentioned in their narratives that there was another person in their home that contributed to their daily living expenses.

Jessica, in the college/school of education, had a multi-year funding award, but still had to rely on loans. She acknowledged that the availability of funding made it possible for her to continue her education, "I'm using loans, and I don't necessarily want more debit, but I can pay for it." Jessica explained that her funding award "motivated me and it was part of what motivated me to keep going." Participants such as Jessica, Casey, and Annabella, all with multi-year funding awards seemed less stressed about course enrollment and overall fiscal issues than Nadia or Justine. The latter women expressed more feelings of anxiety related to the limitations of available funding and the constraints that it placed not only on their individually, but their families. While the majority of women may not have full scholarships for their education there was an accepted normative expectation of having to supplement with other resources such as school loans or part-time positions as a teaching assistant.

A challenge for women was that institutional funding in the form of a specific support package paid for tuition, health insurance, and provided a monthly stipend for up to 10 semesters (5 years) of enrollment at least 9 hours according to the institutional website. Once some students entered the dissertation phase of their programs, no longer in course work, they did not meet the requisite enrollment criteria and were ineligible for an assistantship. A challenge for some students, such as those in a particular discipline within the college/school of education, was that the dissertation course was allocated a

maximum of three credit hours. Therefore, the students became ineligible for the funding package. This was a programmatic impediment that restricted funding to 2 – 3 years in some cases for students, depending on their enrollment status. Per the institutional website, assistantship support was more advantageous than fellowship support because it enabled skill development for scholarly pursuits and was routinely supervised by faculty members (Carter, 2002). Judith, from the college/school of arts and sciences, concurred that once students were at the dissertation phase that a fellowship was more beneficial because a "student can really devote time to research, to writing papers, and not to running to go do a 20-hour job, running around that really hinders you…from being productive." Judith's narrative suggests that students would receive a fellowship that would cover tuition and fees, but may not account for basic living expenditures. The critical challenge interwoven within the participant narratives was that inadequate funding contributed to reduction in course load, which meant longer time in a program, and/or increasing in debt due to the need to acquire loans to not only cover tuition and fees, but daily living expenditures.

B. Cheap Labor

The participants sharing of a thematic narrative related to their doctoral experience perception of being exploited employees or used as "cheap labor" was previously recognized as a barrier to persistence (McAlpine et al., 2009; Zhao, Golde, & McCormick, 2007). The challenge was twofold in that not only did the students need the work, but they also knew that they had to be careful in how to confront the inequity of their role. For example in this study, Monroe discussed how, as a graduate assistant she was initially doing "remedial work." She was frustrated by the work she was given and

sent an email to the faculty member whom she was assigned to work. Monroe reminded the faculty member of her major and professional skills and that she would appreciate using her abilities versus those that are far below her. The outcome was that Monroe began doing scholarly work on publications that would "benefit both of us [the faculty member]." She acknowledged; however, that it was still important to not go against faculty. That theme of navigate and negotiate is discussed in a later section of the findings.

Monroe acknowledged how she resented being used to complete tasks that did not expand her academic range, but she also saw how that occurred for other students and faculty. She discussed in low tones how another student made significant contributions to another faculty member's publication, but did not receive any credit for the work. The other student explained to Monroe that was like "slavery." Monroe explained how:

> …the American society [has] thriv[ed] because of slave labor…you know generations of free labor . . . that's . . . a harsh comparison, but its like she's working and she's never going to see credit for that, but that does not only happen to Black girls…"

Monroe continued her narrative to reference that a faculty member had "stole[en]" the work of a White female student and did not give her any credit. The narrative portrayed that the work contributions of some Black women in doctoral programs were undervalued. There was value in the quality of work produced and how it was academically used in the broader academic community such as for grants and publications, but their work was undervalued due to the lack of credit given for the work provided.

To continue with the broader discussion relative to cheap labor, Paige, in the college/school of arts and sciences, asserted a position that was consistent across disciplines.

> I really have a problem with that is just being seen as cheap labor…they're not going to allow you to do much else. When I think there's different positions that would be better served by having graduate students float around in…that would give the graduate student a more varied…scope as far as what they are capable of doing by the time they walk out of here.

The challenge for Paige and Monroe was not only the frustration of being used by their respective departments, but that they had to exert caution to whom they expressed their dissatisfaction due to concerns of reprisal. Herzig (2002) indicated that students were admitted into programs such as mathematics to meet a teaching assistant requirement for the department or to increase the number of domestic students, but were unlikely to succeed; however, there were no data in this study to support that contention and none of the women indicated that they believed the admissions was based on a quota.

Students such as Lyndsey and Annabella were exemplars for perceptions regarding departmental hiring practices related to teaching assistants and the production of research papers. Lyndsey discussed how she was "bamboozled, I was tricked out, so to speak for . . . my scholarship because it became more of about a model of how to get the line items than how to better yourself academically." She questioned and expressed doubts about the admissions decision. "The reasons for which I was selected were for all the wrong reasons…[the faculty member] could take advantage of [me] this work

alcoholic . . . it wasn't for my betterment, it was for the betterment of that particular professor."

Annabella explained how there was no concern for her as an individual, but rather on the work that she was needed to produce:

> …you turn into a workhorse for somebody else . . . to turn out research. They could care less if you have bags under you eyes and you look like you are about to pass out because you have been up for four days. They just want the work to be done or to meet this deadline or to present this poster or give this talk.

Not all the participants felt that their work with the institution was undervalued. Darlene discussed how she sought out opportunities to become involved in multiple departments and the chance to teach was one that she enjoyed. She only talked about her teaching experience during her first year due to the academic requirements of her program within the college/school of arts and sciences.

Access to Information

Lovitts (2005) postulated that knowledge was not only important for doctoral students to construct original research, but during their education they were dependent on the acquisition of formal knowledge or information to develop discipline relevant skills. In this study women seemed to struggle for access to information that they perceived would maximize their college experience and was differentiated from how readily information was available for White students. Bonner and Evans (2004) asserted that lack of access to key information was a frequently reported barrier to doctoral matriculation for minority students. In the interviews this theme was noted differently as between White and Black students, same race students, between faculty member and

student of different races, and dissemination of information within a program. The interviews of Kelly, Nadia, Lyndsey, Jae, and Annabella noted differences that the women experienced. For example, Kelly was the one participant who spoke most decisively about the differences she perceived that "White students receive[d] more information than [Black students]."

The concept of "White privilege" or belief that White faculty provided for White students because of race was a similar theme in previous research of Black women doctoral students (Patterson-Stewart et al., 1997, p. 493). Similarly, Johnson-Bailey (2004) asserted that intentional exclusion from formal and informal networks such as publication opportunities was a concern for Black graduate students. Kelly in the college/school of education felt that Black students had to intentionally search for information such as organizations and conferences. She explained that while faculty within the department where helpful and that was a positive, it was the fact that as a student there was the necessity or "the fact that you have to ask" was enmeshed within the culture of the college/school of education. Kelly's experience contrasted sharply with the narrative from Jae in the same college who felt that faculty and students were collaborative and there was a spirit of collegiality. A notable difference between Kelly and Jae was their ages, which may have contributed to differences in self-efficacy toward academic needs.

Kelly expressed great frustration over the inequity of having to ask for information when a listserv could be created to provide all students with the same information and equity in opportunity. Kelly acknowledged as a doctoral student that it was a personal responsibility to seek information, "but if you don't know what to look

for, that that's hard." Annabella also in the college/school of computer sciences likened it to an "Easter egg hunt" where she had to find information and resources that she needed to know. Information obtained while persisting in a doctoral program required students to have fundamental knowledge of the resource such as whom to contact and willingness to ask questions. This was expressed as both frustration and exasperation that there was not clear and concise guidance for topics such as how to find funding resources, when to begin publishing, and finding graduate school forms.

A slight variation on the need to seek information was expressed by Casey from the college/school of education, who stated that "I didn't like going to the teachers all the time, because…it was stuff that…I should have known….I feel like my questions were just too elementary." In her narrative there was reluctance to ask for information or assistance due to perceptions of how she would be viewed by faculty.

A different discourse was shared across disciplines by Nadia in the college/school of computer sciences who discussed how she had to reach out for assistance in her program, "I have to run people down . . . track people down . . . I mean highly proactive…students need to figure out on their own how to get around and talk to each other and communicate." A challenge that Nadia experienced that was linked to a dimension within the program was that students did not know each other. Therefore, when they were prompted by advisors to seek out help from peers they either visually did not know who they were seeking or there was cultural fear. Nadia described a reluctance to initiate communication with a student that she described as having sandy brown hair and referencing "Asian fear" when attempting to differentiate between students with similar last names such as "Ju" and "Wu." In an earlier portion of Nadia's interview she

commented on how shocked she was to be immersed in a master's experience with students from other countries, which was a tremendous transition for her. Black women doctoral students are not immune to racial and cultural insensitivity and programmatic structures may lack effective means for all students to initiate means of communication. Nadia felt that her advisor should have been willing to make the initial introduction between students. There appeared to be a breakdown in methods of effective communication strategies that were a hindrance to students.

In the college/school of education there were student mentors to assist with the first-year transition; however, Kelly perceived that the information might have been insufficient due to intra-racial similarities. She acknowledged that student mentors who had access to information and were of the same race "might not even know a lot of the things that…are out there for us." Assignment of student mentors in the college/school of education is an informal process where the mentor provides "friendly support" and "friendly advice and tips on being successful" to a first-year student in an unofficial capacity according to email communications.

Kelly especially felt strongly that there was a difference between full-time and part-time students and the information to which they had access. Kelly perceived that students who were full-time had an advantage over part-time students.

> I feel like, if you're not a full-time student and you work on campus, you would not be exposed to a lot of the things, a lot publications, a lot of the research, that those students, who are full-time, graduate assistance are exposed too, and I . . . feel like that's not fair.

Lyndsey asserted a different position than Kelly relative to how information was disseminated. For doctoral students, there may be a level of competition between students that functioned as barrier that is disheartening. Lyndsey felt that she had made sacrifices and "should be vindicated when it matters." She was reluctant to "share good news" that she was "published in . . . a really good journal" because she understood that another full-time student who was balancing a career and motherhood may not have known about the call for papers due to her "personal situation and circumstances." Students with competing interest for their time were challenged on research productivity, which may have caused a gap in the pragmatic realization of the individualized doctoral experience as compared to the idealized one, where attendance to conference, multiple publications, and successful course load activity was accomplished. Lyndsey articulated that she wanted the other students to persist in the program, but it "shouldn't be my responsibility." Doctoral students should not feel that they have the onus of responsibility for another student, which when conceptually connecting the narrative back to Kelly and the role of student mentors slightly problematic. In an unstructured mentorship program, Black women doctoral students may inadvertently feel that they must overly support other women and/or other Black women when that is not their responsibility. The initial guidance for persisting through a program must come from the academic advisor.

The preceding narratives of Lyndsey and Kelly suggest that part-time students may not be sufficiently integrated within a department, therefore leading to persistence that was influenced by perceptions that full-time students were the greater beneficiaries of educational accruements (e.g., information about publication opportunities or

upcoming conferences). Kelly expressed greater frustration and feelings of displacement when she was a part-time student, which included balancing the roles of parenting, working, commuting to and from the academic institution, and lack of interaction with faculty that would tangentially connect her to information regarding publication opportunities. Conversely, Lyndsey felt that she had made the choice and sacrifice to enroll full-time and should not necessarily feel subjugated about her decision. She stressed that more information and direct support should come from the other student's advisor and that the department should be more accommodating to students with similar needs. Sallee (2011) asserted that students may have adopted the competitive behaviors of faculty and become more results driven. Doctoral programs require that students become proactive in seeking out resources. Leppel (2002) suggested that the more integrated a student became in the institutional environment, the higher personal utility would develop and the higher the expected probability of persistence. There was an additional stressor experienced by Lyndsey from feeling that she had the responsibility of providing counsel to another student who was receiving insufficient support and guidance from her advisor.

The experiences of the women varied; however, contextually the theme of access to information was a dysfunction in the mechanisms for how information was disseminated within and across programs. The lack of access to information or perception that Black women had relative to the connectedness of information represented a constrained institutional engagement.

## Faculty Interactions

### Navigate and Negotiate

#### A. Faculty and advisor control

The ability to learn how to navigate and negotiate as a doctoral student was understood as part of the experience. Participants grappled with the independence of being a doctoral student, yet being tethered to faculty or advisors. The doctoral process was explained by some participants as an "isolated," "life changing," and "long process," that they were glad was coming to an end, but overall by the majority as a "positive experience." Part of the ability to navigate within a doctoral program was to mediate the experiences while simultaneously countering both explicit and implicit expectations. In this section participants were challenged with dilemmas related to understanding the frequently unspoken or unknown rules of a doctoral program that were significant to persistence. During the doctoral process participants came into varying interactions with faculty that were compounded by race and gender obscuring the academic landscape. For example, Monroe first explained how a professor described for her the importance of being able to negotiate through her doctoral program.

> I was talking to my professor…[he's/she's] like you've been a student all of your life. You know how to be a student. A PhD is not being a student. A PhD is about dealing in negotiating all the different relationships and personalities within a program, because anyone can study and make A's, but if you cross the wrong person you'll never get those letters at the end of your name.

The critical assumption of the quote is that persistence in doctoral programs are grounded more in relational non-measurable soft skills than they are in hard tangible outcomes that

students are supposedly evaluated on such as academic benchmarks. For Black women doctoral students, these relationships may be difficult to cultivate due to caution about stereotypes based on gender and race.

Black women doctoral students must understand their precarious position and the authority that faculty and advisors have over their academic trajectory. Students must quickly understand that it is integral to have the involvement of a faculty member in research and a willingness to make inroads within the department culture. In the college of computer/school of science it was important for academic advancement to have an advisor promote scholarly work and assist in integrating a student into the laboratory. Based on the interview findings of one participant, Nadia stated that without the intentional support of the academic advisor she was extremely limited in her laboratory work and had to seek an alternative advocate.

> …I did well on my own but it still wasn't the same that you have with an advisor promoting you and helping you integrate . . . into the lab . . . but [the unofficial advisor] did help me do that . . . was a great experience for me.

Nadia had to diplomatically negotiate the change to obtain a new advisor, but prior to the new assignment she navigated a new independent resolution of identifying an unofficial advisor whom she was able to work with. Doctoral students will remain in an academic quagmire if they are unable to find a faculty member who will enable their academic progression. The critical take away from Nadia's narrative related to her advisor experience, was that she understood the importance of having an advisor and sought a method to identify one who could actively support her academic work.

Embedded within the broader scope of the interview Nadia discussed the ongoing tension with her advisor prior to the change. She shared with some sadness, but more of acceptance of an unfortunate situation that she felt that her White advisor was "uncomfortable with having [an] African-American" student, but the advisor accepted the responsibility, because it would look good on the faculty members' curriculum vitae. Serving as advisor was what one did for opportunities such as tenure to demonstrate attentiveness to serving diverse students. There was a self-awareness of being Black in doctoral programs and how faculty may choose to leverage that to their advantage. That was a very delicate pathway for Black students to navigate as they feel reluctant to turn down a request from faculty or their advisor, especially when the student concluded that there was a racial agenda, specifically the advantage is for the sole intention to promote a stereotypical token Black, but there is no belief in the research agenda of the student. One must learn to navigate institutional power structures because whether it is an advisor or faculty member they have tremendous power through the doctoral process. Nadia's elucidated an important concern that she had that was salient throughout her narrative.

> ...these people [faculty] can crush you…what they are doing is controlling you . . . being overly controlling or using fear intimidation . . . no one cares, no one watches. There doesn't seem to be a check and balance . . . [faculty] are hired not because they are great people but because of their great research record.

No other participants discussed as pointedly as Nadia expressed regarding the controlling aspects of faculty; however, there was a thematic overture regarding apathy within departments and the egocentrism of some faculty. Monroe, Paige, and Nadia shared similar vignettes, which served as cautionary tales for doctoral students interacting and

negotiating boundaries with faculty. The interpretative critically consideration is the disproportionate power that faculty have over students. Monroe first explains the threat of opposition against a professor.

> I think it's about negotiating . . . I mean you say the wrong thing they will come after you . . . like they will ruin you . . . you have to put your foot down . . . you can't touch a full professor . . . [faculty] will get rid of you before anything happens to [them] if you make a complaint . . . its hard to navigate because you don't want to piss anyone off because if you piss someone off, . . . they can try to get you out of the program.

Paige describes what she feels is the elitism that protects faculty.

> …if you cross the wrong person you're blackballed for life . . . they [faculty] can be snarky and bitchy to the nth degree because they're insulated against what we call the quote unquote real world. In their world they're queens, so these are the kings and queens and you don't cross them.

Nadia describes the concern of too much disclosure and how it can be harmful, "I've learned that in academia, don't share anything about yourself, because the more [faculty] know the more they can use against you." The narratives demonstrated both the concern of personal authenticity and the struggle that graduate students lack formal mechanisms to voice complaints of dissatisfaction or discontent because they can always be replaced (Lovitts, 2001). The quotes also suggested that students perceived that faculty consciously or unconsciously create an environment of fear and intimidation, which was conducive to the "chilly classroom climate" that was first coined by Hall and Sandler

(1984) and has been associated with the discouraging departmental climate (Nerad & Miller, 1996).

The following sections illuminated different examples integrated within the subtheme of 'negotiate and navigate.' In addition to faculty/advisor control issues that were presented, one participant reported issues relevant to sexual harassment. At least one other participant alluded to comments about appearance and how it contributed to stereotypes of Black women. The following section denotes the isolated discussion of sexism in the academy.

One participant reported a more troubling faculty interaction relative to sexual harassment. Due to the greater need for anonymity, the name of the participant will not be provided and limited information of the encounter was detailed. The participant discussed her awareness of being an attractive Black woman, but being uncertain of how others perceive her. Holmes (2008) surmised that Black women must counter the negative cultural images that degraded Black womanhood. Holmes (2008) contended that due to the historical history of discrimination in America against Black women that it was impossible to conceive that deep-rooted sexist ideologies do not exist in higher education. The participant very quietly in hushed tones referenced the work load of a PhD program as being "hard . . . its just hard" and it was made more troublesome by the presence of "predators" and that "you want to think the best of people and no one is evil [or]. . . has bad intentions." She described a difficult episode with a faculty member whom she sought out as a mentor because institutionally and academically "everyone's big in networking." The participant thought that she established a good rapport with the male faculty member who would assist her with securing a future academically-related

position; however, unfortunately, the faculty member was not interested in her scholarly pursuits, but rather a more intimate relationship. The faculty member was making advances toward the participant.

> I thought I could handle it . . . nothing happened . . . I'm not crazy . . . but you know it was one of those things were . . . we can no longer talk . . . people are shady . . . that just left a bad taste in my mouth.

The narrative was supported by the previous research of Holmes (2008) who surmised that the primary issue for Black women was self-valuation and self-respect. Black women must respect self and demand respect as serious scholars from others especially men (Holmes, 2008). The gendered politics of negotiating relationships with men may be contentious, but must be acknowledged as significant to the academic experience for Black women doctoral students. There was a demonstrated need to provide support to Black women on how to confront the unwanted sexual advances within the academe.

B. Socialization

Darlene who discussed socialization between faculty and students shared an alternative view of faculty interaction. She "didn't enter the program to make friends with the faculty" but to "achieve [the] goal of getting my PhD." In the college/school of arts and sciences Darlene reflected that structured socialized events such as "pot lucks" and "weekly coffee" events were forced student/faculty interactions and that "when it is forced it is fake" although the intent was good. Darlene continued in her narrative to discuss how faulty were opposed to the interactions and concurred that they also were at the institution to "teach…not to become [students'] friends." The exception was the

faculty within the department who were intentional in extending personal invitations to meet with students for example on a Friday afternoon. Darlene concluded her narrative regarding student faculty interactions with "…if I gotta take your class, I don't need you to be my friend, but sign my papers." Darlene was able to focus more on the required purpose and function of faculty rather than the elusive non-specified requirements as being significant to her persistence. The socialized experiences with faculty were limited to those who were intentional in the inclusive nature of expanded duties and sought to develop Darlene into a more comprehensive doctoral student.

Socialization was indicative of a closer collaborative relationship where students and faculty or advisors interacted within a physical space for a substantive way (Lovitts, 2001). Socialization inferred integration within a program based on the academic structures, conventions, and traditions of the discipline (Gardner, 2008). The isolated reported instances of socialization with faculty and advisors were infrequent. According to Gardner (2008) there have been few studies that address the role of socialization related to persistence or departure from doctoral programs upon underrepresented populations.

Social Prejudice in Classroom Experiences

A final example of interactions was exemplified based on a social prejudice in classroom experience. Within the classroom experience the participants noted varying experiences based on their race. Jae explained that she was "the exception in terms of representing Black women . . . in general." She discussed an ideology that was conceptually linked to one shared by Monroe. When discussing her experience with faculty within the college/school of education Jae explained how some Black women are

accepted, but others are not, "I accept you because you're different, your background is different, the way you carry yourself is different, you know, the way you speak is different, you are . . . very articulate . . . you're not one of these back of the room kind of people."

Relationally, the narrative linked to a concept that Monroe postulated related to "Black mentality" that "there is only…room for one Black person…one token Black person." Monroe was angry of the persistent socialized prejudice reality within her discipline in the college/school of education. She argued that there was a "greater burden…in terms of…the expectations" for Black women to carry themselves in a certain way, "you're expected to finish what you start, you're expected to be at the top of your field" but consequently, as Black women, there is the expectation "to be sweet and kind and you know -- loving" that contrasted with taking traditional male dominant professional roles in administration.

The context was based on a classroom exchange where another Black student was discussing challenges that she was experiencing. Justine expressed frustration that in a program grounded in multicultural design that "everybody kept glossing over the issue of [race]." Justine perceived the White faculty member was not supporting the other student and offered words of support to her colleague in the class. Justine provided an analogy that a doctorate was like a race.

> There are going to be times where you're running to get to that finish line and there are going to be people on the sides that's cheering you one…then there's sometimes some points of the race where there's no one . . . why do you keep running? You keep running because there's a finish line and you realize that

> some folk not going to cheer you on, but you gotta get to that finish line. The finish line is getting this PhD.

The faculty member met with Justine to discuss the incident. The perception that Justine had was that "I had created an environment in her…classroom where I think for that one moment she felt like she didn't have the power." The angst came from the classroom environment being one where race was treated as an invisible or silent artifact. Justine stated the interaction with the faculty member was a "critical incident" for her because she had previously "respected this professor," but from that moment she felt like "now I can't trust you" based on the belief that the faculty member may have thought that Justine had an agenda, when her "agenda was to support my . . . colleague with an issue that I have . . . myself have felt."

Darlene shared another example of a conflicted classroom experience. She discussed how during a classroom discussion a topic arose that was specific to a statistical measure related to Blacks. The faculty member looked to Darlene and asked if she would like to speak to the issue. "He wanted me to speak for every, single Black person on the planet. To talk about how on average [the statistical measure for Blacks was] below European American[s]." There was an internal rage that Darlene battled, but she knew her emotions were visible on her face, so the faculty member "quickly moved to somebody else." Darlene rapidly responded back to the faculty member her angst of being singled out and gave him a visual queue of her displeasure.

> I was like how dare you, like really. You want me to tell you. I was like well then I am going to need you to tell me on behalf of every single White male you know about this topic. Like, I don't represent everybody who look likes me, but

> the look I gave him he quickly moved on to the next person like it was like don't mess with me, like okay keep, keep playing . . . I gave him one of those I dare you to do it again looks.

Jae shared a contrasted classroom experience from the college/school of education. She reflected how there were a few classes where she was the only "racial minority in the classroom . . . it doesn't bother me." Jae was aware of being viewed curiously by others when she spoke "emphatically" that she would receive looks as to "why are you so confident in here . . . you're the only one, or like I had no idea that Black people could think like that. You see it on their faces."

The incident emphasized the lack of value and worth that was not extended to Justine, as a more mature student had in the classroom environment. When Black students felt that their ways of knowing were disrespected or ignored they retreated into silencing that was detrimental to their persistence and inhibited others (i.e., peers and faculty), the opportunity for learning from their experiences based on the positionality of race and gender (Milner, 2004). The sense of not belonging and being marginalized were represented within the narrative, as being excluded from intellectual discourse as it seemed that the faculty member was challenged due to dominant culture ideologies regarding lacked knowledge of how to engage a classroom, which included adult learners and Black women. Further the narrative suggested that there was a mystification of Justine's viewpoint and the White faculty member was reluctant to acknowledge multiple viewpoints within a class dialogue.

The narrative below from Justine was complex and addressed perceptions of race and was supported by the previous research of Souto-Manning and Ray (2007) who

examined that when race became part of the classroom discussion that there was a resistance that was understood as a literal silence that was reflective of systemic institutional silence surrounding race. Justine poignantly shared how the interaction "revealed to me that I have to be careful."

> I don't think people understand what it…means to be in a Black female body . . . not only do they not understand it, but when you try to illuminate as a single case study and not as a . . . spokesperson for all Black women is this whole notion, well, well, we all go through that. No you don't. You have no idea. You have no idea. No, you don't. You may get it on the . . . gender level, but you don't get it on the race and gender level and so it revealed to me that . . . people don't get it . . . its frustrating to . . . not have people value and appreciate your experiences as real.

The contention from the nuanced narrative that Justine articulated was that the interactions with faculty were tangentially linked to notions about race, gender, and the challenge as a Black woman in the education classroom. Consistent with Johnson-Bailey (2004), the interactions between White faculty and Black students were inadequate. Interpretation of the narrative demonstrated the challenge of confronting the problematized silences of race and encountering faculty who may not be sensitive enough or sufficiently skilled in negotiating the classroom environment with a discussion that was interlaced with racial concerns. As previously denoted from Annabella, she felt isolated due to the lack of Black faculty and students. Annabella had no one that she believed she could relate to and that "it was hard to find that commonality" that she felt like a lot of the international students shared. Similarly, Casey and Nadia reported

perceptions that international students tended to socialize and work together and that it was a normative expectation. For example, Casey stated in reference to the student organization within the college/school of computer sciences that while the cohort overall was close, there were those who were closer, "like the people . . . from the same place like the people from China you know they're naturally . . . closer to each other." The critical interpretation of Casey's narrative was the Black students recognized their own 'othered' experiences; however, they may not have been readily cognizant of their separatist ideology when discussing international students.

Lyndsey in the college/school of education discussed a "crab in the bucket mentality" a colloquial term that was analogous to refer to human behavior when members try to diminish competition with others due to feelings of envy. Lyndsey was concerned about propelling that mentality as it related to race at Olympic University. She referenced how she had negative experiences with people of the same race. Those experiences that were offensive made her question "my persistence at a PWI" because if "we are of the minority group…we must stick together at this PWI." She explained how the encountering of opposite experiences, those that countered support, "it's almost life shattering and so I think that's important to recognize for the scope of your study."

Advisor Relationships

Selection of the advisor was the single most important decision graduate students make in their graduate careers (Lovitts, 2004). In this section it is important to denote that participants were singularly referencing their advisor, not an abstract faculty member. It was through the faculty advisor that doctoral students received information related to funding and information about formal program requirements that were key to

program integration. Advisors influenced the interactions with other faculty and advocated research for advisees. Black women in this study found that advisors were not responsive to their needs and were hesitant to make changes. Advisor selection procedures were not consistently clear and there were cases were students did not realize that the advisor assignment was temporary and could be changed without penalty (Lovitts, 2004). Participants reflected on the challenges associated with an advisor and the ensuing perceptions of requesting an advisor change. Institutionally, advisors could be selected or appointed; however, there was concern that a change in advisor appointment could be viewed negatively. Justine expressed her hesitancy regarding hidden reprisal over an advisor change.

> …there's sort of this they would say oh you need to switch that is not a problem nobody is going to be upset, but in the back of my mind I'm like I don't know if that's really a good idea. So I didn't switch. I still had the same advisor.

There are also broader considerations that a change in advisor may mean that problems may have been occurring, such as for Nadia in the college/school of computer science. She had been experiencing a series of problems with her departmental-appointed advisor who was inexperienced, but had more training as a research faculty member. The challenges included the inability to remove course blocks for scheduling to placing the onus of responsibility back on Nadia until things became untenable when the advisor introduced "an undergraduate as the lead on my project."

The situation presented caused Nadia to seek assistance from the associate dean because in her words "I can't take it anymore…I can't talk to [my advisor] anymore" and had even sought student graduate resources that were available to assist students coping

with similar situations. Nadia explained that prior to going to the associate dean due to the structured nature of the program, if there was a problem you must try to resolve it with your advisor.

> …[My advisor] blocked me from TA [teaching assistantships]. She wouldn't help me find a TA or . . . any type of funding . . . [my advisor] wouldn't help me with anything . . . so I tried to go outside of her and say well can someone else help me and they were like no, that's your advisors responsibility . . . and they were politically correct in a sense . . . in staying out of it . . .

In contrast, Darlene expressed a positive advisor relationship. She explained that was not a conscious awareness of the shift when her advisor became more than just someone who assisted with academic related issue, but became someone that Darlene could honestly talk with about feelings of being "overwhelmed" that "no one else understood," but her advisor knew "what I was talking about because [the advisor] had done it herself." Darlene and her advisor would frequently have coffee together especially when she felt like she was "second guessing" herself with questions like "am I supposed to be here." Her advisor arranged scheduled times for coffee meetings to "bring out the balance" in her thought process.

Alternatively, participants discussed the identification of an unofficial advisor who enabled their persistence. This was the advisor who participants trusted and actually went to for guidance. Nadia discussed how the un-official advisor "actually advised [her] even though [the advisor was] not in [her] department…we had some overlapping research interest so it was a good fit." The alternate advisor was needed when the assigned or selected advisor relationship was difficult to navigate or nebulous. This was

a frequent occurrence more apparent within the college/school of computer sciences that participants had an advisor, but had guidance from an unofficial advisor. There was some isolated discussion within the college/school of education and arts and sciences participants of cross-disciplinary support from another faculty member, but not within the framework of advisor discourse. Similarly, Annabella in the college/school of computer sciences, reflected in hindsight about the selection of her advisor. She was comfortable in the laboratory environment due to her alternate advisor and not the advisor she selected, because the unofficial advisor relationship was based on "loyalty that [the advisor] gave me this chance and opportunity to come to lab and I will stick with it."

Absence & Presence of Black Faculty

Hughes and Howard-Hamilton (2003) asserted the value of a critical mass of Black women —faculty members, staff, and students on campus, to counter the effects of oppression that may be experienced on PWI campuses in the form of racism and sexism. Some of the participants were aware of the absence of Black faculty in their departments, but were not sure if it made a significant difference in their degree progression. In this section, the primary emphasis was on challenges with faculty of other race/ethnic backgrounds. Judith in the college/school of arts and sciences noted the importance of Black faculty for her persistence "institutionally it is very important having minorities within the faculty." Judith illuminated the pragmatic use of cross-cultural interactions to provide the needed support that she needed for persistence.

> [The faculty member] was not even an African American [the faculty member] was Latino . . . [a] minority . . . we don't have an African American . . . that teaches within my program currently …the diversity stinks … attention has not

> been paid as much to diversity in terms of hiring . . . having a mentor who is also a minority in some ways . . . I think there is some connection there.

The narrative addresses the awareness of the lack of purposeful hiring practices institutionally to address the diversity of the student population. Black women were aware of the lack of parity related to race and gender, but it may not have been expected as much as the need for greater proportionality within the overall college/school. A different contention focused on the challenges of interacting with faculty of the same racial/ethnic background. In the college/school of education Justine decried:

> I still wonder where is the Black female faculty . . . I've gotten these weird answers of 'oh well you know, we've tried, we try very hard' . . . but yet there is no Black female faculty and I felt like I really needed to have access. I feel like I still do need to have access to a faculty [member] who looks like me . . . I mean we have . . . two Black male faculty, but on some levels they get the race part, but I don't think they get the whole being a Black female part . . . [it] would've helped me to be able to . . . make sense of . . . the experience I felt like I was having as a student in the program.

The crux of Justine's analysis revealed her "naivety" and how "politics" occurred in professional settings, but that she did not believed they would "show up in academia." That was the "game changer" for her in realizing that:

> …[there was] still a game to be played . . . I'm a Black female in a PhD program . . . there's still stereotypes that exist . . . there have been some specific incidents . . . with faculty that made me aware that those stereotypes and those issues [are still out there].

The narrative that Justine shared was consistent with other women in the study who also expressed frustration that due to the lack of Black faculty there was no one who understood the experience of Black women. That consensus within some of the women participants made an assumption that Black faculty were the only ones who could conceptually support and connect with Black women when that was not case. The argument that Jae, within the college/school of education, made was that within the same race she had encountered instances with Black faculty "where we should be supporting one another" but instead she experienced at least one faculty member who "tried to make me feel less than who I really am." She concluded that her encompassing concern was that it was not always "people of European, White European background that can make a person of color feel uncomfortable in higher education; sometimes, it's your own people."

The critical consideration was that in instances where the assumption was that race created a linkage, when there was none. Sharing the same race did not silence the politics of perceptions within the academy. Monroe discussed how there were tensions between her and a Black male faculty member. She disagreed that the faculty members assertion that he was telling her "the truth to realities [that she could not face]." Monroe felt like the Black male was trying to "ruin [her] life." She was told due to their shared cultural status and Monroe being a woman that she should "work twice as hard," and basically was "sucking, like you know, I can't write, I'm subpar . . . basically telling me that I suck."

Monroe was upset by the encounter that left her in tears and confused about "what did I do to this man [faculty member] to make him hate me so much." She was more

disturbed that the faculty member attempted to make an association where she felt there was none. Monroe angrily proclaimed, when confronted with the faculty member, "don't try to liken to me because we are not alike in anyway." She sought guidance from another faculty member, whom she trusted, and was reminded that perceptions of the encounter would be collectively deduced to "how people will spin" it, specifically the faculty member, and that Monroe did not need to allow the mental anguish to linger, thus the recommendation for her to apologize. The recommendation to defuse the situation and to treat it as a learning experience was consistent with case scenarios for Black students presented by Dewalt (2004), which considered the disengaging academic environment for Black students. Specific to this research study, when participants such as Monroe were left to combat demoralizing dilemmas they may be able to persist on with their academic work, but they become more savvy in the academic mores of faculty interactions. Monroe discussed how the encounter with the Black male faculty member taught her that future interactions needed to be brief and that she realized:

> …he plays the game . . . you have to learn how to play the game . . . you have to be fake with these people cause even though I . . . don't really want to be in the same room with you ever again . . . . he does not want to . . . give off that perception. That's academia, perception is key . . .

Justine, who discussed how a Black male faculty member perceived her as being angry, discussed a similar encounter. Justine questioned the faculty members' contention that she was just irrationally being angry, "he had not good evidence for it." The assertion from the faculty member was that Justine tended to "speak very directly and have strong eye contact." Justine theorized "it was all about seeing me as a Black woman

and putting me into that box of angry Black woman." Justine was told she lacked the appearance of a Black woman, "he was like well you don't dress . . . ethnic." The faculty member referred to natural state of her hair as another rationale for her not fitting the stereotypical identity of a Black woman. Justine reflected that the faculty member as a "Black male, [he] should get it, but [he didn't]." Justine concluded that the interactions with faculty were about perceptions and how they sought to group or categorize her.

Annabella shared that the presence of a Black female faculty member was someone who she "gravitated" to and sought guidance on "how to deal with graduate life and maintaining different relationships." Conversely, Jessica noted the presence of a Black male faculty member and while he was someone that she could be her authentic self with she was not certain that he made a "difference between me staying or leaving, but it definitely [made the doctoral] process more manageable." Jessica continued her narrative of noting that the presence of a Black faculty member and another female faulty member were important to her persistence because she perceived that they understood her feelings of not belonging due to race and gender and were open to conversations that supported her.

Darlene shared a contrasted experience that, while there was a Black faculty member within her department in the college/school of arts and sciences, that she was "used to being the minority both literally and figuratively." She explained how her past academic experiences were consistent with her being the "only Black kid in class," thus "I am used to being the only brown person." When she was asked how did having the presence of a Black faculty member within her department enable her persistence, Darlene responded, "I don't think it really did much for me. It was just reality." The

narrative was suggestive that for some Black women their past academic experience of the scarcity of Black faculty and the more advanced and/or more competitive the academic program that the experience of isolation was masked as indifference and normative. The presence of Black faculty while desirous and significant may be prompted by a greater need for commonality and modeling with faculty members or an advisor who can invest the time to intentionally guide a doctoral student through the process.

Personal: Facilitators

Family Support

There were mixed expressions of family support; however, there was discernible data to support the contention that the family was an instrumental link to the participants' academic pursuits. Ong et al. (2011) acknowledged the lack of empirical research to support the importance of family influence and support. King (1996) identified the support of family as an environmental persistence factor that positively impacted the doctoral academic experience. Darlene explained how spiritual support from her family was a significant enabler to degree completion.

> I got a lot of moral and spiritual support from family because . . . very few people in my family . . . had money so there was no one in the family who could actually help me financially . . . but I knew if I ever needed to talk or if I needed somebody to pray with me my family was always there . . . so I think that was just as important . . . just knowing someone's there for you and so for me knowing I had someone I could turn to if I needed it was helpful and knowing that my family was always going to be there no matter what I think that was helpful too.

The family resources most specifically identified were feminine (e.g., mother, grandmother, aunt, sister, or daughter) followed by the spouse. Berg and Ferber (1983) determined that moral support, especially from mothers was significant to persistence for students in enrolled in education as compared to those students in physical and biological sciences who received more support from their fathers. There were only a few instances where the participants referenced the paternal influence and support related to their doctoral degree attainment.

The participants acknowledged a collective link or relationship between themselves and their family members that may offer a rationale for the importance for their personal pursuit. For example, Monroe discussed how important her mother's support was and her purpose for remaining in the doctoral program while acknowledging in her household the gender inequalities. Monroe's narrative was problematized due to gender role expectations articulated from her mother.

> I will definitely say my mother . . . she doesn't have a college education . . . she sells herself short . . . my sisters we will either come to her with a problem or we will try to explain some type of you know academic or intellectual [issue] or have an intellectual discussion with her and she will always say no, no, no go talk with your dad. Your dad will help you more . . . you know like . . . she is a brilliant woman, but she sells herself short because she . . . doesn't have a college education so she doesn't think she's as smart as all of us in the family and she wants to go get her . . . GED . . . so hopefully she will do that. We are very proud of her . . . she just worked so hard for us . . . we are her lifeline. Like she lives for us. We are her 401-K plan.

Monroe spoke while tears filled in her eyes and her voice hoarsely cracked with emotion when describing the relational link to her mother. She conceptually prognosticates that degree persistence is critical due to her mother's lack of formal education.

Black women in this study were strongly connected to their families who verbalized encouragement. According to Jae, her husband and daughter "have been just invaluable" and that they're the ones who kept me going." Jae acknowledged that while her family was supportive and vocalized that she was "smart" that it was a challenge to provide disclosure, without minimizing the value of their support.

> …there were times when I wanted to hear, I wanted them to understand what I was going through . . . a tough time and trying to get acclimated or maybe you know the advanced stats class was too much . . . [they're] not really understanding the . . . psychological and the emotional changes that I'm going through.

The family provided a safe place for students to discuss their academic and social experiences (Bonner & Evans, 2004). Justine commented that her mother was like "one of my biggest cheerleaders." Annabella echoed the sentiment by stating that "my mom became like my best friend" to help combat some of the isolation that she was experiencing. Lyndsey and Jessica, both from the college/school of education, shared a similar discourse relative to effective familial support resources, which were a mixed influence on persistence. Lyndsey described the tension of emotional support within her family as "[it] doesn't necessarily have to [mean someone to] understand what you are going through, but understands how to support you while you are going through what you are going through."

A noted distinction of the family support resource, was that while many of the women were first generation college and/or doctoral students, they were not from families that could necessarily give them specific guidance or advice on how to proceed. The family tried to be helpful to a process while that they did not understand the intricacies of doctoral education. Jessica described how family members were uncertain how to be helpful due to lacking the understanding of the doctoral process and what she was experiencing.

> …they don't necessarily know the ins and outs of what this [doctoral experience] looks like. So they can't be supportive in terms of advice or you know specifics, but I know that they care about me. I know that they want the best for me.

Jessica related that she had to temper her feelings of being appreciative to a supportive family with the frustration and guilt at times due to linguistic communication. Jessica explained that "it takes a lot of energy and I feel bad…I've got to choose my words" to more fully explain doctoral experiences to her mother. Casey similarly understood the importance of communication with family, especially her mother who was an important motivator and learned to use social media as a way to communicate Casey's progress and successes.

> …my mom, is like, she is proud of me. Like . . . she is on Facebook . . . everything I do, every little step, she is like my baby is doing this, and for the oral [examination] I mean I [had] to explain everything that I am doing. I have to explain that well to her…

For the majority of the participants the nuclear family was significant to providing social and emotional support. There were participants who noted a lack of support from

family. Families may seek to trivialize or question the academic pursuit when tremendous effort was applied to submit multiple drafts of assignments that can take years to complete (Carter, Blumenstein, & Cook, 2013). Lyndsey discussed that her parents had been supportive; however, "they don't understand why I am still in school."

Lyndsey acknowledged that she wanted to be a role model for her siblings, but they were a hindrance to her persistence. "They saw education as a way for me to pull away from family contributions. Education was a way for me to leave and be disconnected and not have as much responsibility in my family." For the participant the doctoral degree was an opportunity for upward economic and career mobility that meant she had made short-term sacrifices for long-term gain; however, she perceived resentment rather than support from her family due to the lack of current contributions that she was able to make such as monetarily or extra time spent socializing. Jairam and Kahl (2013) posited that families did not understand doctoral education and were minimally supportive because they did not understand the rationale for degree attainment and the perception that a person was seeking to be "above them" (p. 321).

Kelly concurred with Lyndsey that she lacked family support. Kelly described her family as being "semi-quasi close" and the relationship with her mother as evolving.

> I don't receive the support that I think I should receive from my family. I guess they feel as if, you know, it's just another degree . . . I think that's the ignorance of not understanding . . . the level or the magnitude of what this means . . .

Kelly acknowledged that she did receive support from her child. Kelly believed that it was important for her to persist because she was a "role model" and wanted for her child to understand that if her "mama did it . . . I can do it to." Black women perceptions

were based more on a collective standpoint of familial support and what they would contribute back to the nuclear family or community rather than an individualist position.

Families were able to provide tangible support in the form of childcare assistance. Half of the participants in this study had children. Nadia noted that her mother-in-law was helpful with providing childcare for her children, which enabled her to not have to seek alternative childcare options. The availability of Nadia's mother-in-law was a financial incentive due to not having to pay for daycare, which relieved psychological stress of a stranger caring for her children.

Both Lyndsey and Justine shared similar narratives relative to spousal support. Husbands were characterized as making sacrifices and putting their personal goals on hold while the women pursued their degree interest. Lyndsey expressed, laughingly, that her husband was more supportive "than I probably would have been for him." She explained that the reason she was "able to cope" was due to his support. Lyndsey discussed how they had "library dates" and that it was helpful that her spouse was also pursuing higher education. Justine discussed how her husband's support was demonstrated through "his flexibility and he sacrificed a lot in terms of income" and "pursuing his own professional goals so that I could do this."

The family served as a resource for emotional and moral support. There were a few exceptions in this study, where inter-family tensions contributed to dissonance for participants relative to the persistence of a doctoral degree. Some of the women had limited or lack of family support; however, the experiences of familial financial struggles, lack of advanced college education, or family strife served as a facilitator for women to persist in their doctoral degree attainment. The doctoral degree was an expedient method

to ensure that Black women had the necessary skills to garner career options and to support themselves.

The shifting responsibilities from the family to focus more exclusively on academics can be a difficult transition and perceived as a competing interests by family members. First-generation students may find it especially daunting, as family members may stress the need to secure a job and contribute to the financial stability of the home rather than pursue the uncertainty of an education (Rosales & Person, 2003). Disclosure regarding issues that occurred during the doctoral experience was constrained due to the limited understanding that families had about the process. Participants sought family support as a method for coping and to counter difficult experiences. Family operated with collective agency to advocate for the continual doctoral matriculation and as safe place for dialogue about problem-solving, opposition against isolation, and celebrating successes.

Faith and spirituality

Burgess (1994) previously asserted that faith and family as social support for Black women were important motivational facilitators. Al-Hadid (2004) asserted the importance for Black students to depend on the daily habitus of faith, spirituality, or philosophy of life, as close friends and loved ones may be unable to grasp the nuanced complexities of doctoral matriculation challenges. Carter (2002) concurred that the intrinsic characteristics such as spirituality and empowerment were critical motivators for Back women. In this study, Black women's faith was a critical preexisting resource for their persistence and was previously asserted by Burgess. None of the women discussed changes in the depth of their spiritual beliefs based on oppositional experiences or

challenges. Faith was personified as a mechanism to overcome hardships that were experienced by doctoral students.

Justine concurred with Darlene regarding spirituality that they both referenced the inclusion of participation in church and prayers as part of their religious practice. Justine stated that she was "a spiritual person, so I pray a lot." Darlene had discussed within her narrative the importance of being a Christian and prayer. The participants fundamentally believed that they were being enabled by a greater doctrine to persist and over challenges of enrollment, funding, and the common experiences of managing multiple tasks. According to Watt (2003), faith and spirituality were coping mechanisms for Black women, which included the process of searching for meaning and enabled them to better resist the negative societal messages. The women discussed how their entry into a doctoral program was part of a divine plan. Monroe reflected that culturally she had religious beliefs. She believed her entry into the doctoral program was an orchestrated plan.

> I think it was God to be completely honest with you, because literally it all just fell into place . . . I always feel like its God when it's so easy. When I don't have to fight about it. Like I just feel it . . . has to be God."

Kelly shared a similar narrative related to a divine plan by a belief in God and in the function of faith.

> He [God] had a greater purpose than I knew what the purpose was, so you know, the least I could do if He, if He provided me with the opportunity and avenue to get there the least I could do was continue. So that was the driving force of the, the reason why I, I kept persisting.

Kelly continued in her narrative and expounded her belief that regardless of the circumstances that came her way that "you got to have faith . . . I am going be provided for regardless." Faith was representative of a strong personal commitment despite the uncertainties and difficulties of doctoral research and the belief or hope that in the end things will work out (Delamont, Atkinson, & Parry, 2000). Kelly was responding to the tests of overcoming the challenges of limited funding, juggling the responsibilities of work, travel, and parenting. Nadia concurred that she also had "strong faith" and explained that while there was uncertainty regarding funding that she persisted because of her intrinsic beliefs.

> I know something is going to happen at some point [she laughs] and I'm going to pay for it, so it is not a reason for me not to persist, not having the money up front, but that comes from my faith and . . . my philosophy.

Consistent with Dewalt (2004) the use of prayer was a resource of affirmation, which aided in the physical and emotional health. Annabella reiterated similar themes of a belief that a greater purpose facilitated her persistence.

> Faith is . . . I knew it wasn't just me getting me through some of these tests . . . I am a Christian so a lot of prayer and help and guidance. That is, is this the right person for me? Am I making the right steps in what I'm doing? Is pursuing a graduate degree what my purpose is in life?

Faith was a dynamic relationship that was used to respond to the challenges of being in a doctoral program. It was something that participants intrinsically believed that made a difference in their lives. Participants did not thematically identify other practices

beyond than prayer as significant to faith such as attendance to churches, regular observances of communion, or fasting.

Institutional: Facilitators

Cohort or Peers

The cohort or peer relationship and interactions were an important facilitator to persistence. The cohort grouped students into small communities where interactions were possible to share and distribute knowledge. Through dialogue and interactions with their peers the women were able to consider their standpoint and to use their peers as a source for program acculturation. Consistent with Sallee (2011) doctoral students look to the peer group for topics of intellectual interest that extended beyond the mediocrity of social chatter. Justine articulated the important of having peers within her program to seek out for constructive guidance. It was a benefit to have "colleagues and department students sitting down and talking with me and giving me the ins and outs . . . learning about the resources that they're using to, to make it."

The peer setting was also a place for moral support and guidance. Peer engagement suggested emergent understandings for opportunities for students to learn from each other and enrich the doctoral experience. Women were empowered by meaningfully engaging with peers who shared a perspective that was relatable or tenable specifically those encounters that connected based on race and gender. Jessica explained how discourse with cohort members was invaluable.

> The conversations that we have and the way that we have gotten to know each other has been a different experience for me . . . my cohort has [number of] other

> Black females in it is amazing. Like it's, it's been awesome. I realize it, I realize that it is such a honor, such a privilege, and it's not typical.

The women contended a shared standpoint and functioned to create a space for organic discourse. Advanced peers or those who had been in the program longer were the gateway to information that the women could not access elsewhere or were not even aware that they needed to know. However, Kelly in the college/school of education believed that an advanced peer, who was also a Black woman, was limited in the scope of knowledge that she could share due to common standpoint of gender and race. Black women may seek peer support of other Black women, but desire to expand their access to information networks beyond them in the belief that they are students and may have limited knowledge of resources available. Justine described how information was shared within her program.

> The other students…were willing to share the information. Just asking other folks, or other folks kind of knew, did you know this, did you know that, you need to be doing this, you need to be doing that. It came mostly from the students. … definitely colleagues . . . sitting down and talking with me and giving me the ins and outs and…learning from them . . . about the resources that they're using to . . . make it…

Conversely the peer experience did not necessarily transfer across disciplines. This may in part be due to the organized inherently competitive nature of some doctoral programs. Counter productive passive aggressive behaviors were demonstrative of resistance to another student's doctoral matriculation. Such conduct was interpreted as being indicative of who belongs within a discipline based on the dissemination of

information. Buck et al. (2006) postulated that constructed within women's identity were characterizations of the need for reciprocity between individuals including fairness, which mediated relationship responses. Annabella described a less than cooperative academic environment with her cohort.

> I've been told wrong things to do for homework assignments or you don't get the complete scenario of notes or you might get partial notes or you don't get the help that you would give somebody . . . you don't get that full 100% return.

Annabella shared another experience with her cohort where she was marginalized. She discussed how when interacting with other students in her program that she would frequently get "this look like why are you talking to me right now or you feel like maybe you said something inappropriate." Annabella explained an encounter where she walked into class and everyone looked at her as if she was lost. Laughing, she stated that "I have gotten a couple of the 'is she lost look,' like this isn't the education department," being suggestive that due to the disproportionate number of Blacks in the college/school of education, that might be where as a Black woman the class or building she was seeking.

Peer support networks in the data were noted as being variable. Informally, peers enhanced the doctoral experience through sharing knowledge, opinions about faculty, courses, and assignments (Lovitts, 2001). Casey discussed how it was a common practice to "bounce code off" of her peers and to seek support for tasks that an advisor wanted completed when there was uncertainty of how to proceed.

> …even if were . . . in different labs we go to each other . . . my advisor wants me to run this program, but I don't know how to run it. Do you know how to do this? Its like yeah, sure we . . . help each other out . . .

Peer support was comprised of informal interactions that had the potential to develop into academically productive relationships. Monroe described the collaboration with peer writing partners as "people that are going to ride or die for you." She expounded explaining that it was important to connect with individuals who share a similar timeline for degree completion and a have a desire for academic productivity. There was a trade-off between connecting with individuals who desired high productivity against genuine relationships that could potentially extended beyond degree completion.

In the college/school of education and in arts and sciences the women expressed more closeness with the cohort even though there was not a consistency in a class being brought in as a defined cohort. In some instances, programs had open admissions and students were admitted if there was space in a lab and if a faculty member was willing to take on another student. In computer science, the women identified the program as being mostly male that may have made a difference in interactions among the cohort. Nadia proclaimed "no, no, no togetherness, no cohort. Like a new person will start and . . . you have to interview them like oh who are you, where did you come from." Computer science had the smallest cohort and the college of education had the largest varying sizes estimated at over twelve students.

For the participants it was the understanding that through their peers there was knowledge, which could inform the women's experiences as they made the adjustment to being a doctoral student. Peer information was beneficial for moral support and group interactions. The ability to recognize the connection between ineffective time management and the juggling of multiple obligations including family responsibilities

was important because participants were able to reassess and make decisions about necessary changes they had to make moving forward.

The vast majority of participants explained through their narratives the benefit of the departmental cohort or peers and that faculty members were not completely excluded. There were at least two participants, Jessica and Casey, who discussed at length the benefit of a faculty engagement as a positive force in her persistence. These isolated cases are denoted in this section as institutional facilitators due to relational facet being correlated to that of cohort or peer relationships. Jessica's narrative is examined in this section due to her individualist nature of reflections, which differed from the collective thoughts of the other participants who did not express such a strong relational linkage to faculty, but may have to their specific advisor. Jessica, from the college/school of education, discussed how due to the interlocking nature of race and gender that she believed that at least two faculty members intentionally understood the importance of "checking in with [her]" and made time for conversations that seemed to be motivational. Jessica discussed how she perceived that one of the faculty members understood that she may have felt like she did not belong and that conversations relative to race and gender were important. Conversations that extended beyond the fundamentals of academic requirements and entanglements were constructively invaluable for some of the participants. In Jessica's case, the additional socialized support from invested faculty may have been significant not only due to the duality of race and gender, but also due to being a first-generation college student and from a low SES background. Further in her narrative, Jessica discussed how she was able to meet with a faculty member and was able to be a much more authentic version of herself. She explained how she was not self-

conscious about speech dialect or the inclusion of "ebonics." For Jessica this was important because language was "part of my Blackness and me being a Black woman." While the faculty member was Black, Jessica asserted that the connection she felt with him was not aligned necessarily with a shared race dyad, but rather it was the interconnection between "his race and then his personality," but then she rearticulated her statement to "I think…partly his race, but largely his personality." She was quick to state that she also had a similar relationship with a White female faculty member.

Casey, from the college/school of computer science, also reported a positive faculty experience. She discussed the high representation of women faculty and that through her advisor she was invited to social events such as parties for the department faculty. Casey expressed how she enjoyed the events and especially liked seeing the women faculty intermingle. She thought that the faculty was proportionately split "half and half," but she only saw women professors at the events. Casey commented on the social interactions with faculty while attending events that she "never really asked them anything about their research or anything. It was just cool seeing them interact with each other."

## Findings Related to Research Question 2

Many of the findings that were previously indicated for Research Question 1 were relevant for the second question, how do Black women in the later stages of their doctoral program perceive the personal and institutional characteristics that would facilitate their doctoral degree completion at PWIs? The findings that were identified in the following were linked to degree completion. The findings contribute to an evolution in more strategic mechanisms to graduation. The data also further support the contention that

narrative responses were longitudinal across degree progression.

Personal: Barrier

Time Management

There was a preponderance of data to support the contention that time management was a barrier to degree completion. Competing demands on time coupled with uncertainty regarding the ability to succeed in a doctoral program represented the pressure that students experienced (Leonard & Becker, 2009). In almost each of the transcribed interviews the participants articulated or provided a variation to the theme relating to the struggle to balance priorities, juggle multiple responsibilities including family and academics. Post-comprehensive examinations were noted as a particular challenge when time management of priorities became more significant. The scaffolding of structural accountability measures such as course classes traditionally ended soon after successful completion of comprehensive examinations, thereby giving doctoral degree completion responsibility to the student. Annabella was very direct in her assessment regarding the academic disconnection from faculty post comprehensive exams. She stated "once you've finished this exam now it is all on you, it's not on any homework assignment. It's on you to make it or break it."

It appeared that the lack of structure was a detriment that meant that the women needed to become more independent researchers constructing their own timelines toward degree completion. In the following excerpt Jae explained how the seemingly lack of a priorities was problematic and how the actionable solution was accountability.

> …having too much time on my hands . . . I met the course requirements . . . I don't have any kind of . . . structural accountability in place . . . I don't have to be

> at work at a certain time, I don't have to get up at a certain time, I don't have to write at a certain time.

Other women commented that there was a lack of planning of what to do with the time and use it accordingly as there seemed to be no real consequences. For example procrastination was perceived as a threat to degree completion in the later stages of matriculation. Jessica discussed how "now being in dissertation phase and there is no deadline . . . that's really the only thing that . . . could stop this process is my procrastination." She had earlier in the interview explained how her procrastination was not a new behavior, but "very similar, kind of pre and post comps" with the only difference being that before comprehensive examinations there were "set deadlines."

There was scant discussion of an abstract timeline to move toward degree completion without specifics of a concrete plan of actionable steps. Yet, for others, there was the recognized need for making personal changes to ensure degree completion. Annabella explained how timing was critical in the later stages and could hinder degree completion. Annabella was much closer to graduation than some of the other participants and therefore, had a much more refined understanding of the time required to complete final degree requirements.

> Just timing, I think that was my own fault. By the time of your last year, you're just ready to get out . . . without really crossing t's and dotting i's . . . I just didn't plan those [remaining months] very well and I now see it's kind of biting me in the butt a little bit with getting things completed.

Darlene also discussed the issue of the abstract timeline to degree completion post-comprehensive exams. She stated that for one school year that she "essentially did

nothing academically" and that she realized that if she had not "set on [her] butt for a year" that she could have "paced" herself better. However, Darlene felt that she was "just tired" and "couldn't do anything else" because her "mind was just not there." The interpretation of the two narratives was that the women took the onus of responsibility for lack of progression regardless of when there may not have been program structural requirements to facilitate degree completion.

The women strived for a balance in the management of multiple tasks including those of being a wife and mother. The added roles and responsibilities added to the pressure experienced by Black women doctoral students. There were sacrifices that had to be made in order for degree completion that were seen across all college/schools. Kelly explained how she managed her time.

> Time is a major thing and not just two hours here an hour there . . . I'm realizing that I need a block of time . . . I have to prioritize certain things . . . it's a task trying to juggle your own . . . life and I have to be responsible for somebody else . . .

Juggling Roles and Competing Interests

For Paige there were scarifies to her role as a mother. Previous research concurred that juggling demands such as home life and academic study were a barrier to degree completion (Brown & Watson, 2010). There were constraints to which functions she would be able to perform, while simultaneously being a full-time doctoral student. Paige stated, "Personally, getting rid of some of my family may help me get my degree faster." She discussed the changes that her mother noticed, "she said you've grown so cold in the past two years, and all I remember doing is just looking at her as if to say, so

what. I've got things to do, make your point and move on." Paige was a more mature doctoral student in terms of chronological age and experiences. Paige was very pragmatic and philosophical in recognizing the need to enforce seemingly difficult decisions within her domestic situation for a future benefit.

> …I am not going to be the greatest mother in the world for the next few years, sorry. There are going to be things that I miss. There are going to be nights that I don't get home until real late. Don't count on me to tuck you in . . . but I think in their [her kids] hearts they know they're why I am doing it. I want them to have better, but I also want to be able to give them better, but I also at the same time want to be happy at what I am doing.

Black women doctoral students made trade-offs in the management of their time. Women who had children faced additional parenting responsibilities that were perceived as conflicts. Of the twelve participants, five commented that they had children. Kelly discussed how the lack of focus was a challenge for her due to fulfilling traditional responsibilities.

> …dealing with a child that's in school… their homework . . . field trips . . . teacher work days . . . [school] holidays, and activities outside of school [such as] scouts . . . that can take you're mind away . . . you can just be distracted.

Annabella thoughtfully considered that pursuit of a doctoral degree would require a trade-off in her personal life.

> …you have to make a decision if you want to pursue this graduate career. I don't think you can really do both equally. If you put more emphasis into your personal life, your research suffers and then vice versa . . .

The later stages of a doctoral degree were perceived as a risky endeavor. Lyndsey described how it was important for her to finish because the "uncertainty wears on people and it wears on my husband." The time that it was taking to complete her degree meant indecision on future employment plans for her husband and a delaying in planning to have children. Lyndsey expressed concerns due to the high divorce rate in academic professions. Annabella was also worried about the high divorce rate that was evident by the women faculty in her department. She acknowledged that the only success with marriage, children, and career seemed to be when the spouse shared the same research interest. Lyndsey discussed a worry that she was "studying too much and not giving enough time to him," but understood that if she thought about it too much there was a chance of prolonging her degree or even impacted her so that she would not graduate.

Other participants voiced the concern related to marriage and children. Nadia discussed how "basically being married and having [number] of children" was a hindrance to her doctoral degree completion. While the statement was said with humor, the strain of balancing the time within the domestic home along with a career and being a doctoral student was difficult. Nadia acknowledge that her multiple roles and being a student within a STEM discipline seemed unusual to those outside of the discipline because it was "too much;" however, her situation was "pretty typical" and "that is just how it is." Nadia expressed that it was "all [her] choice" to continue in her program despite perceptions to the contrary that she would be unable to do the work.

The inability to meet the demands of both academia and home life were cited as a challenge for Black women. The gender roles outside of academia may problematize the doctoral process due to academic demands, desire to participate and interact within the

institution, and competing domestic interests, which may include a spouse, children, or significant other (Carter, Blumenstein, & Cook, 2013). Justine expressed sadness over confronting the duality of her roles. Justine talked about this challenge early in her interview, but it was consistent with being a barrier to both persistence and degree completion.

> …it's sad to say, but I'm still a mother and a wife and so I sill have to . . . fulfill those obligations as a wife, as a mother. There's often times I want to come home and just start reading, or start writing, or doing whatever I need to do, but my husband hasn't seen me all day and so I have to think of my family as a hindrance, but in some ways those are some things that have kind of gotten in the way, family obligations.

There were also the within challenges of being a successful student while being in the program. A difficulty experienced was the desire to want to participate in conferences, publish papers, work as a graduate assistant and in current employment, and still have a personal life, all while working on a dissertation. The conference attendances and publication accomplishments were seen as important, but also as distractions because they did not necessarily contribute to degree completion, if not strategically integrated into the dissertation. Darlene, who also was much closer to graduation than some of the other participants, thoughtfully reflected how in her last year she was tired and due to "pure laziness" she could have finished approximately a year earlier, but was not motivated to do so due to fatigue that included a long commute, assistantship responsibilities, seeking an internship, and dissertation requirements. She discussed how she "literally chilled for year," but produced research, attended conferences, taught, and

made other scholarly accomplishments, but as far as things that contributed to actual degree completion she did nothing other than enroll in dissertation.

Institutional: Barriers

There was not a thematic-identified institutional barrier to degree completion based on the interview data. There was more variance in the interview responses than alignment to produce a thematic result. Institutional barriers to degree completion were not collectively conceptualized, but rather individualized. For example, Paige discussed how within her program a challenge for completion was access to equipment and the ability to more quickly access analysis results of data. She did share that "talking through this has given me an idea and I'm going to wind up contacting a few people tomorrow cause I don't like being hindered."

Challenges that were identified early in the doctoral process, specifically with the advisor, that were unresolved, plagued women during the final stages of their matriculation. Annabella noted how her advisor did not review documents until late in the process, which altered her completion date. For other students such as Monroe, there were concerns about committee commitment and their respective roles. She was aware that a member of her committee was reluctant to remain and that a change post-proposal defense was problematic. Similarly Jae indicated that if a faculty member on her committee expectations were not in "alignment with my chair's that will be . . . a huge hindrance." There were legitimate concerns about the inter-dynamics of the dissertation committee and how it could impact student progress.

Judith shared a different perspective. She felt that in the later stages of the doctoral process things should be "smoother at this point when you've done all of your

course work." She stated it would be better if she was working with her professor and "writing papers and trying to get something published" rather than doing administrative work.

A funding issued was identified as a barrier specific to degree completion. Other participants talked about the similar issue; however, it was relative to the context of persistence. The institutional funding support that was provided to eligible students had restriction regarding the number of hours that could be worked. Justine felt that the limitation related to funding award was a barrier.

> …you can only work so many hours if you get a [institutional funding]…you can only do 10 hours outside of the work that I do as a GA. I don't know where you could work for 10 hours and make money and live, but we're going to fight that out {laughs}. This is when folks start trickling off cause it's…expensive…its expensive to be a student {laughs} because I'm used to making money. I'm not used to working 10 hours and getting a few hundred dollars.

A final different scenario that Kelly presented related to institutional barriers was related to the graduate school sponsored workshops conducted through the graduate student center. Kelly felt that there was unfair advantage to full-time students.

> I feel like everything is during the day and not in the evening where most graduate students will be able to attend and I don't think… that's fair. You have to be a full-time student…on campus all the time in order for you to attend those things and I don't think that's . . . fair.

Personal: Facilitator

Belief in self

In their narratives the participants talked about belief in self as a personality trait or cultural identity that functioned to empower them. Ong et al. (2011) referred to personal agency and drive as important to how students connect to their cultural identities. While this study was not focused on identities, it was important to make the connection that the awareness of a belief in self could be an exemplar of self-determination, independence, and assertiveness, all important to countering marginalization and oppression (Ong et al., 2011). More critically, the belief in self was expressed in narratives as radical awareness of personal strength and conviction. For example, Monroe stated, "I think to myself, I have to get through this, I have to get done" in order to make her parents proud, but also to financially assist her mother. King (1995) argued that due to the institutional environment that was conducive to the positioning of Black women as outsiders (i.e., isolation and discriminatory behavior) that perseverance within the academy was demonstrated as assertiveness or independence, which functioned as a "double-edged sword" by facilitating cultural stereotypes of Black women (p. 69).

Some of the women recognized that there were innate skills that they had to confront deficiencies in their doctoral matriculation. Independence and assertiveness were exhibited behaviors in the later stages of the doctoral programs. Justine discussed how she began actively "seeking out Black female faculty" when she attended conferences to purposefully engage with for networking and research guidance. She also talked about intentionally "seeking outside of the department" people who could

"mentor" or provide her with support. Justine also was actively using the resources at the graduate student center. All of the examples were self-actualized steps that Justine took to improve her chances for degree success. Annabella agreed that there were a lack of resources to support Black graduate students and especially Black women. She asserted that it required a lot of "willpower on your own independently to finish" a doctoral program.

Nadia agreed with the two previous assessments that assertiveness was an important personality trait needed to matriculate through doctoral programs. She explained that the type of people who make it through doctoral programs were those with personalities that were independent and resilient. Nadia provided an example of a person who could complete a degree as someone who was willing to seek out multiple people for an answer to a question. The person needed to be "aggressive or assertive . . . you can't be shy." Nadia continued to explain that there had to be persistence to "include themselves in groups that don't include them, so invite yourself." In an earlier description of the STEM faculty, Nadia characterized the personality type as being "a little colder, greener, analytical, not really touchy-feely caring types." This may suggest that for the STEM disciplines the belief in self and development of self motivation were critical not only to degree completion, but were perceived as professional norms.

Lyndsey discussed how in the later stages of the doctoral program she described herself as being assertive. She explained that she was "the type of person I…call myself a finisher of tasks, because I can't…go anywhere until I see the end product. Lyndsey described an evolution in her character from seemingly a conformist to a more independent thinker.

> I found out that I am more militant that I . . . thought I was. I thought I was this happy go lucky, anything goes, or whatever you way, but I found out that I am actually more rebellious and more assertive and even more inquisitive than I was when I first started . . .

The belief in self was a dynamic concept that was demonstrated by evolution in self or a greater awareness of becoming. Jae explained how she recognized "a sense of awakening any kind of sleeping giant." She explained how progression through the doctoral program allowed for a better understanding of the inner self and greater maturity to develop, which enabled an enriched and rewarding experience.

The women were able to describe the doctoral process in general as a "positive experience." Simultaneously, there were periods within the experience that the women expressed feeling like as "a PhD student it's kind of like you are wandering in the dark"––Monroe, it's "painful" as stated by Justine, or according to Kelly that it felt like a "hazing process" at times. The obstacles and uncertainty the participants encountered were countered with their belief in themselves as voices of empowerment. Monroe articulated an introspective representation of herself in relationship to the ideology of degree completion.

> I don't know how to quit, like I don't know how to not finish what I begin…I don't think I'm this great intellectual, you know, scholar like, what sets me apart what set many of us apart as Black women is we work. Like we know that if we don't work we're not going to get anywhere . . .

The belief in self was interpreted as Black women valuing themselves. The concept was understood to counter barriers such as feelings of not belonging, doubt, and

access to information. The women were able to connect with personal agency, which was a catalyst for increased determination. Women intrinsically conceptualized that they had ingrained skills of ownership to overcome obstacles to degree completion as noted in the following vignettes. Jessica explained that "it's my personality…like I started it, so I need to finish it." Whereas for Paige, her narrative conveyed more tenacity. "I am not exactly what you call a passive person…I cannot be . . . mostly because I've come too far and nobody's going to bully me at this point."

The participants recognized their individual empowerment, but also acknowledged the struggle of doctoral degree attainment. It was important to define one's own place of strength and not perceive needing help as a weakness. According to Slovacek et al. (2011), individual determination was linked to future success in doctoral study. Belief in self was important, but the ability to seek and ask for help was also critical. Darlene was attentive to the realities of her limitations and understood that there was support available within her department despite perceived pressures.

> I am the type of person where if I need help I will ask for it, you now, and so I wasn't afraid to ask for help . . . I always felt like I as supported along the way…when I doubted my own ability there was always someone that I could talk to who could tell me okay just keep pushing, you got it . . .

The belief in self was also viewed as a self-fulfilling prophecy. This was a concept that was denoted early in many of the narratives. Many of the women expressed long-term beliefs in the attainment of a doctoral degree. This may be suggestive of preliminary cognitive mapping skills toward a vision of academic interest such as the doctorate. Cognitive maps for graduate students were needed to get through programs as

they provided a broad picture of the formal system of requirements and mapping for the social system such as relationships, expectations, departmental politics (Lovitts, 2001). For example, Jessica shared that she kind of always knew that she wanted a PhD as it was the "highest level of education that I could get in my area and so that was what I was aiming for." Judith denoted her interest in earning her doctorate was there "in the beginning, because I have always known I wanted to do, do that." Another participant, Annabella discussed how she always knew that she would attain a doctorate. As a child she had a sticker with the universal sign for medical and it had the words doctor underneath it. She had gotten a finger print identification card and "I stuck that sticker by my card so every time I looked at my card I would see Dr. Annabella, even though it was a sticker." She talked about how important it was to see that constant reminder paired with a necessity to "take care of myself" as a critical impetus for not only pursuing, but ultimately completing the doctoral degree. Another example of a self-fulfilled destiny was Justine. She explained how she was "an overcomer" who had manage various obstacles in her life, but "there's nothing to suggest that I wouldn't be here."

The belief in self as a motivator was also an ideology to conceptually understand that degree completion was a goal to improve career options. Darlene discussed how she had to push further academically.

> I knew that if I did not finish I likely wouldn't be able to work and so I realized that I had to keep going. That was the end all, be all, like for me. I really knew I had to keep pushing in order to be able to have doors open as far as for career opportunities.

Toward the conclusion of her interview Darlene surmised that the lack of a critical mass of Black women doctoral students should not be the rationale for not pursing or completing the degree, "it doesn't mean you can't do it." She stressed emphatically, that for her she "didn't come to represent the Black people . . . [or to] be [a] representative of the Black female group." Darlene asserted that for Black women it was important to destabilize the pressure that may be stereotypically applied to Black women to over perform, "don't feel like you have all that pressure on your shoulders to prove that Black women can do it. No, prove you can do it!"

The fundamental belief in one's self represented psychological well-being for participants. The internalized reflective discourse referenced an enlightened perceptive for women to become more intentionally engaged members of the doctoral academy. Belief in self contributed to development of students' sense of belongingness and was more indicative of personal attributes that developed and were deemed critical to degree completion.

Institutional: Facilitators

Extended Advisor Support and Accountability

Advisor support was an important university facilitator; however, in the analysis it was more nuanced with the need of accountability being critical. Previous studies contended that a mentor was the most critical to student success; however, for this study the participants concluded that the meaningful engagement with their advisor along with accountability measures were most important to degree completion. Narratives about the need for a mentor were noted for participants in the college/school of education than for any other discipline. Martinsuo and Turkulainen (2011) asserted that advisor support and

benefits could not be maximized without the personal commitment and willingness from the student to devote significant time.

Through the analysis the participants noted the need for extended advisor support and the expectation of accountability from the advisor was insightfully understood within the context of the experiential condition of doctoral matriculation as having a direct impact on women's participation in their doctoral program of study. The term 'extended' is used to describe a more expanded or longitudinal expectation of advisor support and accountability rather than more protracted support. Jessica explained how "accountability would help" her to complete, because she was aware that she had been in "school for a while, a long time" and it was not "time to be done." She explained that having one faculty member that she could have "heart to hearts" with was invaluable, but her dissertation chair was needed to "keep the ball rolling." Jessica also discussed how the faculty members conceptually understood that due to her "race and gender" that she may have feelings of "I don't belong," so it was important to monitor her progress and to have "conversations" with her.

As doctoral students the women were not naïve about the time commitment needed for their doctoral matriculation, but they are seeking accountability processes to be embedded within the structure of their programs to enable degree progression. Kelly made an assertion regarding the need for extended advisor support that would be important for keeping her task oriented.

> I have to find the time. I need my advisor to be on top of me. Like . . . connect with me, communicate with me about what's going on, the process, making sure that I'm on task . . . you could fall off task so easily . . . cause you just get caught

> up the next thing you know it's a month later and you hadn't written anything down or you hadn't gotten anything together . . . my advisor . . . will [keep] me on top of things.

In the college/school of arts and sciences there were structural accountability metrics. Darlene discussed how it was a required practice in her program to conduct end-of-year academic self-evaluations. The evaluations detailed student "accomplishments or advancements…made in research," personal goals, and degree requirements that were achieved. Students submitted the evaluation materials to faculty; approximately six weeks later students received a "personalized letter written...giving…feedback and goals for the next year." Darlene acknowledged that there was never any type of "hate mail" received, but rather constructive feedback on doctoral progression. Darlene discussed that she had heard of other students in other programs completing similar year-end evaluations, but no other participants who were interviewed discussed a specific-end-of year evaluation process.

The relationship with the advisor manifested itself as a sense of belonging within the department that enabled the women to perceive themselves as part of a collegial network. It made a difference for the women within the academic community. It would be reasonable to conjecture that the participants were seeking the accountability from advisors not only for degree completion purposes, but also to combat isolation that could occur during the dissertation research process. Johnson Bailey et al. (2009) asserted that Black students at PWIs were disconnected from programs. In this study the seeking of accountability marked a necessary change that the participants perceived as integral to their persistence and degree completion.

Comprehensive exams were a hallmark of doctoral programs that denoted a time of change from course work to independent research. Participants were able to comment on the need to make changes in actions that could be facilitated by the advisor such as promoting the need for greater accountability. Participants did not discuss the role of advisor accountability prior to comprehensive exams, which may suggest that the greater the persistence in a program the more the need for accountability toward degree completion is necessitated. Casey was able to speak to her advisor's support when she was "devastated" after not passing her comprehensive exams for the second time.

> …he was really pushing them [other faculty] like okay she may not be so strong in [this but] she is a good candidate to keep for our program, so I believe that [advisor] really push[ed] . . . he told me that he was going to push, he was going to push my research and do all that he can to get me to stay and I know that they [the other faculty] had meetings to talk about whether I would stay or not but I don't know you know I have no idea what the others were saying . . . I didn't know where I was going to go . . . I was worried . . . people have been kicked out of the program for not failing this [comps] . . . he just was like just keep working on your research he said because I am going to push your research . . .

It was very difficult for Casey in the college/school of computer sciences to talk about the comprehensive experience due to the emotion that it still elicited; however, the experience resulted in a change for her that while her advisor supported and advocated her research, the director of the program met with her and provided guidance on how to proceed that "gave [her] confidence" to continue on. That was a very specific example of accountability interplay between the participant and advisor, but it also involved the

director of the program. The meaningful interaction demonstrated the level of support that the participant was able to receive. Additionally, Casey discussed a structured accountability metric that her advisor incorporated for all students post-comprehensive exams. Her advisor required a daily report. Casey explained that the report was submitted daily and though she initially thought it was inconsequential she realized that the report was the "catalyst" in "getting more research done" and it greatly reduced doubts that she had about being able to finish within her prescribed timeline.

Casey's example was one of the more dire academic circumstances; however, thematically the participants noted varying circumstances where the advisor support was important and the need for being accountable to them as significant to offset detrimental hindrances to persistence such as procrastination or the tendency of "laziness" and fatigue. Jessica, in the college/school of education, experienced issues with procrastination as illustrated in the vignette below.

> …I kind of set my deadlines…my professor may say, oh it will be good to get this back quickly …[professor] is not very firm…not at all…[professor] is kind of like, oh you can decide…I really need someone to be like, no, I'm going to hate you if you don't turn it in on Monday {laughs}…[professor] is not that person…so, it's different in that I have more flexibility, but it's the same procrastination.

Six of the participants conveyed in their discourses the need for extended advisor accountability and for more enriched interactions. An example according to Judith was working on writing papers or focusing on a publication. Through guided accountability Black women participants construed the later stages of doctoral matriculation as a shared

process with their advisor, therefore being more desirous of metrics to ensure degree completion, much more so than in the earlier stages of their doctoral experience. The embedded understanding was the accountability with the catalyst for research productivity. The seeking of greater accountability in the later stages of doctoral progression suggested that the Black women in this study were seeking more meaningful engagement to be better positioned in their respective departments as budding colleagues to faculty with skill development to become independent researchers.

Kelly, in the college/school of education, discussed how her advisor was the "only one" within the academy to provide intentional support. She explained how she had her advisor for many classes so there was a "connection" that facilitated communication. In her interview, Kelly, talked about how her advisor provided her with information on conferences, offered opportunities to publish, frequently read her work, and understood the future career plans that she was seeking. Kelly valued the information and support from her advisor that she perceived would contribute to developing her as a future faculty member. A key difference between Kelly's advisor and other faculty that she noted was that her advisor gave her the information relative to resources and opportunities, whereas she felt that as a student she had to seek and ask questions regarding the same information.

The improved engagement could however be stressed due to gender tensions as exemplified by Nadia from the college/school of computer sciences. She discussed how her new advisor provided her with tremendous support and that the advisor would contribute meaningfully to her degree success. When asked if she saw her advisor as more than just an advisor, such as a mentor, Nadia remarked that she anticipated more

guidance from the new advisor due to the level of expertise. Nadia tempered her response by stating that due to gender dynamics she thought that their interactions would be limited. She explained that "it's just you know inappropriate I guess for a man…and a woman to like be paly, paly like beyond professionalism especially if we are all married." Nadia continued to discuss how within a male dominated STEM discipline there were separate spaces for interactions of where additional support may be given for men and women. Nadia explained that socialization dynamics were "just separate, it's just men, men don't really mix with the women…even professionally, sometimes, they still won't say certain things when the women are in the room." There seemingly were constructivist limitations within programs that created alliances and implicitly encouraged solidarity based on gender, which functioned as exclusionary for women.

Many participants expressed the need for greater accountability from their advisors. As a whole there was a greater sense of a more positive outlook when there was greater accountability and extended advisor support. The challenge for doctoral students may be that the level of support that they were seeking may not materialize based on unrealistic expectations and/or constrained faculty or advisor obligations. For faculty in higher education mentoring is not the primary intention within academia.

Institutional support resources

An additional institutional facilitator that offered support to advisor accountability was support resources within the institution such as the graduate student center. There were not sufficient data to discern from the interviews a primary theme; however, it was more appropriate to denote the resource as an example of support that some of the students used. Four participants articulated positive experiences with the center and two

of those students expressed an active advisor relationship. There does not appear to be a correlated relationship that suggests a strong interaction with an advisor implies a greater likelihood of use of an institutional resource such as the graduate student center. The resources offered by the graduate student center appeared to be an independent conduit for more intentional engagement.

The Black women in this study subtly talked about the need for interactions with others who showed an interest in them at the institutional level. This was an infrequent reference to the graduate student center, a university resource that was especially beneficial for those doctoral women in the final stages of writing. The four participants who referenced the center did not seem to learn about the resource or the benefits until the later stages of their program. Other participants either did not discuss the center or seemed to be unaware of the services offered. Two participants, Monroe and Paige discussed the isolated nature of their programs and how busy they were within their respective departments, which may suggest a need for greater communication and collaboration between the graduate student center and programs. The center provided workshops multiple times during the year, which enabled and encouraged all students to come in and work exclusively on their dissertations in a designated location that was quiet and restricted to only those students who were actively writing. There was an assigned person within the center who reviewed dissertation formatting for students. Annabella expressed that it was nice to have someone "…showing interest that you've just did all this work..." That was an important interaction for her as she later expounded about the lack of support as a Black student. According to Annabella "there is no outlet to connect to as a female and then on top of that as being a minority in the graduate

program." Her narrative suggests the continued isolation that Black female doctoral students experienced and the need for greater access to resources to combat the marginalization and to provide opportunities to intentionally engage with other scholars across disciplines.

At Olympic University there were no Black women's doctoral organizations or resources to support their multifaceted needs. Two key informants were interviewed separately. One who worked with a division within the graduate school and the other within student academic affairs. Both responded that while there were no directed programming efforts aimed directly toward Black doctoral students all the services offered within their respective divisions were available to everyone. The graduate school representative indicated that when programs were scheduled, staff members did informally communicate via email to Black women doctoral students with whom the staff already had established a relationship with or those who had previously attended other events in a hope that they could promote and encourage other Black doctoral student participation. Both informants were reflective of statements which appeared on departmental websites that indicated an intention toward encouragement of the inclusion of all student participation rather than one particular group.

The graduate student center was recognized by three of the participants as a meaningful institutional facilitator. Justine was aware of email communications that were generated from the center and the services that were offered and while Kelly did not necessarily like the times that programs were offered she expressed interest in the cadre of workshops. Darlene discussed how staff in the graduate student center knew her by name and were willing to assist her with any paperwork needed by the graduate school.

She did articulate that her being a recipient of a funding award may have facilitated her relationship with the graduate school. Darlene explained how she was able to:

> …go to any one of them, you know, ring in the graduate school, and they would take care of me. Like I could ask them any question I needed, so as far as like support it started at the top. I think I was just very thankful that I had that door open for me to kind of grant me access to individuals who really actually cared…and want to help you out.

The graduate student center was recognized by participants as providing email communications to upcoming events and maintenance of the website for the dissertation formatting guidelines. Students are required to schedule appointments for formatting once they have applied for graduation and to submit documentation to the graduate school. The graduate student center provided resources for those processes. More broadly, it is significant to realize that the majority of Black women doctoral participants were not able to reference institutional support resources beyond their advisor or dissertation chair as a facilitator. The data upon initial review would suggest that participants were accepting of scarce institutional resources, but a more critical analysis lends to a dissociated institutional structure that left participants independently seeking methods to facilitate degree completion. Unfortunately, it does not appear that participants were able to identify institutional facilitators to counter the roadblocks to degree completion such as isolation, procrastination, lack of a realistic goals and deadlines, all issues that were part of the participants' discourses. The institution seems to have programs that lack definite expectations post-comprehensive exams as to how to

complete the dissertation without definite benchmarks that have guidance and a method for receiving information and support beyond the advisor.

## Summary

The purpose of this qualitative interpretative study was to examine the experiences of Black women doctoral students at a PWI to understand: (1) how Black women perceive the influence of personal and institutional characteristics on their doctoral degree persistence at PWIs and (2) how Black women in the later stages of their doctoral program perceive the personal and institutional characteristics that would facilitate their doctoral degree completion. The intent of this chapter was to present the detailed findings and analysis for the themes that emerged from the twelve interviews. Tables 8 and 9 indicated the themes and subthemes. The themes were positioned all within the context of the dually-bounded realities or intersectionality of race and gender that was inescapable to the perspectives shared (Collins, 2009).

The chapter was organized based on the two research questions and then the corresponding themes relative to barriers and facilitators were provided. Through the analysis process, women were more easily able to attribute the barriers and facilitators to persistence than to degree completion. A potential rationale was that women perceived persistence and degree completion as a continuum and not as separate constructs warranting the need of different strategies. Persistence appeared to be significantly influenced by the ability of students to navigate the systemic culture of doctoral education and most notably thematically as faculty interactions. The narratives provided showed that the interactions were more problematized and complex than simply denoting the engagement as a part of doctoral socialization. Women demonstrated intrinsic skills

that were critical to counter the oppressive conditions at a PWI, such as reliance on family, faith, and their diversified cohort group.

The chapter evolved from tightly-woven narratives to those, which were more nuanced. The thematic analysis of the second research question relative to degree completion was more difficult to synthesize. There was not a unifying institutional barrier; instead, the disparate data were presented that represented the varying thoughts. This may suggest that Black women in the later stages of the doctoral program have silently regressed from the institution and are primarily goal oriented to complete the degree discounting institutional barriers that may not have been resolved earlier in their matriculation. The interview data had to be carefully reviewed to tease out the responses relative to degree completion. In some instances there was overlap, which was anticipated based on the literature review of Chapter 2 that there was fluidity in the themes. The women did not experience the constructs of persistence and the degree completion in isolation. There were challenges that were experienced early that remained unresolved and continued for some beyond comprehensive exams such as the inability to secure funding or challenges with faculty interactions. For other women the lack of confidence was a challenge in the early stages of the doctoral process, but was either resolved in the later stages as being developed into greater self-motivation or a stronger belief in skills that one possessed.

Chapter 5 will provide summary, conclusions and recommendations for future research. The summary discussion will include the theoretical framework and how the narrative perspectives were supported. There was alignment between some of the dimensions of BFT and the thematic analysis. BFT does consider the tension between

race and gender and how Black women resist marginalization. Chapter 5 will conclude with recommendations to impact future research related to Black women doctoral students.

# CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of Black women doctoral students at a PWI in the Southeastern part of the United States to understand personal and institutional characteristics that influenced persistence and degree completion during the later stages of their doctoral program. The study emphasized a particular stage of the doctoral process, after successful completion of comprehensive and/or qualifying examinations, to better explore issues of persistence for a specific subpopulation, Black women within the doctoral community.

This was a basic interpretive qualitative research study using semi-structured interviews. Twelve Black women doctoral students were interviewed. The participants were enrolled either part-time or full-time at Olympic University in the college/school of arts and sciences, education, or computer science. Two key informants were selected based on their unique positions associated with Olympic University who were knowledgeable about their offices and could provide a contextual contribution regarding the institution. The study was unique due to exclusive focus of Black women doctoral students at a particular time within their doctoral studies (i.e, post-comprehensive examinations).

The research allowed for women to retrospectively analyze how they persisted thus far in their doctoral programs and to prospectively consider the barriers and facilitators of degree completion. The use of qualitative interpretative research allowed for the practical multiple realities of the Black woman doctoral experience to be the

hallmark of the research and not on the periphery or a condensed portion of larger studies related to graduate research. The study considered the nuanced epistemological discourse of Black women doctoral students as critical to the essence of demonstrating the analytic themes. The vignettes that were aggregated within the analysis of Chapter 4 demonstrated the participants' thoughts regarding how they made decisions, values, beliefs, and their overall perceptions that were salient throughout the doctoral process. In this chapter findings from the literature were integrated with key findings to contribute to the discussion and conclusions section. The chapter will conclude with recommendations for future research.

## Theoretical considerations

In this study the integrated framework of BFT was inextricably linked to the lived experiences of the Black women doctoral students. BFT is concerned with empowerment of Black women and emphasized the intersectionality of gender, race, and class undergirded on socially constructed meanings (Collins, 2009). The core of BFT lies in clarifying Black women's experiences and ideas (Collins, 2009). Howard-Hamilton (2003) posited that one of the encompassing themes of BFT was that the framework was intentionally informed and produced by the experiences that have been documented by Black women. The theory grounded the study based not only on the singular focus of Black women's perspectives, but also due to the interpretive lens used to critically illuminate nuanced dimensions of the constructs' persistence and degree completion. The findings conveyed exemplars of BFT that described the intersections of gender and race and empowerment. Here, in the following discussion section, are two of the distinguishing features that are highlighted to demonstrate specific connections between

the theory and data.

One example was connected to the first distinguishing feature of BFT, which concerned the "dialectical relationship" that links Black women's oppression and activism (Collins, 2009, p. 25; Patton, 2009). This first feature is based on the contention that Black feminism as a social activist response is needed in response to oppression that exists with the continuation of Black women's subordination within intersecting oppressions such as race, class, gender, and sexuality (Collins, 2009). More broadly understood, according to Collins (2009), Black women do not live lives where race or gender occurs at a distance.

Jessica presented a narrative that profoundly addressed the multiplicity of oppressions (i.e., race, gender, and class). She was the one participant who was blunt in her discussion relating to a "low SES [socioeconomic status]" and her awareness of the lack of Black females faculty in the college/school of education. Jessica commented that it may not have been a barrier related to her persistence, but it was something that she was aware of while stopping short of calling it a hindrance. She did, however develop a strong collegial relationship with another Black male faculty member that she felt was important to her persistence and ultimate degree completion. The development of her relationship with another faculty member can be understood as personal activism.

In a particularly poignant section of Jessica's narrative she reflects on being from "a real small town" and working with Black children who she believes "don't realize the possibilities" for their futures. With tear filled eyes Jessica discussed the desire to be a "role model" (i.e. activism), which was motivated in part by the children's perceptions that due to being Black and from a "low SES" background seems to parallel the plurality

of her life. Jessica continued to discuss how important it was to inform potential students that may or may not be interested in college to "hang in there, there is something different out there, you know, the sky really is the limit in a lot of ways." Her discourse exemplifies a multi-pronged social activist response to the intersecting oppression of her life. Jessica was actively engaged in persisting through her doctoral program and sought support resources to better facilitate the process for her. The personal experience of being from a rural community and from a low SES background compounded with the issues of race and gender had such an impact on Jessica's life that she was committed to becoming a role model for youth from similar environments.

Also linked to the first distinguishing feature were the experiences and consciousness that shaped the lives of Black women (Collins, 2009; Patton, 2009). For example Annabella noticed that as a Black woman she was "roped into a lot of things because [she] was the only minority." Annabella was aware of the political nature within her department to recruit a more diverse class of students and that it was primarily "minority student[s] that were being brought" to her for presentations and student tours. She was also not naïve to the use of her photograph being used on the departmental website and her narrative carried an undertone of resentment, while attempting to laugh it off; however, within the deeper level of her narrative she acknowledged that she hated giving presentations and that is not a task in which she excelled.

Institutionally, there may be an attempt toward a supposition that the department was providing a learning opportunity; however intrinsically Annabella was aware that race was the driving force. It is important to note that when Annabella entered her program she was the only Black in the department. She actively countered that when

another Black entered the program and informed the student to be prepared to have "[his/her] face plastered everywhere," but the student informed her that he/she did want to do that. The action taken by Annabella may have been in the guise of attempting to divert any of the perceived exploitation that she may have encountered from occurring to another Black student. Annabella then reflected that she felt "obligated" to promote the department, although it had gotten "a little old" and she just wanted to do her research. That perspective was one that Annabella could only conceptualize in the latter stages of her program as a pertinent concern for her degree completion. She perceived an inequity in the distribution of responsibilities issued to doctoral students as it pertained to race and indirectly to gender. There were layered realties in addition to race and gender that Black women must confront in order to realize the connection between their experiences and consciousness to consider how that informs their lives (Collins, 2009).

According to Collins (2009) there were commonalities to Black women's intersecting oppressions, but that does not predispose the same individual responses. In the examples of Jessica and Annabella both women experienced oppressions tangentially connected, but were able to articulate and respond to their situations differently based on their level of consciousness linked to the experiences.

Another example to demonstrate the link between BFT and the findings was connected to the second distinguishing feature related to divergent responses to experiences. Most tangibly present within the data was the concept that there existed common challenges for Black women; there was incongruence among the experiences and a lack of agreement on the extent of the experiential significance. Within the data through the lens of BFT, all of the Black women in this study did not all characterize

positive supportive, family interactions but rather as an overall supportive construct with embedded complexity. That finding contrasted with the results of Bonner and Evans (2004) where the family was viewed as a generalized positive influence of support. In this study, while the family was determined to be primarily a facilitator to persistence there was variation in how the familial support was expressed and in some cases was not discussed at all. For example, Judith did not discuss at all how her family contributed to her persistence. In her interview she did talk about various dimensions of her family, such as the presence of a spouse and children, but not in the context of familial support and how they may have contributed to her persistence. Conversely, Kelly discussed how her young daughter was able to provide more impetus for support than members of her immediate family. Those narratives contrasted sharply with the majority narratives, such as Monroe and Annabella, who both discussed the motivation that came from their mothers and the conversations that they had with them.

Through the shared narratives the Black women were able to provide a richer understanding of the complexity within the families of origins and how overcoming obstacles through their doctoral experiences was an important goal not just for the individual, but pluralistically for the family. In this study the women were able to reflectively consider the role that their family conflated or constrained the doctoral experience especially post-comprehensive examinations when participants were no longer new to their respective programs and had a baseline of understanding of the rigor required for degree completion. The family acted as a support mechanism for participants and enabled empowerment through verbalized support and motivation. The participants relied on both their family and religious communities during emotional

distress (Hamilton-Mason, Hall, & Everett, 2009). The help and solace that families could provide contributed for some participants in minimizing the emotional isolation that was being encountered. For others, the family represented an ongoing relational struggle that magnified during the doctoral process due to disconnection between the individual and the family. According to Jairam and Kahl (2013) families do not understand the doctoral process. There was mixed support for that finding in the current study. Participants commented on the need for family support with the caveat that especially for first-generation college students and at the doctoral level families did not necessarily understand the long process of course work, dissertation writing, publishing, and countless revisions. At least two of the participants discussed the scarce support they received from family members who were either not invested in their education or felt that it was a distractor from the more immediate familial issues. This was especially salient for the first-generation college students who discussed how they frequently struggled with wanting to openly communicate with their families, but acknowledged the frustration of having to provide detailed explanations so that they were understood, yet still feeling that their concerns were not fully captioned.

Another example of the second distinguishing feature related to common challenges was faculty interactions. Consistent with the conceptual underpinning of the feature, not all of the Black women in this study had the same experience with faculty, nor was it necessary for them to do so to face challenges that are experientially derogatory for Black women (Collins, 2009). For example all Black women doctoral students in this study did not need to necessarily comment about an experience related to faculty interactions to understand that the minimal diversity within the ranks of faculty

was troubling for them or to address issues related to power that faculty had over students. Seminal to BFT, the participants shared a common theme, but there were varying perspectives on their experiences (Howard-Hamilton, 2003). There were varying rationales to explain the diversity of responses from participants. The participants were from different colleges, but the experiences were not conclusively the same within the disciplines. The differences represented variation in the relational experiences with faculty such as interactions to understand that there was a dominant power (i.e., faculty member, dissertation chair person, or academic advisor) who had authority over the doctoral students survival within the academy in many instances.

For Black women, their oppression had connotations to the historical struggle of race and gender and vulnerability. For example, in the narratives when Monroe and Paige discuss the need for being aware that faculty are not the people that you to oppose because they as students you could be "blackballed." According to Paige, it was not a good idea to share too much about yourself because it could be used against you. Those participant narratives portray an example of a common standpoint or group knowledge, but a variation in the degree of depth of the idea or experience.

This study utilized tenets of BFT to ground the study by addressing the need for inclusion of Black women's voices in research where it has been previously unequally distributed. BFT is concerned with development of the marginalized voice of Black women from a position of powerlessness in the context of an outsider group to one that can orient a self-defined standpoint within the intersections of race, class, and gender (Collins, 1998). The research data was a rich landscape that conceptualized BFT with not only the examples that were previously provided, but extended to the core themes that

Collins (2009) addressed such as exploitation of labor and the oppression of stereotypical images. At least four of the participants discussed the issue of being used a "cheap labor" while expressing feelings of discontent of being used with lack of regard for any meaningful contribution that they could possibly make and/or their degree completion goals. According to Paige, as a Black woman there was a need to be careful of the perception of being viewed as "loud, bossy, [or] pushy." That perception was shared by six women who also addressed issues related to stereotypes that Collins (2009) would assert was a core theme of BFT that controlling images represented domination by power groups. The current study was also similar to the findings of Holmes (2008) who also used BFT and reported that Black women in higher education were challenged to counter negative cultural images that were demeaning such as the controlling images characterized by hooks (1981) of the Jezebel and Mammy.

The theoretical framework contributed to the data analysis by providing the underpinning to address Black women's experiences by centering on their ideas. BFT as a critical social theory acknowledges the plurality of multi-intersecting oppressions for Black women and more directly provides a conceptual perspective of their reality within inherently unstable and unequal society. Informed by the assumptions and distinguishing features of BFT this research contributes to the limited research related to Black women and doctoral scholarship by validating their experiences of persistence and degree completion. The intentional inclusion of women post-comprehensive examinations enabled the richness of perspectives and a more nuanced consideration of positionalities.

## Discussion and conclusions

The current study denoted within group differences of 12 Black women doctoral students enrolled at a PWI. Chapter 4 focused primarily on data findings and the following section underscores the link between previous literature and the findings. Similar to Chapter 4 the following section is organized based on the research questions and primary themes from Tables 8 and 9.

### Discussion Related to Research Question 1

#### Personal Barrier

How do Black women perceive the influence of personal and institutional characteristics on their doctoral degree persistence at PWIs? The question primarily examined persistence for Black women. The personal barrier theme was lack of self-confidence (see Table 8). Subthemes were illuminated as lack of academic ability, questioning or doubt, feelings of isolation, and social or cultural capital (see Table 8). Self-doubt as a barrier to persistence was consistent with the findings of Johnson-Bailey (2004) that Black women participants struggled with uncertainty and isolation in classroom interactions. Souto-Manning and Ray (2007) juxtaposed the contention that women of color in the academy constantly were negotiating and navigating in the space that had devalued their lived experiences, discourses, and ways of producing knowledge. The ongoing struggle may contribute to the deterioration of self-confidence.

The questioning or lack of self-confidence that was a thematic concern for participants may have lent to the instability in programmatic connections and contributed more to subtleties in discourse related to experiences such as lack of belonging and the need to continually self assert that contention refrain related to finishing. The women

post-comprehensive exams were goal oriented and confident in their abilities to complete their doctoral degree as they had already persisted through challenges within their program such as course work, lack of access to information, and issues of funding.

Confidence was described as important to graduate students' degree persistence (Berg & Ferber, 1983). Participants such as Casey in the current study recognized that her lack of personal self-confidence was a hindrance to persistence. Regardless of the confidence in the ability or belief in self that led to the decision to pursue the degree, participants described various feelings of self-doubt during their doctoral study that was consistent with previous findings in the literature (Smith, 1995). During comprehensive exams, four participants suggested some levels of doubt during that crucial period of their doctoral experience. Feelings of self-doubt were actually found to be normative for doctoral students; however, women tended to internalize the issue whereas men projected it as an organizational issue or onto the faculty (Sells, 1973). Conversely, Bonner and Evans (2004) contended, based on the research of Hughes and Demo (1989), that it was not the lack of self-esteem that hindered Black students, but rather personal efficacy. The current study did not have findings to support lack of personal motivation, but rather limited instances of procrastination by two women. More broadly, participants discussed feelings of isolation, which were contributory to the theme of lack of self-confidence.

For example, Annabella discussed retrospectively that post-comprehensive exams that she no longer felt like she was stuck in her program and that she did not want to quit everyday. Annabella alluded to feeling isolated prior to her comprehensive exams and was glad to move to another phase within her program. For Paige, she cancelled her exams initially and had to work herself up to a point where "I am going to take it anyway

and either I pass or I fail, so I'm not going to sweat bullets about it." Again, these were suggestive of feelings of questioning or doubt and possible inadequate support within the department to appropriately frame and guide a student's success through the comprehensive exam process.

Another example was from Casey who was much more reserved and hesitant about her abilities. Casey felt like it was only when she attended Olympic University that she as not "smart enough" and acknowledged that it was her confidence that would hold her back academically. Both women were enrolled in programs there were primarily male dominated and were confronted with the complicating agendas. For Paige, she felt that in her program gender was a competing interest primarily as it related to "issues . . . in the hard sciences," but for Casey race was more of an issue because she did not like the stereotypes associated with Black people and it made her feel like she was walking on "egg shells" a lot of the time. For both women they independently were coping with trying to assimilate to the cultural mores of their disciplines, but Paige seemingly had transitioned easier than Casey due to greater confidence.

Casey was the one participant who discussed how difficult the qualifying exam was. She indicated that she "didn't realize the depth" of the questions and was not prepared for the oral portion. Casey explained that upon realizing that she did not pass the exam she experienced feelings of devastation and uncertainty of her academic future. Gray et al. (1997) asserted that self-doubt reoccurred during events such as comprehensive examinations where students were externally evaluated on increasingly more complex academic requirements. Prior to the discourse regarding the comprehensive exams, Casey only referenced feelings like there were things that she felt

she "should have known" coming into the school/college of computer sciences. She presented an overall narrative of being inadequately prepared for the course work, but it only after discussing the comprehensive exams that her dialogued shifted to reference specifically the lack of confidence that she perceived was different about her than from other students in the program who were primarily male. Women were viewed as less confident with a lack of ability when compared to men who were viewed by faculty as being less dedicated or promising (Berg & Ferber, 1983). Collectively self-doubt was not just isolated to internalized feelings, but more critically understood as confronting the reality of their positionality as both woman and Black and being uncertain in the early years of their doctoral education how to discredit or silence the conscious oppression. Feelings regarding lack of self-confidence were indicative of the participants' evaluation of their own abilities. The critical challenge within a doctoral program is to adjust current intrinsic feelings with whom the participant was evolving into (i.e., academic scholar). The need for contrastive reappraisal allows for Black women to better realign their own self worth.

Institutional Barriers

There were three primary themes for institutional barriers: funding, access to information, and faculty interactions (see Table 8). Funding was important to the overall composition of persistence and degree completion for participants. The participants understood that funding was a critical gateway to faculty, information, and institutional resources. For example, Darlene discussed how through her funding she had access to important institutional staff within the graduate school that were able to assist her with required doctoral documents. Darlene believed without her funding she would never

have had access to those individuals. Other participants had to cope with the lack of funding and how it would impact their enrollment. There were some consistencies with Johnson-Bailey (2004) that two participants had to adjust their course loads due to limitations of finances. Different from Johnson-Bailey (2004) where women started in higher education without funding, the participants in the current study all had financial assistance at some point during their doctoral program in the form of tuition assistance, philanthropic awards, and/or school loans.

Ong et al. (2011) asserted that funding was an important factor for recruiting and retaining students in STEM. The current study noted that the at least one participant enrolled in a STEM program received a multi-year funding award. She expressed how it was decisive in the overall decision to pursue and remain in her doctoral program. Ong et al. (2011) referenced the empirical findings of Sosnowski (2002) and Hall (1981) that Black women seeking funding in STEM programs require transparency about the process and guidance on navigating the application with the caveat from Brown (1995) that minority women were significantly unlikely to receive offers of National Science Foundation fellowships. However, unlike Cho et al. (2008) that focused on college freshman where financial aid was a critical determinant of college choice, the participants in the current study did not reference funding as important to institutional selection. Location for current participants was more influential to college choice than funding, but that does not mitigate the importance of financial support through fellowships and/or awards.

Being used as ‘cheap labor’ was a pattern of concern for four participants in this study who worked as graduate assistants and felt that they were exploited through

working hours without pay, and, consistent with Zhao et al. (2007), feeling overworked due to the teaching load and the amount of time being spent on a faculty members research. In the current study, participants felt that their work was minimized to insignificant tasks that had no relationship to their abilities or contributed meaningfully to their scholarly development. Bonner and Evans (2004) argued that successful students needed to be integrated within the institution; however, being used in a capacity that was not academic and/or professionally developmental only contributed to feelings to resentment and inadequacy. In this current study participants were able to effectively discuss issues related to labor exploitation due to being in the latter stages of their program and reflectively considered the impact of work not relevant to their scholarly development. Consistent with Zhao et al. (2007) feelings associated with 'cheap labor' denoted negative satisfaction from participants in the current study.

A second institutional barrier was access to information. Participants felt that they were excluded from information that was important to their persistence and degree completion. Information about funding and resources were available, but students lamented that they had to know where to find and how to access the information. That was troubling especially when there appears to be reluctance not only with faculty to share information, but there was the belief that peers may not always be forthcoming. Part of the challenge to obtaining information may be linked to the level of integration within the institution for the student. Bonner and Evans (2004) concurred that social integration was a difficulty experienced by Black students and asserted that lack of access to key information was a common frustration. As denoted from Chapter 4, Johnson-Bailey (2004) agreed that for Black women there were concerns of being excluded from

information through both departmental formal and informal networks such as study groups, research projects, and publication opportunities. Kelly in the current study surmised that the primary issue relative to access to information was that Black women had to ask for it, but they really did not know what they were asking for except there was the belief there was information beyond Afrocentric groups and organizations that were significant to degree progression. Participants in the current study alluded to feelings of being alienated or experiencing marginalization due to not having access to important information. Malone and Barabino (2008) asserted that students felt invisible due to being excluded from networking information and that, while they were pragmatically linked to a program, they lacked the requisite full recognition that came with being a member of the learning community. In the current study, participants felt isolated due to the lack of information, and it magnified the divisions between constructs such as part-time and full-time students and race.

The third institutional barrier was faculty interactions and broadly navigating the systemic culture of doctoral education that was comprised of the subthemes (see Table 8). Across the three disciplines represented in this study the women recognized the systemic culture as an institutional barrier that they needed to effectively negotiate and navigate, which included interactions that were decisive for students' decisions to persist (Mastekaasa & Smeby, 2005). According to Grover (2007) the political maze was an unfortunate reality within doctoral programs and students had to be aware of the pitfalls when managing their programs and that students must be conscious of interactions with faculty. Experiences with racism, sexism, and isolation were coupled with the need to balance and negotiate the various roles within academia for women of color (Souto-

Manning & Ray, 2007). The systemic culture of doctoral education was inclusive of funding, access to information, and interactions with faculty. Previous literature contended that supportive and productive academic relationships with faculty were important to the overall scholarly development of students (Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Patterson-Stewart et al., 1997). Ong et al. (2011) postulated based on the work Solórzano (1995) that minority women entered doctoral programs with lowered expectations from faculty, therefore functioning as a cultural bias against minority women and undermining their success.

Embedded within the primary institutional barrier of faculty interactions was the subtheme of faculty and advisor control, which was broadly significant to underscoring the link between students and faculty, particularly the extend that students perceived faculty to have control over them in their doctoral progression. As a point of distinction primarily due to the participants being interviewed post-comprehensive exams they frequently used the term faculty and advisor interchangeably to refer to the same individual, thus there was significance to the interaction with the advisor. Previous literature had focused on the benefits of the advisor relationship for doctoral students as critically important (Lovitts, 2001). The participants in this study frequently stopped short of referring to interactions with their advisor or faculty members as 'relationships'. According to Annabella in reference to her advisor "there is no relationship." The current study's findings of a non-existent relationship, as described by Annabella, paralleled results of Malone & Barabino (2008) where minorities experienced feelings of invisibility and marginalization. More precisely, Annabella referred to the non-

relationship as more of a “boss/employee” dyad. This does not necessarily imply that Annabella did not want more meaningful interaction.

The term relationship was more predominately noted with students in the college of education. All of the participants discussed faculty interactions to some extent, but there were seven women who provided discourse focused on the controlling aspect of the interaction. The within-data findings would suggest that student potential was stymied by either the explicit or implicit behaviors of faculty. To be fair, faculty do have a lot of demands on their time, and it may not be part of the departmental culture to intentionally emphasize quality over quantity when it comes to advising assignments. Faculty may feel ill equipped to appropriately advise doctoral students to degree completion; there are minimal incentives for the additional workload. Herzig (2002) argued that it was through faculty interactions that doctoral students have access to the cultural practices and expectations that students learn are critical to persistence. Therefore, faculty do have a role in controlling how students adapt to the structure of program and learn to negotiate within the systems of discipline. Interactions with faculty were part of the environmental factors that make up the setting to integrate Black women doctoral students. The quality and frequency of interactions with faculty in this study were significant to students. This differed from the conclusion of Herzig (2002) who asserted that based on the interviewed faculty that student success or failure was the responsibility of the student; essentially placing the onus of responsibility centrally with the student. The contention of this study was that while faculty interactions, especially advisor relationships, were significant during the entire doctoral process, they were critical during the latter stages when Black women may be more cognizant of the lack of structure post-comprehensive exams.

Previous literature supports that faculty influence women's doctoral degree progress. Maher, Ford, and Thompson (2004) made several assertions regarding the faculty role including that new doctoral students benefit from an intensive orientation so that they may adjust expectations and learn methods to navigate through a program successfully. Faculty were encouraged to consider the balance of advising duties and uniformity in distribution of information such as use of a listserv or newsletter that provided updated resources. A final recommendation for faculty and programs was the implementation of a mandatory portfolio review system that could guarantee that doctoral students meet face-to-face regularly with their entire committee to discuss academic progress. A review system would be especially critical post-comprehensive exams when many students are no longer being accessed or evaluated based on course work. A monitoring system would ensure progression on independent dissertation research and prevent years elapsing without any meaningful progress. All of the recommendations were consistent with data findings for the current study. For example, Kelly commented that it was only her advisor who provided her with information to research opportunities. Kelly felt that there should be a "listserv of the graduate students" in the department and that faculty should inform students of opportunities as they are received. She understood that as a doctoral student it was her responsibility to identify opportunities, but she also felt that in the early part of her doctoral experience she lacked the information to know where and how to identify opportunities. Kelly summarized her frustration by simply stating, "just give me the opportunity or just send it out so I will be informed about it." The inequity in opportunities for students to persist correlated to unequal chances of persistence for students (Herzig, 2004). The feeling of exclusion and being "out of the

loop" was consistent for underrepresented minorities (Malone & Barabino, 2008, p. 495). Gardner (2008) asserted that a part of the socialization process for doctoral students included information seeking tasks, which included normative expectations and learning through interactions with faculty and the cohort.

The current research findings suggest that there may be challenges in information seeking behaviors for Black women doctoral students, but there is also culpability on the part of faculty due to the level of complacency regarding advising duties. Further, the current study noted that there was a limited interactive academic relationship between the student and faculty members that led to students feeling angry regarding perceptions of stereotyping. There exist two issues that limit information seeking behaviors for students. One according to the key informants that were interviewed there are no programs or services that specifically address the academic or social needs of Black women doctoral students; rather, programming that was offered was inclusive to all students. A second issue is that students may be limited to obtaining information from their academic advisor who may be overloaded with advisees, research, and course load.

New doctoral students may lack the confidence for information seeking behaviors and often do not have enough information to know what they don't know. Therefore, faculty have a tremendous amount of influence over degree persistence in the early years of a doctoral program when students are still learning how to navigate the expectations of a discipline. This study is consistent with Herzig (2002) where faculty had limited interactions with students during the earlier stages of their programs, which may have contributed to the limited scope or development of crucial interactions between students and faculty. That finding was consistent with Golde (1998) who asserted that individual

rationales for first year attrition in doctoral programs were insufficient and that it was important to consider how the discipline and program informed student experiences.

One reason for departure within the sciences in the first year according to Golde (1998) was a mismatch in working styles and inability to communicate with their faculty advisor. Further, Herzig (2002) asserted that during the first three years of a doctoral education for mathematics students that their primary task was to participate in course work and qualifying exams. Those tasks would be guided or in collaboration with faculty. Herzig (2002) found that faculty implied that courses and qualifying exams were opportunities for students to prove or discover if they had the ability to succeed, then they were given opportunities to meaningfully participate in programs. A catch-22 was formed, that ignored the meaningful participation that could enhance students' abilities and skills as students must first prove themselves (Herzig, 2002). To be clear, the Herzig (2002) study was focused on the earlier stages of mathematics doctoral students, whereas the current study focused on the latter stages of doctoral programs when Black women could retrospectively consider issues of persistence. The participants in the current study were seeking information to aid them in persistence through coursework, but they needed accountability and structure during the latter stages of degree completion. The current study corroborated with McAlpine and Amundsen (2012) that doctoral student success was contingent upon explicit calls for accountability and not taken-for-granted departmental practices.

A more critical aspect of faculty and advisor control that was more troubling was the overtones of fear and intimation that Black women doctoral students expressed. Baker and Pifer (2011) asserted that an ineffective relationship with a faculty member

stimulates feelings of fear and undue stress in doctoral students due to a belief that faculty do not see them as a future scholar and therefore worthy of a time investment. A more complex probing of data analysis of the current study suggest there may be disjunction with the implied and real expectations of faculty particularly the academic advisor that are the stimulus behind feelings of fear. Participants rarely spoke directly about concrete guidance that they received from their advisors, but instead opted to comment in broad terms of how important they felt faculty and their advisors were. For example Lyndsey had a faulty advisor who she felt was concerned about her "holistic self" and not just about the program. She stated that the faculty member was "careful to allow you to make your own decisions, but not fall so far below that you can't rise from them and so all those things kind of helped me to see completion." This was counter to the experience of Judith who had a faculty member suggest that she should leave her program early on because she had a child. The comments created undue anxiety and stress for Judith. Because she received support from another faculty member encouraging her to stay, the original faculty member persisted in controlling the information that she received. Judith commented that "I would come to talk to him in the office and he would ignore me sometimes" and that she did not received the same emails that other students received.

There was an element of distrust regarding the ability to push back or to disagree with faculty, thus participants were left to silence their grievances. Participants felt that there would be punitive repercussions if they complained about faculty. Paige, Monroe, and Nadia all spoke about the challenges of being oppositional to faculty. The women referred to being "black balled" and the feeling that "faculty will ruin you." Black

women were then left in the untenable position of being able to adequately be immersed within their disciplines due to the need to prove themselves worthy of the academy.

Students expressed concerns related to the immense pressure and intimidation they perceived from faculty. While it may be an accepted norm within higher education that faculty are essentially above reproach it leaves students in an untenable position that hinders recourse and student autonomy. Faculty are then cast in the roles of primary guardians of student success, when in fact there should be greater emphasis on the shared roles and expectations within a collegial dyad where students are learning the roles and responsibilities of being a researcher. The findings related to faculty control were consistent with Widnall (1988) who asserted that specifically "women students give their" faculty advisors "a great deal of power" when "assessing their ability" and therefore internalize and validate their perceptions based on the assessment (p. 1744). The findings did not yield results that were consistent with Barnes (2009-2010) related to advisor expectations of advisee. Cumulatively, the findings related to advisor duality of stress and distress was consistent with Hyun, Quinn, Madon, and Lustig (2006). None of the participants in the current study discussed specific expectations that their advisors had of them that may be suggestive of mutual and shared expectations that would be foundational to an effective relationship that was detailed by Barnes (2009-2010). The encompassing concern for Black women doctoral students in the current study was the absence of tangible support within the institution.

Personal Facilitators

There were two themes identified as personal facilitators to persistence: family and faith and spirituality. Eleven of the participants identified faith as being a critical

personal facilitator to their persistence. Both the family and faith functioned as places of solace for these 12 Black women doctoral students to sought affirmation and comfort that they were pursuing a worthwhile endeavor with the doctoral degree. The participants commented on the family members being their "cheerleaders" and how they frequently voiced pride and support for the academic goal even though may not have understood the process of degree attainment.

The role of family in the current study reiterated Leppel (2002) that a spouse and children can provide emotional support and motivation to complete a degree. The current study also was consistent and expanded the findings of Bonner and Evans (2004) that family was important to combating feelings of isolation. Specific to the current study, seven of the participants identified as being married; five of those had children. One participant did not report being married, but had a child. That finding corroborated with Carter (2002) that family motivational support varies with family structure and marital status. The women in the current study who had children frequently reported that they wanted to be an example to their children. In the example of one participant, who was not married and had a child, she stated that she received a tremendous amount of support from her child rather than from other family members. The inclusion of family support also was consistent with Carter (2002) and Bonner and Evans (2004) that eluded for Black women there exists a tradition of collectivist adaptation and support within families for feminist survival.

The theme of faith and spirituality was significant to lives of six participants. Faith was an effective coping strategy to address the pressure of academics, family dilemmas, and for reducing stress. Participants did not necessarily prescribe to a

particular religious practice, but primary discussed the inclusion of prayer. Participants commented on the belief that their families prayed for them and that was significant to their persistence. The contribution of faith and spirituality for Black women doctoral students aligned with the findings of El-Ghoroury, Galper, Sawaqdeh, and Bufka (2012) that minority students reported a greater benefit of using spirituality as a coping mechanism than White students. The current study also paralleled the summation of Watt (2003) that for Black women the use of prayer, bible study, and other rituals of faith may function to counteract the isolation of academic studies and prevent them from engaging in negative self-destructive behaviors such as overeating or seeking unhealthy relationships.

Institutional facilitators

Cohort participants or peers were identified as the one institutional facilitator to degree persistence. Black women participants in the current study had expressed that importance of family and faith as important personal facilitators, but acknowledged that while family members may have endeavored to be supportive they lacked the conceptual understanding of the academic rigor and multi-layered complexities of programs. The cohort or peer group was able to provide an informal network of support and understanding. The peer group was also a resource for collaboration on publications or conference presentations and they were able to commiserate with each other regarding program rigor and process. The study was consistent with Patterson-Stewart et al. (1997) that noted Black women benefited from positive relationships of Black peers enrolled in the same program. For those participants in the current study who were not the only Black females enrolled in their program they frequently reported being surprised at not

being the only one and that they were amazed to see other Black women seeking similar academic goals. The current study overlapped the findings of Roberts and Plakhotnik (2009) that relationships with peers served as an invaluable relationship for academic success. The current study also concurred with Roberts and Plakhotnik (2009) that peers facilitated in knowledge sharing and had access to the unspoken or hidden rules of a program.

Key informants who were interviewed discussed that their office programming efforts were not directed toward Black women doctoral students. The interviews were limited in scope as informants remarked that their offices within the graduate school and academic affairs did not intentionally seek to create programming purposed for Black women doctoral students or advertise to attract that sub-population. The workshops or seminars were general in nature and they depended on Black attendees to bring other Black students to their programs. Participants expressed the lack of intentional institutional strategies directed toward Black women doctoral students as a barrier that contributed to isolation and marginalization. The one-size-fits all ideology that key informants discussed was consistent with Hughes and Howard-Hamilton (2003) that ignored within differences of student populations. To be fair, participants did discuss that they felt constrained by their departments in that they did not have time outside of their departments to seek other institutional resources. At Olympic University there is an international center which assists primarily international students and a multi-cultural center that according to their website has no programming directed toward doctoral students. The graduate student center serves as the most advantageous location for

offering institutional support, but based on the key informant interviews there do not appear to be any strategic aims purposefully directed to Black women.

## Discussion Related to Research Question 2

### Personal barrier

Time management was reported as the one personal barrier to degree completion with the subtheme of juggling roles and competing interests. Many participants were challenged with the pluralism of roles as student and mother. Finding balance or the ability to effectively manage the roles was seen as making trade-offs with parenting and academic tasks. Participants who were not married and did not have children also faced the duality of roles as student and in their personal lives. Annabella was one participant who explained that is was not possible to equally pursue a doctoral degree and invest in a personal life. That trade-off was commented on by at least two other participants who noted that women faculty were frequently unmarried or were divorced. Therefore, demonstrating the realities for women with doctoral degrees. For another participant, Lyndsey, the uncertainty of the time commitment in a doctoral program contributed to tension in her relationship because the longer she spent on her studies without a clear timeline to degree completion meant a delay in decision making for planning to have children and impacted employment choices and educational opportunities for her spouse. The current study was consistent with Buck et al. (2006) especially for those participants enrolled in the sciences that finding balance in academic and personal lives was significant. Further, the present study aligned with Leppel (2002) that time management and the consistent juggling to meet multiple demands created high levels of stress.

The participants in the current study had to combat fatigue due to extended periods focused on academic commitments, without necessarily finding time for those things that were personally important outside of school such as time spent exercising, and with family and friends. Buck et al. (2006) contended that participants had to juggle many of the requirements of doctoral studies including teaching, research, and numerous revision submissions that they did not foresee as challenges that would end with their education, but as development for careers beyond degree completion. Participants in the current study concurred in many instances that although it was a challenge to balance the varying facets of their personal lives with higher education that they believed it was developmental to their professional careers.

Personal facilitator

Belief in self was identified as the facilitator to degree completion. The participants in this study reported that rising to the challenge of degree completion in a doctoral program required a strong sense of self. There was an evolution in the innate strength of the women as they became more empowered with the self-awareness of their own internal locus of control, which enabled them to become more assertive in the later stages of their degree programs and to value their own self-determination. The current study was consistent with Williams, Brewley, Reed, White, and Davis-Haley (2009) where BFT was used and third and fourth year Black female doctoral students had to persist with asserting their identity standpoint regardless of institutional politics or refuting negative images associated with race, but rather focused on persistence and degree completion. The current study also expanded on the findings of Selmer et al. (2011) that Black women doctoral students experience the doctoral process as a journey

that is impacted due to the relationships in their personal lives, with faculty, coursework, and funding issues. Similar to Selmer et al. (2011) participants overcame insecurities to become more confident and to challenge themselves not only academically, but to postulate the identity of a more assured woman who did not necessarily feel judged during interactions with faculty, but in the later stages of the doctoral program sensed greater respect during interactions.

The women in the current study expressed that broadly their doctoral experiences had been positive; however, there were numerous obstacles and barriers that they had to overcome. During the latter stages of their doctoral experience the women were able to reflect that it was important to have a strong personality type that would aid in the propulsion toward degree completion. There was an underlying core belief in self and an inherent strength that would not allow them to quit. That finding aligned with Robinson (2013) that Black women would continue to earn degrees regardless of the structural and individualized oppression due to their legacy of strength and perseverance. The concern with the Robinson (2013) conclusion is that it may be suggestive of the mythological 'strong Black women' conception that does not necessarily allow for weakness in Black women. The current study acknowledged both the importance of women to believe in themselves, but also to know when to ask for help to continue toward degree completion.

Alternatively, Lee and Boud (2009) suggested that there were competing agendas embedded within doctoral practices, which may also function as enablers. Primarily, Black women believed in their own internalized self-efficacy to persist and complete their doctoral degrees; however, there were competing interest for their time, which included family, publication interests, and/or employment. For example, Paige stated

that she had an "A type personality" that it was "always ingrained in [her]" that she would return to school and get her degree. Paige acknowledged that because she was not a "passive person" and she was "a pretty driven person" suggesting that regardless of time constraints she was relentless about setting and achieving goals. The current study highlighted the importance of self-efficacy and personal drive as attributes of a doctoral degree completer.

Institutional facilitator

Extended advisor support and accountability

The institutional facilitator of extended advisor support and accountability differed and was identified by participants as being pivotal in their degree completion. The women reported that the relationship with their advisor was significant in the latter stages of their doctoral programs because they relied on their advisors for keeping them accountable to deadlines, being aware of their degree progression, and more specifically wanting greater structured metrics to enable degree completion. This was broadly interpreted as participants needing more meaningful interactions with their advisor through scheduled meetings, email and/or telephone communications, intentional guided support not only with the dissertation, but with publications.

An unanticipated finding was related to the expectations that doctoral students had regarding extended faculty accountability and support. Although it was not surprising to identify strong support for a faculty advisor relationship it was significant to note the unexpected context for greater accountability and support. Having a faculty member who functions as key member to the research agenda for the student and can guide the student through the doctoral experience is critical. Participants in this study

focused more on the need for an actively engaged faculty member who may have been their advisor, but not necessarily a mentor was clearly important. Only four of the twelve participants discussed the value of having an advisor who also was able to function in the extended role as mentor. The primary impetus for students was that the faculty member was needed as a source of information and demonstrated interest in their success.

The participants frequently stopped short of stating that their advisors functioned as a mentor possibly due to the earlier interactions with them during the early years of their programs. The current study corroborates previous research of Johnson-Bailey (2004) for the need of supportive professors. The current study was consistent with Patton (2009) that Black women understand the purpose of a mentor as being different from that of an advisor. While Patton (2009) suggested that a mentoring relationship was critical for Black women; however, faculty commitment was important in establishing those mentoring relationships. Rheineck and Roland (2008) concluded that doctoral students relied on mentors more in their second year of study, but in the third year they sought a more intentioned relationship that encapsulated personal attributes of assistance in self-understanding and professional etiquette. That study differed from the current one where participants primarily noted the significance of wanting more collaboration and accountability with their advisor. In the current study the emphasis was not on the mentoring relationship, but rather on the richness and purposeful engagement with the academic advisor. That was a very sharp contrast with the previous research of denoting the importance that Black women participants in the current study wanted a stronger partnership with their faculty advisor that may or may not involve mentorship. The primary intent was toward degree completion. The two key informants who were

interviewed did not discuss any programming or services that specifically target Black women doctoral students or under-represented students; however, it would appear that facilitation of faculty relationships and, most significantly, the advisor dyad would be fertile ground for programmatic development. That does not exclude departments from efforts to develop further clarity on the purpose and roles of faculty and how they differ from a mentor.

This study focused on the personal dispositional and institutional situational characteristics that influence persistence and degree completion for Black women doctoral students at a PWI. The research illustrated specific experiences that women had, which informed their doctoral experience. The overall contention would be that Black women reported basically good experiences; however, the sole conclusion was more complex based on disciplinary culture as it related to faculty interactions, expectations of extended faculty advisor accountability, values of personal faith and spirituality, and cohort. There was a saliency of both gender and race within the narratives, with slightly more emphasis on race. Black women do not have the option of being categorized based more on race or gender, but rather must cope with the duality of their position. Within this study, Black women may have wanted to detract from race, but their narratives tended to be inclusive of their status.

There is an important caveat regarding the conclusions based on the findings. Because the outcomes were related to persistence and degree completion, the study does not distinguish the levels of satisfaction based on the overall experience. For example just because a participant was able to successfully make it to the benchmark of comprehensive exam completion and then prospectively consider degree completion that

does not correlate to satisfaction within a program. There may be other factors that contribute to satisfaction that can be distinguished greatly from those related to persistence and degree completion.

## Recommendations for Policy/Practice

Grant (2012) posited that for identifying factors related to degree completion for Black women doctoral students in educational leadership provided scant information relative to how those women would advance to the professoriate. In this study, the contention is that Black women doctoral students must first successfully navigate the academy and complete the degree prior to advancing to professoriate for the career of their choice. Understanding what informs both persistence and degree completion are critical not only for the specific academic experience, but longitudinally for it provides a link to future professional praxis. To consider degree completion, institutions must be willing to consider more than "generic approaches" to combat the isolation and psychological stress of Black women doctoral students (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003, p. 98; Myers, 2002).

Black women doctoral students must become more empowered regarding their levels of confidence within the academy. While Black women attempt to control the stereotypical images that faculty may or may not have of them it is important that they recognize the valuable and unique contributions that they make to the academy such as research interests. Black women need not continue to combat the "double-edged sword" of assertiveness that created pseudo associations regarding the intellectual competency of women (King, 1995, p. 69). Black women also must develop more realistic expectations of faculty support and realize that their research interests are viable to higher education.

Black women need to be stronger proponents for acknowledging the need for support networks and connecting with other women to share and counter stories of oppression. Salient to this study were concerns about stereotypes of Black women. Support networks that are organized to dispel those perceptions are important to producing an academic community of scholars unified in a collective group standpoint. The support would be constructed by formal faculty relationships that address and differentiate the purpose and role of advisors and faculty. Networks could be constructed within colleges and across the institution, but this requires proactive engagement by faculty and staff. The participants in this study expressed mixed feelings about being part of an all Black group, but wanted a safe place to authentically convey their concerns related to management of stereotypes, displays of competence, and having confidence in their scholarly contributions. Institutional dependence on organically occurring programs is not sufficient for the persistence of Black women doctoral students. Institutions must be willing to provide the space, funding, and individuals to support ongoing resources for Black women doctoral students. As noted in previous sections, the key informant interviews did not yield data relevant to facilitation of support networks specifically for Black women doctoral students or under-represented students.

Based on the results from this study and previous literature there are recommendations for institutional policy and practice. Black women who enroll in doctoral programs at PWIs would benefit from departmental policies that are more sensitive to the salient issues within the intersectionality of gender and race that directly impacts Black women doctoral students. First, PWIs should continue to diversify not only teaching faculty, but also mid- and senior- level administrators who are in key

decision making roles such as those related to funding. This is an important strategy linked to the overcoming the institutional barrier to persistence related to faculty interactions and specifically the subtheme of absence and presence of Black faculty (see Table 8). While the participants were not able to resolutely state that the presence of either Black or minority faculty made a significant difference in their persistence it was important to note that they did recognize that there was something missing and there was an awareness of the lack of diversity. For Black women doctoral students to persist, it is important that they at least can see and interact with diverse faculty members. Faculty that are more diverse not only gender and racially, but also those with research agendas that are more inclusive to Black women or at least demonstrate a willingness to consider their underrepresented status is critically important.

Second, the interactions with faculty were an environment rich for populating dynamic change. Most specifically in the context of this study extended advisor accountability was a facilitator for persistence and degree completion. This was most significant as students were no longer enrolled in course work, but may be removed from the institutional setting to write the dissertation. Two participants discussed programmatic and/or advisor requirements that continued to make them accountable to their degree requirements and facilitated degree completion. The need for measurable results during the 'all but dissertation' stage is important for prompting students to the elusive 'timely degree completion.' This recommendation was significant to the second research question as it related to the institutional barrier of extended advisor support and accountability (see Table 9). Institutions should consider incentivizing faculty for the time spent on productive output of quality advising, mentoring, publishing, and doctoral

degree completion through research grants and/or as a benefit to tenure and promotion. The caveat would be on establishing metrics related to each variable.

When most students are admitted into a doctoral program there is an orientation that provides a broad landscape of program expectations and an overview of the program handbook. Students need more than just a one-time orientation session to persist through doctoral programs and courses are frequently instructionally focused. A more advantageous recommendation would be for departments to provide students with a one-hour seminar at least once per semester or academic year that focused on varying topics such as the rudiments to publishing, how to secure funding resources, what are the norms or culture of a program, how to formulate and sustain working relationships with faculty and peers, and the realities of how to balance work, school, and family. Seminars that are offered throughout the program provide an opportunity for faculty to relate to students on a different construct other than just the student/professor dyad. The sessions are more relational and can be especially beneficial for those students in programs that are constructed on a cohort model.

Third, an extension of faculty accountability would be for institutions to provide more intentional training and resources to faculty regarding the role of advisor and/or dissertation committee member to aid in degree completion. This would allow departments to more critically evaluate the extent and quality of advising. This recommendation is also an important strategy connected to the institutional barrier of extended advisor and accountability (see Table 9). A caveat to this recommendation is for doctoral programs to incorporate measurable benchmarks post-comprehensive exams to aid in degree completion. During coursework grades are awarded at the end of each

semester, but post-comprehensive exams students potentially can go years without submitting anything to faculty and then realize that their time to complete the degree is almost over; therefore, students either submit subpar work that faculty accept to 'get rid of the student' or the students don't complete their degree. The primary intention was for there to be greater transparency regarding program status and to provide faculty with resources to guide the dissertation process. A further extension of this recommendation would be for departments to clearly differentiate the roles of faculty, advisor, and dissertation committee member to those serving in these capacities, and also to students. Workshops within departments and the institution should be offered to provide guidance on the roles.

## Recommendation for Future Research

The current study used qualitative methods to explore the experiences of marginalized populations related to institutional practices and characteristics that contribute to persistence and degree completion. Future research may seek more quantitative methods to more definitively measure faculty interactions and to examine to what extent and when the interactions occur. Additionally, future qualitative studies may seek to examine the psychosomatic impact of Black women doctoral students as the current study highlighted the psychological barrier of lack self-confidence as a barrier to persistence. Those studies may be instrumental to establish stronger evidence for causational relationships between advisor interactions and degree completion for Black women.

Future research should focus greater emphasis on issues within colleges or program clusters as previous research has done in the college of education. While that

college will most likely continue to have a preponderance of Black women, future studies may elect to address core differences within other colleges such as those in STEM fields. This study had participants from at least three different disciplines within the college/school of education and their experiences were unique to the respective field of study, but may have been masked within the context of the entire college. Within the college/school of computer sciences participants had more similar experiences due to no differences of the specific programs; however, at other institutions there may be greater variation of within program offerings that can be explored. The participants in the college/school of and arts and sciences tended to mimic overall behaviors similar to those in computer science. Olympic University did not have Black women doctoral students in the college/school of engineering and the Black women in the college/school of health did not meet the requirements of this study. Future research may focus more on Black women's experiences solely within STEM programs.

A second recommendation for future research is to examine the experiences with Black women doctoral students with their faculty advisor. One option would be to examine the experiences from the advisor's perspective. The current study focused only on the student standpoint, but future studies may elect to examine the experience of degree completion for Black women as understood from the advisor. The study may seek to address the concept of what it means to be a good dissertation advisor along with what attributes does that require and timeline to completion. A second option would be to examine the facilitators and barriers that faculty experience when advising doctoral students. The study may also want to include if the advising was intentionally inclusive of mentoring. In this current study participants did not identify their advisor as a mentor,

but in some instances referred to another faculty member or someone else as a mentor. A future study should be sensitive to differentiating if the faculty role is that of an advisor, mentor, or both when examining faculty experiences.

A third recommendation for future research should focus on benchmarks to graduation and examine the more evidence-based meaning behind 'timely degree completion.' In the present study, participants alluded to an abstract time to completion, but it was not clear when that was or how that was guided. Based on the data findings faculty advisors have tremendous control over the process although the participants tended to take the onus of responsibility. Future research may elect to measure the interactions and behaviors between Black women and their advisors that promote 'timely degree completion.'

A fourth recommendation for future research is to compare the experiences of Black women doctoral students in similar programs across multiple institutions. Research could examine if the experiences that Black women doctoral students are experiencing at one institution are consistent or vastly different at other institutions and examine why those differences exist. Future research of this nature may require a mixed-method design to include a survey in addition to an interview. For all of the recommendations it would still be important to isolate a particular time within the doctoral experience to examine persistence and degree completion. While this study used post-comprehensive exams future studies may need to further isolate the time beyond that benchmark.

A fifth recommendation would be to further isolate the time to explore issues of persistence and degree completion. The current study examined the constructs post-

comprehensive exams; however, there was still great variation in the narratives as at least two participants were within months of graduation; therefore, their discourse differed tremendously from participants who were post exams within a few months. Future studies may choose to focus on students who have been all but dissertation for at least one-year to examine the level of advisor support that may or may not be provided and their individual situational facilitators or challenges to degree completion.

A final and more challenging recommendation for future research would be to examine the experiences of those Black women doctoral students who either switched programs or left their doctoral ambitions all together. All of the women in this study plan to complete their doctoral degrees; however, that is not the reality for 40%-50% of students who leave without completing (Di Pierro, 2007; Golde, 2005; Lovitts, 2001; Nettles & Millett, 2006). Future research that focused on the experiences of Black women who do not stay in doctoral experiences would generate powerful insights on what it takes to leave a program specifically to this subpopulation. Their stories would be beneficial not only for those women who elect to stay in programs, but also for those who elect to depart or transfer to other programs. There may be an untrue assumption that early departure students leave because they simply could not 'cut it' and that may be shortsighted and an incomplete hidden discourse. All of these suggestions for future research had implications on the development for more innovative and effective doctoral programs at PWIs.

## Summary

This study examined persistence and degree completion of Black women doctoral students at a PWI and the barriers and facilitators to those processes. The study seeks for

institutions to consider not only enrollment data, but also the quality of the experiences that students are receiving. This study adds to the scarcity of available literature on Black women doctoral students at PWIs for exploring persistence and degree completion post-comprehensive examinations, but prior to institutional graduation.

This study asserts the standpoint of Black women without the attempt to make comparisons to other ethnic or gender groups. Black women experiences at PWIs are significant to institutions regarding not only attempts aimed at recruiting and retaining students, but also faculty and administrators from marginalized groups (Ellis, 2001). This study contributes to the scholarly research the contention that Black women doctoral students do not perceive persistence and degree completion as separate constructs, but rather a continuum. This researcher is not aware of any other research that has been done on persistence and degree completion that has intentionally isolated a specific time within the doctoral experience to explore the two constructs. This study also purposefully focuses on Black women and doctoral students rather than the homogenous minority women and graduate students. The analysis yielded thematic content that was detailed in Chapter 4 and highlighted three themes here in Chapter 5.

The purpose of this study was not to compare and contrast Black women doctoral students experiences with other racial or gender groups, but to purposively center their experiences within the context of BFT. The present study results show that Black women experienced greater benefits from extended faculty advisor support and accountability than that of a mentor. The focus on the role of advisor as being critical to persistence and degree completion was important as it suggested the need for stronger relationships and communication between the advisor and advisee. The participants in this study displayed

resiliency in engaging in various coping mechanisms such as their cohort or peer groups and the use of faith. The doctoral persistence and degree completion for Black women doctoral students is a collective endeavor with the institution partnering with women to promote a cultural shift directed at understanding their needs and reducing oppressive conditions. Institutional policies and practices must cease being rhetoric that shifts and eases the burden of meaningful engagement and instead must be intentional regarding the retention and practices related to persistence and degree completion for Black women.

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# APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT EMAIL #1

Greetings!

My name is Cathy Howell and I am a doctoral candidate at UNC Charlotte in the Educational Leadership program. I am seeking eligible participants to take part in my dissertation research study related to persistence and degree completion of Black women in doctoral programs. You are receiving this email because you are a doctoral student as determined based on publically available information. Participants who are ultimately selected to participate in and complete the research interviews will be compensated with a $10.00 Barnes & Noble gift card.

Selected participants will be asked to participate in a face-to-face or telephone interview that will take no more than 2 hours of time. I may need to request a subsequent follow-up interview and/or focus group to clarify information or address any discrepancies obtained from the first interview or such additional information. This is a basic interpretive qualitative research study using semi-structured interviews. Digitally audio recorded interviews can occur either face-to-face or by telephone. Interview times will accommodate your schedule. Some participants may be asked to participate in a process known as “member checks” to provide feedback on data findings to access if my interpretation of collected interview data captures the essence of their perspective.

If you are interested in participating in this study and meet the minimal criteria listed below please email me at chowel22@uncc.edu. If you know of any women who meet the study criteria at this university, please forward this email to them.

Participants in this study will be women students recruited based on the following criteria:

- Self-identified as being Black;
- Enrolled in a doctoral program (Ph.D. or Ed.D.);
- Have completed comprehensive and/or qualifying examinations.

Please respond within the next 5 business days of your interest. Selected participants will be contacted.

Thank you for your consideration and I look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

Cathy

**Cathy D. Howell**

Graduate Assistant | Doctoral Candidate | Educational Leadership

University of North Carolina at Charlotte

9201 University City Blvd., Charlotte NC 28223

Cc:

Dr. Mark M. D'Amico

Dissertation Chair and Advisor

mmdamico@uncc.edu

# APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT EMAIL #2

Greetings!

This is a friendly follow-up email to one that you received approximately 2 weeks ago. In case you did not see the email or have not had a chance to respond

My name is Cathy Howell and I am a doctoral candidate at UNC Charlotte in the Educational Leadership program. I am seeking eligible participants to take part in my dissertation research study related to persistence and degree completion of Black women in doctoral programs. You are receiving this email because you are a doctoral student as determined based on publically available information. Participants who are ultimately selected to participate in and complete the research interviews will be compensated with a $10.00 Barnes & Noble gift card.

Selected participants will be asked to participate in a face-to-face or telephone interview that will take no more than 2 hours of time. I may need to request a subsequent follow-up interview and/or focus group to clarify information or address any discrepancies obtained from the first interview or such additional information. This is a basic interpretive qualitative research study using semi-structured interviews. Digitally audio recorded interviews can occur either face-to-face or by telephone. Interview times will accommodate your schedule. Some participants may be asked to participate in a process known as “member checks” to provide feedback on data findings to access if my interpretation of collected interview data captures the essence of their perspective.

If you are interested in participating in this study and meet the minimal criteria listed below please email me at chowel22@uncc.edu. If you know of any women who meet the study criteria at this university, please forward this email to them.

Participants in this study will be women students recruited based on the following criteria:

- Self-identified as being Black;
- Enrolled in a doctoral program (Ph.D. or Ed.D.);
- Have completed comprehensive and/or qualifying examinations.

Please respond within the next 5 business days of your interest. Selected participants will be contacted.

Thank you for your consideration and I look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

Cathy

**Cathy D. Howell**

Graduate Assistant | Doctoral Candidate | Educational Leadership

University of North Carolina at Charlotte

9201 University City Blvd., Charlotte NC 28223

Cc:

Dr. Mark M. D'Amico

Dissertation Chair and Advisor

mmdamico@uncc.edu

# APPENDIX C: RECRUITMENT EMAIL #3

Greetings!

This is a friendly follow-up email to one that you received approximately 2 weeks ago. In case you did not see the email or have not had a chance to respond.

My name is Cathy Howell and I am a doctoral candidate at UNC Charlotte in the Educational Leadership program. I am seeking eligible participants to take part in my dissertation research study related to persistence and degree completion of Black women in doctoral programs. You are receiving this email because you are a doctoral student as determined based on publically available information. Participants who are ultimately selected to participate in and complete the research interviews will be compensated with a $10.00 Barnes & Noble gift card.

Selected participants will be asked to participate in a face-to-face or telephone interview that will take no more than 2 hours of time. I may need to request a subsequent follow-up interview and/or focus group to clarify information or address any discrepancies obtained from the first interview or such additional information. This is a basic interpretive qualitative research study using semi-structured interviews. Digitally audio recorded interviews can occur either face-to-face or by telephone. Interview times will accommodate your schedule. Some participants may be asked to participate in a process known as “member checks” to provide feedback on data findings to access if my interpretation of collected interview data captures the essence of their perspective.

If you are interested in participating in this study and meet the minimal criteria listed below please email me at chowel22@uncc.edu. If you know of any women who meet the study criteria at this university, please forward this email to them.

Participants in this study will be women students recruited based on the following criteria:

- Self-identified as being Black;
- Enrolled in a doctoral program (Ph.D. or Ed.D.);
- Have completed comprehensive or qualifying examinations.

Please respond within the next 5 business days of your interest. Selected participants will be contacted.

Thank you for your consideration and I look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

Cathy

**Cathy D. Howell**

Graduate Assistant | Doctoral Candidate | Educational Leadership

University of North Carolina at Charlotte

9201 University City Blvd., Charlotte NC 28223

Cc:

Dr. Mark M. D'Amico

Dissertation Chair and Advisor

mmdamico@uncc.edu

# APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Warm up questions – Personal background

1. Please tell me about your background.
    a. Tell me about your family, educational background and work experience.
    b. Tell me about your academic background.
2. Describe your doctoral experience.
3. What influenced your decision to attend [Institution Blinded]?
    a. What influenced your decision to select your degree?

Persistence

Facilitators

4. Please describe some of the things that have helped you make it this far in your program?
    a. What in your personal life helped you?
    b. What at the university helped you?

Barriers

5. What are some of the things that have hindered your progress up to this point?
    a. What in your personal life has hindered you?
    b. What at the university has hindered you?

Degree completion

Facilitators

6. What are some of the things that you envision will help you complete your doctoral degree?
    a. What in your personal life will help you?
    b. What at the university will help you?

Barriers

7. What are some of the things that will hinder you as you work to complete your doctoral degree?

Wrap-up

8. How do you think your race or gender has influenced your doctoral experience?
9. Describe the culture of your [Institution Blinded] doctoral program.
    a. What does that mean for you?
10. How do you plan to use your degree after you finish?

# APPENDIX E: INFORMED CONSENT

- Project Title and Purpose

In this study, it is important to understand how Black women doctoral students persist and plan to advance to degree completion. The study seeks to understand: (1) how do personal and institutional characteristics influence the doctoral degree persistence and (2) how did Black women in the later stages of their doctoral program perceive the personal and institutional characteristics that would facilitate their doctoral degree completion.

- Investigator(s)

This study is being conducted by Cathy D. Howell, a Doctoral Candidate in the Department of Educational Leadership, College of Education under the supervising faculty advisor and dissertation chair, Dr. Mark M. D'Amico.

- Eligibility

Eligibility consists of being women recruited based on the following criteria:

  - Self-identified as being Black;
  - Enrolled in a doctoral program (Ph.D. or Ed.D.);
  - Have completed comprehensive and/or qualifying examination.

- Overall Description of Participation

Recruitment of participants will be through emails sent to all Black women doctoral students within the colleges/schools of liberal arts and sciences, education, health, and

computer sciences. If recruitment emails do not generate participation graduate program coordinators will be asked to recommend potential participants.

Prior to the interview, each participant, who indicates an interest and willingness to participate, will be asked to provide documentation verifying the successful completion of comprehensive and/or qualifying examinations. This can be either a printed copy of documentation that states pass/completion of exam or participants can forward an email from a university official indicating the successful completion. Following verification, any records of this verification process in the possession of the researcher will be destroyed or deleted.

The interview design is open-ended and semi-structured. A maximum of two hours is needed to complete the interview. A subsequent follow-up interview and/or focus group may be necessary for clarification of information obtained from the first interview or such additional information. The intent is to understand and then interpret the phenomenon of persistence and degree completion. The interviews will be audio recorded and then transcribed verbatim for use in the data analysis process. Participant names will be changed to assure confidentiality and anonymity.

Participation is completely voluntary. A $10.00 Barnes & Noble gift card will be given to those who complete interviews.

- Length of Participation

Selected participants will be asked to participate in a face-to-face or telephone interview, which will take a maximum of 2 hours of time. A second follow-up interview and/or focus group may be necessary to clarify information or address any discrepancies obtained from the first interview or such additional information. The interviews will take place at an agreed upon location between the researcher and the participant. Some participants may also be asked to participate in a process known as "member checks" to provide feedback on data findings to access if my interpretation of collected interview data captures the essence of their perspective.

- Risks and Benefits of Participation

Risk is minimal where the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the current research are not greater, in and of themselves, than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests.

For this study, no medications are administered. There is minimal psychological risk as participants respond to questions regarding their graduate school experience. Discussing personal experiences may bring up some upsetting feelings that are unforeseen.

This study will be as confidential as possible. The confidentiality form will be reviewed carefully and allowing time for participant questions. Participation is voluntary and participants can withdraw at any time. If a participant does not want to continue to be in the study, they may stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which they are

otherwise entitled. Any information that participants do not wish to share will not be disclosed.

This knowledge will be used to have an impact on institutional practices and is beneficial toward policy and program development for key institutional stakeholders, and relative to the academic success of Black women. This research provides for strategic mechanisms for enriching the academic timeline in which a student is enrolled by improving the support infrastructure needed for persistence and success. Research that can enhance the pipeline to the disciplines where women are overwhelming marginalized is critical to enhancing to overall academic missions of diversity and affirming education of all.

- Volunteer Statement

You are a volunteer. The decision to participate in this study is completely up to you. If you decide to be in the study, you may stop at any time. You will not be treated any differently if you decide not to participate in the study or if you stop once you have started.

- Confidentiality Statement

Any information about your participation, including your identity, is confidential. The following steps will be taken to ensure this confidentiality. Cathy Howell will manage all student interview data. Any identifiable information will be removed from each interview transcript during the transcription process use pseudonyms (fictitious names) instead. No references will be made in oral or written reports, which could link you to

this study. Use of direct quotes from interviews will not include your identity. The expected number of student interviewees recruited for this research is nine to twelve participants with the intent to gain participation from each college that enrolled Black women doctoral students as of fall 2011.

It is planned that all records of this study, including interview files and audio files, will not be kept beyond three years after completion of this study.

- Statement of Fair Treatment and Respect

UNC Charlotte wants to make sure that you are treated in a fair and respectful manner. Contact the university's Research Compliance Office (704-687-3309) if you have questions about how you are treated as a study participant. If you have any questions about the actual project or study, please contact Cathy Howell, chowel22@uncc.edu or Dr. Mark D'Amico, Dissertation Advisor, mmdamico@uncc.edu

- Approval Date

This form was approved for use on Month, Date, and Year of IRB approval.

- Participant Consent

I have read the information in this consent form. I have had the chance to ask questions about this study, and those questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I am at least 18 years of age, and I agree to participate in this research project. I unders tand that I will receive a copy of this form after it has been signed by me and the principal investigator of this research study.

---

(Signature of Interviewee)

_____

(Printed name of Interviewee)

_____

(Date)

_____

(Signature of Interviewer)

_____

(Printed name of Interviewer)

_____

(Date)

# APPENDIX F: KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. What programs and services are offered that address the academic needs of Black doctoral students?
2. What programs and services are offered that address the social needs of Black doctoral students?
3. How are students, especially under-represented Black women in doctoral programs, encouraged to participate in programming that is provided by your office?
4. Do you have any program evaluation data that you could share to help me understand your service to doctoral students?