UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

AN EXPLORATION INTO SUCCESS FACTORS OF

AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES WHO OBTAINED TERMINAL DEGREES

FROM MAJORITY WHITE INSTITUTIONS

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By

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Norman, Oklahoma
2006

UMI Number: 3237522

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AN EXPLORATION INTO SUCCESS FACTORS OF
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FROM MAJORITY WHITE INSTITUTIONS

A Dissertation APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND POLICY STUDIES

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ABSTRACT

AN EXPLORATION INTO SUCCESS FACTORS OF
AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES WHO OBTAINED TERMINAL DEGREES
FROM MAJORITY WHITE INSTITUTIONS

By

Harlan E. Ballard

The success rate of African American males graduating from Majority White Institutions (MWI) is dismal at best. It is an enduring enigma that continues to plague the academy and has negative implications for society as a whole. While African American females and other ethnic groups are making positive gains, African American males trail all others in academic success indicators. Yet, despite a plethora of challenges and countless obstacles, some African American males are successful in their doctoral pursuit.

This study identified factors that African American males who completed a terminal degree program at an MWI credited to their success. This investigation was qualitative in nature and used the phenomenology methodological approach to identify patterns of success. The theoretical framework was Critical Race Theory (CRT).

The study consisted of individual unstructured interviews with five African American males that completed a Ph.D. at an MWI. The interviews explored how these individuals made sense of their achievement of a terminal degree.

The interviews generated data in the areas of academic success in terms of persistence, campus environment and mentoring, social support, and strategies for overcoming barriers. Once admitted into the degree program, failing or quitting the program was not an option for any of the study participants.

OPENING VIGNETTE

Elmer is a 35 year old African American male employed with the federal government for the past ten years. He initially intended this to be a two-to-three year stint before seeking a position in higher education. It turned out to be ten years employed in a position that had decent pay and benefits but lacked the inspiration, creative freedom, intellectual nourishment, and the ability to be fully self-expressed that Elmer so desperately wanted and needed. Fifteen years after completing his Masters, Elmer finally decided that it was time to do something about his dismal outlook on life; Elmer chose to pursue his passion and begin the pursuit of his life-long dream, the Ph.D.

Elmer enrolled in the summer semester at a large, majority White research institution located in the Midwest. With little prior knowledge of what would be expected to succeed at this level, he reentered the Academy for the first time in over a decade. Having completed his undergraduate degree from a Historically Black College and University and his graduate degree from a Majority White Institution, graduating with honors from both, he found no reason to question whether he had "what it takes" to succeed at the post-graduate level.

From the first day of class and continuing throughout his program, Elmer was faced with numerous obstacles he neither anticipated nor had been forewarned about. These problems ranged from a supervisor who was often times less than supportive of his doctoral pursuit, to occasionally doubting his ability to be in a Ph.D. program. In spite of all that the first-generation college attendee would encounter, he was determined to succeed and gain membership into this club reserved for the educationally elite.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Overview

"Not seeing Black professors--for me, if you can't see it how can you believe it;

how can you achieve it?"

Dr. Phil

The African American male lags behind in virtually every index of success in

higher education (Johnson, 2004). College students of African American descent have

been retained and graduated at rates that are significantly lower than the national average

(Beard, 1998). Since a relatively few number of African Americans enter graduate

school, colleges and universities should be especially concerned with helping these

individuals persist or encourage their graduation efforts (Bingman, 2003).

Statement of the Problem

By 2002, more African Americans were enrolled in degree-granting graduate

schools than ever before. Blacks were 8.4 percent of the total enrollments in U.S.

graduate schools: 170,241 of 1,850,000 individuals (National, 2006). However, only 29.5

percent of the 170,241 of them were Black men (Graduate, 2005). For the year 2002,

Black men comprised 2.7 percent of the total graduate school enrollment or 50,221 of

1,850,000 graduate students (See Table 1).

Table 1

2002 African American Male Graduate Enrollment (U.S.)

Graduate Students	Number	Percent (%)
Total Students	1,850,000	100
African American	170,241	8.4
African American Male	50,221	2.7

Note. From National Center for Education Statistics: Table 206. Retrieved May 9, 2006. Available from: http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d02/lt3.asp#c3a_1.

African Americans earned 1,596 or approximately 3.8% of the 41,140 doctoral degrees received in 1999 (National Opinion Research Center, 2006). The percentage of the African American doctoral degrees earned during this same time was between three to four times less than the proportion of the African American U.S. population (Bingman, 2003). In contrast, approximately 64% of the doctorates awarded in 1999 (26,450) were earned by Whites (National Opinion Research Center, 1999). Therefore, some authors (Bingman, 2003) have indicated that the proportion of White doctoral degrees earned in 1999 was closer to their actual percentage in the U.S. population-approximately 70% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

The study contributes to the body of literature in higher education by allowing the participants, African American males who have achieved academic success, an opportunity to chronicle their lives as they pursued their educational goal of a terminal degree. A depository of narratives not only augments history, but creates the basis of the story. Such stories, counter to the prevailing culture, have the power to begin the process

of dispelling the beliefs, norms, and standards that perpetuate the tolerance of unjust conditions.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the meaning behind the academic success of African American males who obtained terminal degrees from Majority White Institutions (MWI). This study sheds light on the path of academic success in relation to persistence, campus environment and mentoring, social support, and strategies for overcoming barriers to success. It will look at these key domains from institutional, societal and individual perspectives.

There are numerous costs associated with obtaining a graduate degree. These expenses can range from the disbursement of tuition, fees, books, and other expenditures directly related to the university, to the personal, social and emotional costs experienced by the individual. A study of African American students that looked at persistence, attrition, and retention (Pauley, Cunningham & Toth, 1999) found that the cost to students who did not complete their degrees was in part due to the overall expense of a doctoral program.

One of the more prominent features investigated by researchers involves the role of campus environment on student success. Williams (2002) reported that African American doctoral students who attend MWIs have more negative perceptions of the campus social environment than their White counterparts. Similarly, according to Johnson (2004) African American males' perception of the climate of predominantly White colleges and universities was primarily negative. According to the latter author, perceptions of African American males' higher educational experiences form the basis of

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current research in the area of African American males in higher education. In relation to social support, however, many African American males accredited their success to a strong network of family, friends, mentors, instructors, religion, and fellow African American students (Johnson, 2004). In a study of African American graduate students, Adams (1999) revealed that students had a sense of self-efficacy, determination, exposure to motivating and stimulating educational environments beginning in childhood with parental involvement, and relied on their spirituality in times of discouragement.

In considering strategies of overcoming barriers to success of African American graduate students attending traditionally (majority) White institutions, Kennebrew (2002) pointed to various factors that can create a sense of alienation and stress that affected not only their academic success and career development, but their psychological well-being. Conversely, the coping methods of Blacks are especially important at a university with a majority of White students and where racial confrontations may influence their personality development and psychological adjustment (White & Parham, 1990).

This study significantly varied from previous research in that it examined success factors of African American males who obtained terminal degrees from Majority White Institutions (MWI). Although there is robust literature on failure among first-generation college students, there is a paucity of literature regarding success in the academic arena, specifically literature that examines factors related to the successful completion of terminal degrees.

It can be generally noted that a comprehensive body of empirical data regarding Black students in higher education has value for those who make policy for the operation of colleges and universities (Douglass, 1999). The results of this study provide those in

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the area of higher education the information necessary to support African American males who are working towards terminal degrees and are successful in their educational pursuits.

Need for the Study

The recruitment and retention of African Americans in graduate schools remains a significant problem (Onwuegbuzie, 1999). The length of time from passing of comprehensive examinations to proposal defense, and the length of time from the proposal defense to the dissertation defense were found to be significant predictors of degree completion (Quinn 1991). Retention of minority students was perhaps the single most important issue facing public higher educational institutions in the 1980s (Douglass, 1990). Retention is linked to a number of factors that include: gaps between learner expectations and reality, past school and home experiences, educational and practical concerns, and social integration (Kerka, 1995). Tinto's model proposes that retention is related to how well students are socially and academically integrated into the institution (Tinto, 1987). This is especially true of learners who experienced culturally insensitive teachers, issues of racism, were labeled failures, or students whose family and community circumstances demonstrate that education does not necessarily improve mobility (D'amico-Samuels, 1990).

Ashar and Skenes (1993) found that social integration had a significant positive effect on retention when the means of analysis was the class and not the institution. However, even with acceptance and belonging, tangible assistance and material aid, modeling, and behavioral and cognitive guidance, African American students reported higher levels of dissatisfaction with the support they did receive in comparison to other

groups (Rocha-Singh, 1990). Attrition may be tied to a number of factors. In a study at Indiana University (Anshel & Sailes, 1990) academic difficulties were the chief reasons for withdrawal. Other factors often cited were the university social environment and the desire to pursue full-time work. "Targeted" ethnic students (African Americans, Chicanos, Philipinos, and Puerto Ricans) reported higher levels of environmental and family/monetary stress and lower levels of support (perceived-fit) on financial assistance and information how to cope in their new environment than "non-targeted" (Asian American and other Latinos, not including Chicanos and Puerto Ricans) and Anglo students (Rocha-Singh, 1990).

By recognizing the factors associated with success, current students, prospective students, faculty and administrators can benefit in a number of ways. One such way would be for educational institutions to create policies to increase the rate of success of African American male graduate students. Another way this study could add to the knowledge base and benefit the university is to help faculty and administrators become aware of factors that enhance terminal degree attainment of African American male graduate students.

Research Questions

(1) How do African American males with terminal degrees from Majority White Institutions make meaning of their success?

(2) Do their stories of success include narratives of the following:

- Persistence?

- Campus environment and mentoring?

- Social support?

- Strategies for overcoming barriers to success?

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study the following terms were defined:

- "Academic culture" in higher education is defined as "the collective, mutually shaping patterns of norms, values, practices, beliefs and assumptions that guide the behaviors of individuals and groups in an institute of higher education and provide a frame of reference within which to interpret the meaning of events and actions on and off campus" (Kuh & Whitt, 1988, p. 12-13). For the purposes of this study, the term academic culture will be used interchangeably with campus environment.

- The group "African American" is defined as an American whose ancestors were indigenous to Africa. For the purposes of this study, the term African American was used interchangeably with Black and/or Black American.

- Attrition is defined as the termination of enrollment in a graduate degree program before completing a terminal degree.

- Graduate student is defined as someone pursuing a Master's or Doctoral degree.

- Historically Black College or University (HBCU) is defined as a Land Grant Institution founded for the purpose of educating African Americans/Blacks.

- Majority White Institution (MWI) is defined as a college or university where the majority of the student population is of White/European ancestry. For the purposes of this study, the term MWI was used

interchangeably with Predominantly White Institution (PWI) and Traditionally White Institution (TWI).

- Persistence is defined as the completion of a graduate degree program.

- Psycho-social factors are defined as pertaining to either social or psychological behavior.

- For the purposes of this study, racism was defined in the words of Marable (1992) who defined racism as a "system of ignorance, exploitation, and power used to oppress African Americans, Latinos, Asians, Pacifica Americans, American Indians, and other people on the basis of ethnicity, culture, mannerisms and color" (p.5).

- Retention is defined as the institution maintaining the student's successful enrollment in the graduate degree program from start to completion of the terminal degree.

- Social support is defined as that support stemming from factors outside of the campus environment and not provided by the institution.

- Stress is defined as pressure, tension, or anxiety as reported by the participant.

- Student success has been measured by GPA in previous studies (Davis, 1994); however in this study, success was measured by terminal degree completion and graduation.

- Terminal degree is defined as the Doctor of Medicine, Doctor of Philosophy, Doctor of Education or the Jurist Doctorate.

Theoretical Framework

The analysis of the data collected in this study was done through the framework of Critical Race Theory (CRT). Although it has origins in legal discourse, CRT has been linked to other discourses and disciplines such as Marxism, sociology, ethnic studies, feminism, and cultural nationalism. CRT refers to a framework used to examine and challenge the ways race and racism implicitly and explicitly shape social structures, practices and discourses (Yosso, 2006, p. 4).

Created in the mid-1970s by Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman, CRT came about as a result of what the originators viewed as a standstill in racial reform. Bell, an African American, and Freeman, who was White, felt that the Civil Rights Movement had stalled and that many of its gains of the 1960s were digressing. Others joined Bell and Freeman in believing that new techniques and methodologies were needed to combat a more subtle, covert type of racism. "As Freeman once put it, if you are up a tree and a flood is coming, sometimes you have to climb down before finding shelter in a taller, safer one" (Delgado, 1995, p xiii).

Even though the first meeting organized as a self-conscious entity took place in 1989, the intellectual origins of CRT began much earlier. It has predecessors in Critical Legal Studies, feminism, social and political philosophy. Inspired by the American Civil Rights Movement, CRT draws its motivational basis from the likes of Civil Rights Pioneers Rosa Parks, W.E.B. DuBois, Martin Luther King, Caesar Chavez, and Malcolm X.

Furthermore, CRT has fundamental principles. A key, underlying belief of CRT is that racism is a normal and common occurrence in American society. "Because racism is

an ingrained feature of our landscape, it looks ordinary and natural to persons in the culture" (Delgado, 1995, p xiv). A premise of CRT is that formal equal opportunity laws and rules that claim to treat both Whites and African Americans equal only address the most overt and excessive cases of racial discrimination; official egalitarianism decrees do not readily address the day-to-day acts of racism that results in much anguish, isolation, and desolation. Equally important to the basic tenets of CRT is the belief that Whites only tolerate or encourage racial advancement when they (Whites) stand to gain or have self-interest to promote.

While the origins of CRT are from disciplines of anthropology, sociology, history, philosophy and politics, it was a useful framework for a higher educational study due to the work of Richard Delgado regarding the conceptual framework used by people of color. Delgado (1995) contended that Blacks speak from an experience framed by racism; that the stories of persons of color come from a different frame of reference. A different frame of reference provides a unique conceptual understanding that gives voice to an experience dissimilar from the dominant culture and deserves to be heard (Delgado, 1995). The application of CRT to research in education has increased since the 1990's. For example, Tate (1996) employed Crenshaw's expansive and restrictive view in evaluating certain educational policies.

Indeed, concepts of a social construction for the reality of race discrimination are ever-present in the writings of critical race theorists such as Derrick Bell, Mari Matsuda, Kimberle Crenshaw, and William Tate, as well as CRT pioneers W.E.B. DuBois and Max Weber (Delgado, 1995). Derrick Bell, a lawyer and instructor at Harvard, examined many economic, social, and political aspects of racial issues from a legal standpoint. Bell

challenged both the dominant liberal and the conservative position on civil rights, race and the law, using arguments in his analyses of racial patterns in American law. Bell posited that Whites will often promote racial progress for African Americans as long as it maintains and advances the self-interests of Whites, and Whites will not support civil rights policies that threaten White social status (Bell, 1993).

Since Critical Race Theory is a development of African American thought post Civil War, the majority of CRT resources contain only American references. Legal scholars such as Bell, Matsuda Lawrence, Delgado, and Crenshaw have challenged the philosophical traditional liberal civil rights stance of a colorblind approach to social justice. The historical origins of CRT provide a contextual understanding for contemporary debates, research, and analysis concerning the effectiveness of past civil rights strategies and racial solutions in current climate. It has been the conclusion of these scholars that the restrictive interpretation of anti-discrimination laws has inhibited African American students.

Post Modernism

Post-modernism is the philosophical perspective that holds the premise that scientific method is not the only appropriate manner to conduct research. It places value on the human experience, perception and meaning that individuals assign or relate to phenomenon. Most researchers who follow this approach believe that some things can not be explained and that they just are; to attempt to dissect the occurrence subtracts from the nature of research. Interventions such as "therapeutic touch", "laying on of hands", "prayer" and other so called supernatural or unexplainable things fall under this philosophy.

At the same time, many writers of Critical Race Theory are post-moderns. Post-moderns feel that form and substance are directly related. Consequently, post-modernism use stories, counterstories, autobiographies, biographies and narrative analysis "to expose the false necessity and unintentional irony of much current civil rights law and countries" (Delgado, 1995, p. xv); "Many CRT writers urge attention to details of minorities' lives as a foundation for our national civil rights strategy." "The post-modern condition is a crisis of faith in the grand stories that have justified our history and legitimized our knowledge" (Torres and Milun, 1995, p. 48).

Limitations of the Study

Due to the relatively small number of participants, the ability to generalize the results was difficult. The objective of the study was not to provide a basis for theory development, nor to provide statistical data to infer to a larger population. The ambition of this project was to provide in rich detail what a select group of African American males associated with their successful completion of their terminal degrees. "Thus, descriptions and interpretations of events and actions from one institution are not generalizable to other institutions" (Kuh & Whitt, 1988, p. 12).

Unlike quantitative research that traditionally utilizes a larger sample size, qualitative research may have as few as one participant. Creswell (1998) suggests up to ten participants for a phenomenological study. According to Tesch (1990), phenomenological researchers routinely conduct studies ranging from five to ten individuals. "A common characteristic of qualitative research is the small number of human participants used in the studies," (Wootton, 2006, p. 76). For this reason and to

obtain rich, in-depth data, the principal investigator selected five individual participants for the study.

The candidness of the respondents was a consideration in regards to the validity of the study. The truthfulness and the authenticity of the participants was an assumption. This study addressed success factors. It gave a perspective of what these students confronted and eventually overcame. It discussed the mechanisms these participants used to ensure achievement. Additionally, it determined how those mechanisms affected completion.

The investigator deemed some of the information obtained through interviews as being either inconclusive or insignificant. The principal researcher relied upon audio-taped conversations between the researcher and participant, observations noted during the interview, and field notes taken at the interview. The personal goal of the principal investigator in this study was to maintain the ideal of objectivism by eliminating any subjectivity or biases.

This proposed study was limited in that it discussed the personal experiences of African American males who completed their terminal degrees at institutions where the majority of students were of European ancestry. The campus culture at a HBCU, Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) or a tribal college could possibly result in a different insight for African American male graduate students.

After a careful review of the literature, the author opted to focus on those who had completed their terminal degrees as opposed to graduate students currently pursuing their terminal degree. Other limitations of this study were the issues of gender and race. The researcher purposely selected males over females for the study. In contrast to African

American females, African American males' success in higher education is pale in comparison. Participation rates of African American females have improved in the past decade (National Center for Education Statistics, 1997) but the rate in which African American males partake in higher education continues to decline.

The study addressed the voice of students who have completed their terminal degrees instead of those who failed to complete their terminal degree. The research did not speak to the point of view of faculty and administrators. The researcher believed that faculty and administrators might provide a perspective different than those of the terminal degree completer. Through the voice of the students themselves, the researcher sought to find how these students over came all and "beat the odds" (Gándara, 1995) in order to achieve a terminal degree.

Lastly, in this study and as in most qualitative studies, the researcher was the primary source for collecting and examining data. Merriam (1998) cautions investigators to be cognizant that findings and results are prejudiced by the individual or individuals who collect data. The researcher could have chosen other mediums by which to gather information (e.g. online). Instead, the investigator opted to perform this task in person. It is believed that in doing so, the researcher was better equipped to make note of personal observations (i.e. changes in tone of voice, emotions, attitudes and reactions) that might otherwise be impossible to detect without a face-to-face meeting with respondents.

Disclosure of Personal Interest

In this phenomenological study, it was imperative to disclose personal interest. This provides a glimpse of the special connection between the researcher and the study. In disclosure of the researcher's personal interests, the reader gains access to a deeper

insight into the researcher. Additionally, it allows the reader to be aware of any biases the author may have toward the data.

As an African American male, the researcher hoped that he might find the answers to questions he has asked himself numerous times. Asked repeatedly by family, friends, and colleagues why he had not yet received "his" doctorate, it appeared to the researcher, that in the minds of many, that obtaining "his" Ph.D. was as certain as the sun rising each day. The researcher later learned that what was once believed to be a foregone conclusion soon became the one that "almost got away."

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to introduce the reader to the major concerns of the investigation. Chapter Two presents a review of prior research of the higher educational condition of African American men. Chapter Three includes many salient issues and enduring enigmas that serve as a framework for the study at hand and serve to formulate the research questions.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

Overview

"...do something that means something that's going to help."

Polo

A review of the literature of African American male terminal degree recipients

was conducted. The literature associated with African American males with terminal

degrees from Majority White Institutions was found among studies on persistence

(Patterson-Stewart, 1995; Patterson-Stewart, Ritchie, & Sanders 1997; King, 2004);

retention (Patitu, 1999; Rowser, 1997); stress and coping mechanisms (Damush, Hays &

DiMatteo, 1997; Taylor & Anthony, 2000, Bagley & Copeland, 1994, Poyrazli, Arbona,

Nora, Mcpherson & Pisecco, 2002).

The search for relevant literature was conducted using dissertation abstracts,

Lexis Nexus, and ERIC databases. An amalgamation of the terms African American,

male, graduate student, and doctoral student were utilized as major descriptors. The

words persistence, campus environment, mentoring, social support, and success were

combined with the major descriptors in order to refine the search. The intent was to

obtain information specific to the research interests. The search yielded 150 citations with

dates ranging from the years 1999 to 2006. The vast majority of the information

addressed undergraduate students. There was a large amount of information on graduate

students but little was found that specifically addressed African American male doctoral

students and terminal degree completers.

In looking at graduation rates, Carter & Wilson (1993) showed that the rate for

African American women graduating from college was nearly 43.9%, and the rate for African American men was around 33.8%. This is consistent with research by Anshel & Sailes (1990) and Schwartz & Washington (2002) that assert African American males tend to have more persistence problems than African American females. In a similar vein that looked at African Americans attending MWIs, Fleming (1984) showed that African American women generally had higher grade point averages and higher graduation rates than their African American male counterparts.

African American doctoral students have been the focus of many recent studies in higher education. These studies could be organized into four broad thematic groups: (1) persistence/attrition/retention (Bingman, 2003; Ford, 1996; Johnson, 2001; Johnson, 2004; King & Chepyator-Thomson, 1996; Patitu, 1999; Patterson-Stewart, Ritchie, & Sanders, 1997; Rowser, 1997); (2) campus environment and mentoring (Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001; Jones, 2002); (3) social support, (Williams, 2002; D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993); and, (4) strategies for overcoming barriers to success (Bagley & Copeland, 1994; Johnson, 1993; Taylor & Anthony, 2000). The body of literature on African American males with terminal degrees remains incomplete. This study was warranted in that it addressed the factors that resulted in African American males at MWIs successfully obtaining a terminal degree.

Similar to the trends observed in the literature, the context of American graduate education provides the background for understanding the challenges, obstacles, and dilemmas of African American males in graduate school. The organization of the chapter includes analyzing the range of challenges African American males experience in graduate school. The topics include: (1) persistence, (2) campus environment and

mentoring, (3) social support, and (4) strategies for overcoming barriers to success. The

chapter concludes with a detailed presentation on the theoretical framework, Critical

Race Theory, and a critique of the studies reviewed.

The Context of Graduate Education

In 2001 the number of Blacks receiving doctoral degrees declined with few

degrees in the sciences and the majority of degrees awarded in education (The number of

Blacks, 2002). While the number of Black doctoral recipients has increased over the

decades from 1985 by 110 percent, the percent was still lower than the overall Black

population percentage of the US ("The striking progress," 2001). By 2002, of all African

Americans in higher education, the percentage of males was only 34.3 and the percentage

of males awarded doctoral degrees was 29.5 creating a massive gender gap ("Graduate

school enrollment," 2005; "The striking progress," 2001).

Of those Blacks who were enrolled in graduate school in 2002, nearly 58 percent

attended state institutions, compared to 61.4 percent of Whites ("News and views:

Good," 2005). In 2002, less than 39 percent of all Black graduate school students and

39.8 percent of Whites were enrolled full-time ("News and views: Degree," 2005).

Table 2

African American Degree Attainment in the U.S. (1999)

_____

Degree	Total	Men	Women	% Men
College Degree	3,854,000	-	-	-
Bachelor	2,730,000	-	-	-
Master's	858,000	339,000	519,000	39.5
Professional	168,000	93,000	75,000	55.4
Doctorate	98,000	52,000	46,000	53.1

Note. From News and Views: Degree Attainments of African American: the good and the bad. (2005). *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, (47)*, 18.)

Data reported in The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education called attention to fact from appearances, current degree holders are almost equally men and women (see Table 2). However, a huge gender gap is occurring between African American men and women in U.S. graduate schools: African American males comprise only one third of all doctoral students (see Table 3). Some have speculated on the enormous impact an educational imbalance will create economically, politically, socially, and personally within the African American community and the nation as a whole ("News and Views: Degree," 2005). Table 3 shows the demographic changes of African American males with doctoral degrees with the numbers receding over the last 30 years.

Table 3

African Americans with Doctoral Degrees

	Year	
	1977	2003
Percent of the total population (%)	3.6	6.5
Percent of males (%)	61.3	34.9

Note. From News and Views: Good News! A record number of doctoral degrees awarded to African Americans. *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, (46)*, 11.

A large gap exists between Blacks and Whites in terms of graduation rates - the overall rate for Blacks at 38.2 percent, and Whites at 57.2 percent ("News and Views: Degree," 2005). Graduation rates were calculated from the year 1996, and measured first-time freshmen that graduated within six years. However, a closer look at the statistics shows that Blacks are able to achieve near the overall average for Whites within certain institutional settings. African Americans tend to do well at the large research institutions and at liberal arts colleges, 51.3 percent and 54.3 percent respectively. Impacting the overall graduation rate through reduction, African Americans tend to do poorly at baccalaureate colleges and proprietary institutions offering two-year and four-year degrees at only 18.3 percent (See Table 4).

Table 4

African American Graduation Rates* by Institutional Type (2002)

	% African Americans	% Whites
Overall Graduation rates	38.2	57.2
Liberal Arts Colleges	54.3	70.0
Research Universities	51.3	67.2
Baccalaureate Colleges	18.3	34.7

Note. * Report of 1996 first time freshmen graduating in 6 years or fewer. From News and Views: Black student graduation rates at the nation's selective Liberal Arts Colleges are much higher than the nationwide average. (2005). *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, (47)*, 18.

While more doctorates are being awarded to African Americans, there is a great disparity in the fields the degrees represent. In 2003, of the 1,742 degrees conferred on African Americans, 43.5 percent were in the field of education, 5.4 percent in the physical sciences, 4 percent in engineering, and zero percent in 52 of the specialized science fields ("News and Views: Good News! A record," 2005). Other indicators of doctoral progress show deficiencies for African Americans. While the average age of doctoral recipients was 33.9 for all Americans, African Americans were 37.4 ("News and Views: Good News! A record," 2005). While 17 percent of all Americans were teaching assistants, only 8 percent of African Americans were. While the average time to complete the doctorate for all Americans was 10.1 years, the average for African Americans was

12.7 years ("News and Views: Good News! A record," 2005). In almost every case of measure, Blacks are lagging behind other Americans.

While admissions for African Americans under Affirmative Action programs in graduate school have been discontinued in some states, the controversy surrounding the academic viability of Black students continues. It is unlikely that students overreach themselves by gaining admissions to institutions they cannot compete in. Congruently, graduation rates of African Americans in law, business, and medical schools, however, remain constant ("How young Blacks," 2005).

Table 5 illustrates another critical trend: the lack of African American faculty in US colleges and universities and the available pool of graduate students (Rikuda, 2004). Considering that only half of the small pool of graduate students plan careers in academia, there is little room to expand the number of African American faculty ("News and Views: Good News! A record," 2005).

Table 5

Pool of African American Faculty in the U.S. (2002)

	Percent of Total (%)
Black graduate students*	6.0 %
Black doctoral degree holders	6.5
Black faculty	5.0

Note. * Graduate students include students seeking terminal Master's degrees. From Rikuda, B. (2004). Low percentage of African American students in graduate programs persists. *Washington Informer*, *40(48)*, 14.

The good news is that over the last century, incredible progress has been made in higher education by African Americans (See Table 6). While the U.S. population of Blacks has increased slightly, the strides in higher education have been tremendous. In 1920, only 10,000 African Americans had college degrees contrasted with the almost 3.8 million in 2000 ("Good News! Three million," 2005).

Table 6:

African American College Degreed in the U.S. (1999)

	1920	1960	1999
Blacks in the U.S. population	9.9 %	10.5 %	12.0 %
Blacks with college degree	0.0010	3.1	15.5

Note. From Good News! Three million African Americans now hold a bachelor's degree. (2005). *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education.*

Although more African Americans are earning doctorates, there has not been a corresponding trend in hiring African Americans as they come into the academic job market; many are going into industry, foundations, and academic counseling (Hamilton, 2001). Academic community can have its allure; however such communities tend to be small for African Americans at institutions other than Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) (Hamilton, 2001).

Very little is known about the educational history and performance differences between minority and majority students, but even fewer studies have examined how those differences impact success (Nettles, 1990). While Blacks receive the most financial assistance, they receive the fewest teaching or research assistantships. While mentoring relationships with faculty are known to have a significant impact, most black graduate

students do not have these relationships with departmental faculty. Feelings of discrimination exist, but minority students become more positive if they can survive to the second year (Nettles, 1990).

Although more African Americans were enrolled in degree-granting graduate schools than ever before, Blacks have remained behind other groups. In the U.S., 8.4 percent of black students are enrolled in graduate schools - 170,241 Black graduate students in 2002 (National, 1997). African Americans make up a small number and percentage of the doctorates earned in the United States (Isaac, 1998; National Opinion Research Center, 1999; Willie, C., Grady, M. & Hope, O., 1991). The overall number of African Americans awarded the doctoral degree spiked in 1977 (Ford, 1996), but decreased by 22% overall, and by 47% among African American males between 1978 and 1988.

The number of African Americans completing doctorates at HBCUs is increasing (St. John, 2000). Officials at HBCUs contend that strong faculty with an emphasis on mentoring and teaching with greater student-professor contacts has been attracting more students, both Black and White (St. John, 2000).

Few would argue that both African American males and females attending MWIs are faced with a multiplicity of related issues. However, research completed by Anderson (2005) hypothesizes that the two groups may address the same obstacles but with different responses. Unique obstacles exist that influence their experiences in these environments in differing ways (Johnson, 2004). This contention, according to Anderson (2005) and Hubbard (2002), can be supported via a consideration of sociological influences such as race, culture, and class.

African Americans have less trouble adjusting to the campus environment of a Historically Black College or University (HBCU) than that of an MWI. Also, the experiences for African American men who attend MWIs are similar to those of African American women who also attend MWIs (Fleming, 1984). It appears that there are differences in experiences however, that may impact the performance of both groups in the curriculum (Fleming, 1984; Schwarz & Washington, 2002). Fleming (1984) surmised that African Americans who attend HBCUs demonstrate a higher level of social and intellectual adjustment than African American males who attend MWIs.

Persistence

This study examined success factors of African American males who obtained terminal degrees from Majority White Institutions. Much research has been done in the area of attrition of doctorate programs. However, a review of the literature indicates there is a need for further research specifically in the area of African American males (Johnson, 2004). Apparent in the literature is a neglect of research concerning the factors affecting African American students' persistence to graduate from college (Robinson, 1990).

The problems of low retention and low graduation rates have plagued American universities greatly in recent years (Beard, 1998). Factors affecting persistence of African American university students included encouraging formal organizations with African American concerns, providing diversity sensitivity training for faculty, staff, and students, and hiring Black faculty and support staff (Gardner, Keller, & Piotrowski, 1996). In a study researching the persistence of ethnic minorities in graduate programs,

African Americans trail behind Anglos, Asians, and American Indians, but are slightly ahead of Hispanics (Carter, & Wilson, 1993).

Provost (1995) focused on the elements in the campus environment such as the availability of mentors, peer relationships, university organizational memberships, residences, work sites, and the students' responses to their institution's strengths and weaknesses. She found that the 169 Black students surveyed were disappointed overall with their campus environments but still retained a value for education that may have contributed to their persistence.

When students are comfortable with the environment, they can better evaluate and balance their efforts in terms of outcomes. Students who become more involved in campus activities have a better environmental fit with the institution. Oddly, in the Provost study (1995), mentoring, peer group, and residence were not significant factors related to persistence of African American students. Moreover, these students reported distractions of a job were a negative factor.

Tinto's (1993) theory of doctoral persistence concluded that a lack of social and academic integration at the departmental level adversely impacts the persistence of doctoral students. Given the opportunity to learn the culture of their departments and the demands of their disciplines, students have an opportunity to become socialized in the intellectual community. Social integration is the process of creating collegial relationships with other students, participating in departmental social activities, and informal meeting with peers or faculty. Such activities have been found to enhance students' intellectual development and contribute to student retention (Tinto, 1999).

Academic integration is often positional, including activities such as participating in colloquia, co-authoring with faculty, and working as graduate assistants (Bingham, 2003). Tinto's theory of doctoral persistence does not specifically address the issues of African American male graduate students but it does address the issue of college students in general.

Factors contributing to graduate students' success were learning to navigate the university culture and systems by locating academic support programs and identifying mentors and advisors (Lewis, Ginsberg, & Smith, 2004). Successful male students describe themselves as being particularly adept at networking and attribute this characteristic to their academic success (Harris, 1996). In the Harris study, networks included study groups, pre-professional organizations, and student government with other persons of color. Successful students have a sense of time management in terms of balancing academic workloads and jobs (Harris, 1996; Bingham, 2003). Others have noted the impact of the college department on student success in that departments with aggressive orientation, advising, and cultural integration achieve high graduation rates (Tierney, 1999; Ferrer de Valeo, 2001).

African American undergraduate students suffer higher attrition rates, lower cumulative gradepoint averages, and lower graduation rates than do the majority of students (Lewis et. al., 2004). The paucity of positive male role models may limit the students' ability to succeed academically (Anderson, 2005). Female-headed homes in the Black community is 44 % opposed to 32 % overall and may be statistically related to the achievement of Black students since minority campuses reported enrollments of 61 % female and 39 % male for the year 2001 (Anderson, 2005). Some believe that

intervention must occur in primary and secondary education for the numbers of African American male graduate students to improve (Hrabowsiki, 1991; Anderson, 2005).

It appears that most background characteristics do not contribute to the academic success or failure of African American male students. According to a study by Stamps and Tribble (1995), undergraduate experiences, families, attitudes, opinions, and personality traits showed no significance in determining program persistence. Yet, other studies have indicated some intrinsic background experiences may be factors for African American males' success in higher education: a nurturing environment, a bond with a positive role model, a spiritual upbringing, and an introspective nature that can focus to complete goals (Ross, 1998).

Previous research on African American male graduate students has focused on identifying barriers to completion. According to Lewis et. al. (2004), the most powerful barrier was feelings of isolation upon arrival on a majority White campus often associated with feelings of invisibility. Most students found very little campus support and direction and had to rely on themselves for their continued success. On the other hand, Lewis et. al. (2004) found African American graduate students felt conspicuous in a majority White campus and did not feel part of an inclusive environment. Whereas Cuyjet (1997) posited that African American males needed special care or nurturing, Howard-Hamilton (1997) argued that as a result of psychosocial issues Black males face that theories of student development targeting African American male college students need to be created.

Researchers have identified key findings associated with African American males' persistence. The student's relationship with his faculty advisor, informal faculty

relationships, and African American faculty mentors play a critical role (Tinto, 1993; Bingham, 2003). Faculties that are approachable and encouraging to students contribute to the student's acclimation to departmental culture (Bingham, 2003). In addition, the students' peer relationships, particularly cross-cultural friendships within the Academy, help clarify and resolve common concerns of graduate education (Bingham, 2003).

Enthusiasm for their work or research positively affects student success. Successful students keep good records to monitor and self evaluate their efforts not only for time management purposes but to preserve information for research. Motivated students that are self-directed and able to work independently without constant assistance from advisors are able to re-evaluate their own efforts in order to move forward and persist (Bingham, 2003).

In this analysis, persistence is a constituent of both structuralism and social constructuralism. Structuralism describes a view of reality that is concerned with the perceptions and descriptions of structure. It holds the premise that human activity is not natural but constructed through the integration of an activity into a larger structure or system. The experience of the individual only has meaning as it relates to the system (Siegel, 2006).

Similar to this school of thought is social constructuralism which presents a model which focuses on agent interaction. The core of constructuralism is the communication transaction that produces a dynamic exchange between the individual and their world. This creates a continuous cycle of action, adaptation and motivation which allows for individual, societal and structural change (Carley, 1995).

This frame of reference fosters the idea that reality is actually a multiple of realities that are dynamic and constantly changing. Constructivists, which are also referred to as critical theorists, view reality as being shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender values which allows it (reality) to frequently vary (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Conversely, it is the individual that usually experiences the most change as a manner to adequately become a part of the system.

In further looking at persistence, Tinto (1987) relates retention to complex interactions between social integration and academic integration. Walters (1997) sought to determine factors affecting retention of minority students in graduate and professional science degree programs. Jones (1997) discovered that individual commitment to degree completion was a major factor in persistence. The latter findings support Tinto's premise that social integration is important in furthering student persistence.

Campus Environment and Mentoring

Campus environment is critical to academic success. The ability to assimilate into the university culture and adjust to the rigors and routine of the campus environment can be quite challenging to all students, graduate or otherwise. Proper socialization and indoctrination into the campus culture is integral to this success. Students' participation in campus organizations and activities strengthens connectedness to the campus (Ford, 1996).

Racial and other college environments differentially affect college success. Determinates of success vary between black males attending MWIs or HBCUs. Because the relationship between institutional support and achievement was not clearly explicated by these analyses, the well-documented finding that Black students at MWIs do not get

psychosocial support (deemed characteristic of Black colleges) may require clarification or qualification, at least with regard to Black males. However, failure to find a link between institutional support and the college racial environment is consistent with findings that suggest that Black colleges do not necessarily facilitate the psychosocial development of African American students more so than MWIs.

It may be postulated that Black males, given their experience at MWIs, perceive from the outset that these institutions will not support them and in turn, move through the curriculum and course of study without those expectations. Research indicates that Black males more often find instructional support lacking, and more often view the racial climate at MWIs as hostile. However, they find the facilities and services better at the MWIs than the HBCUs, and view the benefits as offsetting the lack of social support (Davis, 1994).

A common reason that many students pursue higher education is to increase their chances of having a better future for themselves, their families, and their communities. The small cohort of African American male college graduates will affect US employment for decades, in addition to affecting individuals' social status and earning ability (Cuyjet, 1997). Future relationships with African American women, who perform better in education in general than African American males, may result in domestic difficulties. To avoid these pitfalls, a non-threatening environment for Black men should be provided along with efforts toward eliminating typecasting that currently handicaps the cohort. One important assessment is to review what Black men themselves say about their experiences.

Mentors can provide academic advising, assist in professional socialization, facilitate the development of scholarship, and provide psychosocial support to the African American doctoral student (Bennett, 2000). Excluding financial assistance, African American success in graduate school is determined by two key factors: the availability of mentoring relationships, and prior educational preparation (Bennett, 2000). A study by Rowser (1997) concurs: poor time management, a lack of academic preparation and unrealistic assumptions of departmental expectations are deterrents to academic success for African Americans.

An African American president of an MWI linked problems with campus diversity and low black enrollment to the neighboring community that was only 2.4 percent Black ("A novel approach," 2005). The community environment, which was inhospitable to African Americans, lacked culturally appropriate hair salons, dance clubs, and restaurants.

Many students, both in the minority and the majority, seek the support and guidance of other students senior to them. These mentor/mentee relationships have proven to be quite beneficial to graduate student success; they provide a relationship of special importance to African American graduate students, who have cited mentor relationships as vital to their persistence in graduate school (Faison, 1996). Roles performed by mentors are characterized as academic, facilitative, professional developmental, career support, and personal support.

Whether sought out or appointed, the role of the mentor can play an integral role in the pursuit of higher educational goals. While mentoring/role modeling relationships are crucial to helping students realize their full potential (Colker, l996), it is essential that

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these students find someone that can nurture them. Colker presumes that an individual

will serve as one or more of the following:

(1) an ethical template for the exercise of adult responsibilities;

(2) a symbol of special achievement;

(3) a nurturer providing special educational services.

In 1984, the Florida Education Fund created the McKnight Black Doctoral

Fellows Program (MDF), a program developed for the purpose of generating more

African American doctorates in non-traditional courses of study. The program, which

fully funds tuition, books and fees, as well as a travel allowance to attend professional

meetings and conferences, looked at increasing the recruitment, retention, and graduation

rates of African American doctorates outside of the field of education. The reason for

looking at those outside the field of education was because most African American

doctoral recipients reside in the field of higher education. Data provided by the MDF

(Ford, 1996) pointed to the roles of models and mentors as important to student success

in doctoral programs.

Academic integration, study habits, and peer relations are included in the study's

variable (Davis, 1994). College racial environment and other college environments

differentially affect college success. Determinates of success vary between black males

attending MWIs or HBCUs. Because the relationship between institutional support and

achievement was not clearly explicated by these analyses, the well-documented finding

that Black students at MWIs do not get psychosocial support deemed characteristic of

Black colleges may require clarification or qualification, at least with regard to Black

males. However, failure to find a link between institutional support and college racial

environment is consistent with the findings that suggest that Black colleges do not necessarily facilitate the psychosocial development of African American students more so than White colleges in providing socially supportive and conducive learning environments.

Overall, it is estimated that only 40 to 60 percent of graduate students graduate; the wide range is accounted for by large variances between academic fields (Malone, Nelson, Van, Nelson, 2004). The researchers investigated doctoral attrition and noted the dearth of literature on the subject, the lack of a national data base, and the overall attitude of institutions. Other informal estimates are as low as 20 to 40 percent. For graduate students graduating, however, these numbers may reflect transfers to other institutions to complete doctorates, or to become employed. Factors contributing to doctoral attrition included departmental culture, difficulties with the dissertation, and financial problems. Adding to the complexity was the fact that doctoral attrition varies widely from one department to another. In the end, they recommended that non-quantitative non-cognitive studies continue to assess doctoral student attrition.

In another study, eight African American doctoral students were interviewed to ascertain the degree interpersonal dynamics at MWIs contributed to doctoral persistence (Patterson-Stewart, et. al., 1997). They noted that "the relevant variables affecting student persistence have not been identified and those that are known have not been well explained" (Patterson-Stewart, et. al, 1997, p. 489). Participants noted that academic requirements were not barriers to completion and that positive interpersonal relationships were factors of success.

In reality, cross-cultural adaptation may have a positive impact on a students'

persistence. The university has a moral obligation to provide a culturally diverse

environment (Dawson-Threat, 1997; Willie et. al., 1991; Howard-Hamilton, 1997).

African American students reported needing specific types of faculty interaction during

the dissertation process and it is important for students to be associated with important

figures in the university environment. Little is known, however, of these instances in the

literature.

Social Support

Williams (2002) studied over 1,454 doctoral students, of which 292 were African

American. Overall, he found most doctoral students were somewhat satisfied with their

programs, but saw their advisors and academic environment as strong social support and

conducive to success. However, African Americans reported more negative perceptions

of social support, more program problems, and less program satisfaction than Whites

(Williams, 2002).

D'Augelli and Hershberger (1993) studied 73 African American undergraduates

at an MWI comparing them to 73 closely-matched White counterparts looking at factors

of social networks and campus climate. They found that lack of social and community

support and incidents of harassment affected students' sense of personal security. More

than half of the African Americans (57%) surveyed feared for their safety on campus, but

only 10% worried excessively about it.

Almost all African Americans reported enduring racist remarks and anticipated

them upon their arrival. Students' general feelings of well-being did not seem to be

affected by incidents of insults, threats, or spitting. Such incidents did not appear to

interfere with their academic pursuits. However, these types of incidents did influence students' feelings about the University - more negative toward the institution as a whole. Factors noted but not explored in the study included the disproportionate ratio of African American males to females in the population, and the subsequent effects on the students' social environment and attitudes about campus life.

The academic failure of African American males often begins by the first grade, leading to disillusionment and repeated failures. Garibaldi (1992) studied African American males in New Orleans public schools in 1987. He found that one third of African American male children were in crisis, a situation so grave that "African American males may one day become an *endangered species"* (Garibaldi, 1992, p. 4). Problems reported included non-promotions in class, expulsions, suspensions, and dropouts.

In the study, 80 percent of the parents believed their sons expected to go to college; however, only 40 percent of the teachers agreed. Between student and parent expectations and teacher assessment, a huge disparity of academic abilities had developed. Recommendations and solutions to the crisis included teaching very young African American males the necessary values and etiquette, encouraging participation in organizational activities, giving academic recognition and tangible rewards, and integrating African American male college student tutors.

In Clark's (2004) study, *Factors that motivate African American males' decision to graduate from urban institution of higher education in St. Louis*, 33 participants indicated a strong desire to be successful in mainstream society. Students' self assessment indicated that they believed they were adequately prepared for the rigors of

university academics. Social support for these students included family, friends, mentors, faculty, religious associations, and other African American students. The students' social support came from family, peers, their spirituality, and an academic ambition to achieve a college degree.

Psychologically, students were of a strong mind, and mentally and emotionally capable with a self-motivated drive to achieve. Several of Clark's participants were motivated by narratives of African American males in their families or in their acquaintance who were unable to finish college. Many were motivated by a perceived ideal of a college education, and saw it as an opportunity for their entire family to move forward. Others were motivated by the negative aspects of their lives and sought to create something new.

A strong desire to avoid the failure of other African American males that dropped out in their freshmen year was cited as a motivating factor. Most male students struggled to find a niche at the university, and never bonded with the institution. Clark (2003) concludes with a recommendation of further research into what motivates African American males from single-parent households to be successful in college.

Endecavage (2000) studied the attribution style (sense of power over his environment) and the social support of African American males who succeeded in college by survey. Compared to freshmen, her research indicated that African American completers had a high internal locus of control, as related to self-esteem and personal empowerment, and experienced a great amount of social support from sources - particularly parents. Mentoring was also highly significant and considered a key factor to student success. Completers also scored higher than freshmen on all sources of social

support, except for individual friendships in which freshmen scored higher. Recommendations from the study included a call to improve delivery of existing support systems, creating mechanisms to involve the family, creating opportunities or peer bonding, beginning the mentoring of students earlier, and having continuous student orientation.

Johnson, (2004) in a quantitative study, surveyed 101 African American males' motivations to graduate. Two constructs were examined: African American self-consciousness (attitudes and behaviors reflecting the norms, beliefs, and values associated with the culture), and cultural congruence (the correspondence between intrinsic values and the extrinsic values found in one's environment). While Johnson found these factors were not predictors of high academic success or persistence towards graduation for African American males, he suggests that other non-cognitive factors may be of influence.

Johnson, R. (2001) interviewed 10 African American doctoral students, enrolled between 1985 and 2000, to examine their perceptions of their communication strategies in their efforts to adapt to an MWI. African American students developed positive relationships with other African Americans and felt affinity for African American faculty. Communications with White faculty were labeled strained or limited (Johnson, 2001, p. 150). "Most students reported incidents of injustice, isolation, alienation or marginalization at the department level and the institutional level" (Johnson, 2001, p. 151). Institutional support systems for African American doctoral students were non-existent.

While Johnson agreed with the findings of Clark (2003) and Endecavage (2000), she drew conclusions not found elsewhere in the literature. African American doctoral students rarely acknowledge having a mentor. African American doctoral students did not feel comfortable at events with White faculty where alcohol was consumed, but felt that White students were comfortable and also frequently participated. African American doctoral students used assertive language with group members. African American doctoral students who used non-assertive language with chairpersons were less likely to be successful. While Johnson directs her recommendations to the university named in the study, some suggestions are worthy of mention. In response to the needs of African American doctoral students, she cautions that a problem must be acknowledged before a solution can be administered.

Johnson, R. E. (1993) surveyed 239 African American male undergraduates for a quantitative study to determine the strongest factor of academic success in terms of Black identity models. While the literature review in the study overwhelming confirms non-cognitive factors, Johnson found that a combination of non-cognitive and cognitive factors influence success citing SAT scores, high school rank, self-confidence, academic self-concept, and self-consciousness. Some of the researcher's assumptions were not confirmed such as a hypothesis that a high Black identity would lead to high self-esteem and thereby academic confidence. Finally, Johnson recommended that the study be repeated using other non-cognitive factors such as study habits, work ethic, father's educational level, and degree of aspiration.

Strategies for Overcoming Barriers to Success

One might logically assume that being a college student causes some amount of stress. Hypertension rates of African Americans are unduly more elevated than that of other groups. Therefore, the campus environment of an MWI could increase blood pressure rates. In a study done by Psychologist Dr. Rodney Clark (2004), findings indicated perceived racism of African American female college students was associated with increased systolic and diastolic blood pressure readings.

Graham, Furr, Flowers, & Burke, (2001) discussed the use of religion and spirituality as resources for coping, self-esteem and community, and as indicators of personal happiness and satisfaction in life. The authors queried whether the religious or spiritual affiliation of counseling students influenced their own spiritual health and their levels of coping with stress. In the last 15-20 years the concept of spirituality has been identified as an important component that needs to be included in counseling training programs and the counseling relationship (Ingersoll, 1994). The following nine themes emerged from the Graham, et. al. (2001, p.8) study when participants answered the question, "what helps you combat stress":

1. Prayer;

2. Solitary activities;

3. Distraction from stressful situation;

4. Relaxation/pampering activities;

5. Management of stressful situations;

6. Physical health;

7. Belief in God;

8. Christianity;

9. Family.

To illustrate factors important in the adjustment and achievement of minority college students, Smedley, Myers, & Harrell (1993), looked at the chronic study role strain and life events stressor of women, African American, Latino, Chicana/Chicano, and Pilipino students. The researchers sought to answer whether minority status stresses would confer an additional burden of stress and be associated with increased negative outcomes beyond that which is attributed to the stresses of being at a highly competitive academic institution. Smedley, Myers, & Harrell (1993, p. 434) linked the regressive trend in enrollment, academic performance and retention of minority students to academic pressure, non-cognitive, contextual and socio-cultural factors associated with adjustment and performance. According to the authors, African American students are most strongly affected by these factors.

Smedley, Myers, & Harrell (1993, p. 446) confirmed that chronic study role strain and life events stressors are important correlates of psychosocial distress in minority students. Analogous to the aforementioned study, Tracey & Sedlacek (1985) and Nettles, Theony, & Gosman (1986) ascertained that different sociocultural and contextual factors influence the academic adjustment of African Americans and other minority students more than those that impact non-minority students. Academic problems, conflicts with professors and students, financial despair, tension at home, and other stressors may present more detrimental consequences for minority scholars than for White students (Allen, 1981; Burrell & Trombley, 1983).

Critical Race Theory

Postmodern theorists claim that it is impossible to establish a foundation on objective knowledge. Saalman (2006) posits that one cannot objectively understand reality because all knowledge is contingent on social convention. Those theorists who advocate postmodernism further argue that principles of law do not reflect universal truths but represent the culture of the dominant group in society. That is to say that the goal is to seek what is in the best interest of the dominant group rather than the group that suffered from injustices (Donner, 2005).

The postmodernism philosophy rejects the belief in universality and asserts that experience is personal while promoting an antiscientific path for the acquisition of knowledge. Habermas (1971) supported this philosophy by expounding that the prevalent paradigm in science was not reflective of people's reality and that defining reality through the use of experiments or observation usually resulted in cognitive dissonance and blindness. This mind-set fosters a tendency toward objectivism which ultimately conceals the transcendental basis of facts and meanings of experience and action (McCarthy, 1978).

From a postmodern view, meaning and interpretation in legal situations is most always uncertain and arbitrary because the traditional manner of enforcing the law is not deemed effective; it does not embrace the culture of individuals and the social implications surrounding them. For example, language means different things to different cultures. The legal system has specific definitions for terms that individuals in some cultures may not fully understand even though they are governed by them. In this

state of affairs objectivity cannot exist. This illustrates that the past paradigm of objectivity is not reliable or relative to the people which it affects.

Kimberle Crenshaw argued that little difference existed between conservative and liberal discourse on race-related law and policy. She identified two distinct properties in anti-discrimination law: expansive and restrictive properties. The former stresses equality as outcome relying on the courts to eliminate effects of racism, while the latter treats equality as a process (Crenshaw, 1988). Crenshaw argued that both the expansive and restrictive properties coexist in the anti-discrimination law. The implication of the Crenshaw argument is that the failure of the restrictive property to address or correct the racial injustices of the past simply perpetuates the status quo. As further illustration, the United States legal system is based on a set of expressed and implied duties that separate actions into categories of right and wrong or legal and illegal. These principles have traditionally operated under a system of objective, neutral decision-making which have proved insufficient when attempting to view the system holistically.

Postmodernism has served as a catalyst for the development and utilization of other theories and facilitates the performance of research that is phenomenological in nature. Phenomenology is a type of qualitative research that claims that truth lies in the human consciousness and supports the exploration of the lived experience (Speziale & Carpenter, 2003). Critical theory attempts to integrate a new framework that includes ethical and social thought with elements connected to values and human interests.

Habermas redefined critical theory by discussing human behavior in terms of interest and needs as knowledge is obtained through the process of self-reflection (Carr & Kemmis 1986). This reflection on one's own condition engages the individual in a quest

to explain and understand the dominant scheme and to free or emancipate one's self from this prevailing system. The previously mentioned description of critical theory originated in social theory. However, it is important to acknowledge that critical theory is defined by two different meanings. One has it roots in literary criticism while the other is grounded in a social theory.

The meaning of critical theory from the social theory realm was developed in Germany in 1937 by Max Horkheimer of the Frankfurt School of Science. Horkheimer defined critical theory in his essay entitled *Traditional and Critical Theory*. In Horkheimer's version, critical theory is a social theory that critiques and changes society ("Critical Theory," 2006).

The second meaning of critical theory originated among literary scholars in the 1960s and 1970s. In the literary criticism meaning, the focus of critical theory is to analyze text. The meaning of critical theory in the literary sense is not necessarily aimed at either changing or analyzing society.

In contrast, the objective of traditional theory is not to critique or change society as a whole. Its aim is only to understand or explain it. Horkheimer's goal was to distinguish critical theory as a radical break from Marxian Theory (Edgar, 2005).

While associated with the Frankfurt School in the latter part of the 1960s, Juergen Habermas broke the direct connections critical theory had with previous work done at the Frankfurt School and with Marxism. Habermas conceptualized that humans should be free from domination through self-reflection (Dews, 1999). Instead, psychoanalysis was taken as the paradigm of critical knowledge.

This expanded greatly the broad range of what constituted critical theory in the social sciences. This included such approaches as structuration theory, world systems theory, postcolonial theory, social ecology, feminist theory, queer theory, CRT, neo-Marxian theory and the theory of communicative action ("Habermas," 2006). The study is aligned with the meaning of critical theory according to Habermas and social theory.

Critical theory is neither an altogether homogenous school of thought nor a theory of society. Critical theory is a tradition of social thought that, in part at least, takes its cue from its antagonist. Critical theory is opposed to the wrongs and ills of modern societies on the one hand, and the forms of theorizing that implied, go along with or seek to legitimatize those societies on the other (Bernstein,1995, p. 11).

According to McGregor (2003) the basic tenet of the critical science approach is that people need to think about improving their living conditions rather than accepting and coping with their present conditions. The principal theme of this methodology is the liberation of individuals and the ability to make their voices heard (Bent, 1993). This enrichment is dependent upon both individuals and groups being mindful of social realities that exploit or dominate them. These individuals and groups must then insist on emancipating themselves from those that take advantage of them. McGregor (2003) further asserts that if people recognize their condition, they can improve it by working together to achieve a sense of liberation. The core of this idea is that societal structures and conditions must be altered in order for individual and social autonomy to be obtained.

Tenets of Critical Race Theory

In illustrating key tenets of CRT, (Howard-Hamilton), reports that "methods used to awaken the consciousness of disadvantaged groups are exposure to microagressions, creation of counterstories, and development of counterspaces" (Howard-Hamilton, 1997, p. 23). Counterspaces were also referred to as safe spaces and safe places. Microagressions are a type of subtle abuse aimed at minorities that can be visual, verbal, nonverbal, conscious or unconscious (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yoss, 2000; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Yosso, 2000). Counterstories can be archives, testimonies, or discussions that marginalized groups use to respond to stories previously espoused by the dominant group (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Counterstories cast doubt on existing myths and ideas of the dominant culture (Howard-Hamilton, 1997). Safe spaces are venues that marginalized groups use to express their counterstories (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

Although this type of racism impacts the lives of African Americans and other minorities, little is actually known about microagressions (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Examples of microagressions occur in situations in which Whites, when discussing the topic of African Americans with other African Americans will utter phrases such as, "You are not like other Blacks," or, "I sometimes forget that you are Black," or, "you [Black] don't act like them [Blacks]." Whites are able to speak in this fashion "because cognitive habit, history, and culture [have made them] unable to hear the range of relevant voices and grapple with what reasonably might be said in the voice of discrimination's victims" (Davis, 1989, p. 1576). Pierce (1974) maintained that

African Americans and students in general should be trained to recognize instances of microagression and take proper action at the beginning.

In like manner, Delgado (2000) posits that stories for years have been told by members of a loosely described "outgroup." These outgroups represent a voice and a consciousness that have long been suppressed by a mainstream society, or the "ingroup." "The cohesiveness that stories bring is part of the strength of the outgroup" (Delgado, 2000, p. 60). An outgroup creates its own stories which circulate within the group as a type of counter-reality. Ingroup stories are also known as "majoritarian" stories.

These stories, told by both the ingroup and the outgroup, lend themselves to their own identities and realities within the respective group. Each group's view within its own group views the superior position as natural. The outgroup stories destabilize and undermine those stories of the ingroup.

Storytelling is characteristic of both minorities and non-minorities. A counterstory recounts experiences of racism and resistance from the perspectives of those on society's margins (Yosso, 2006). A common story told by the dominant culture is that which revolves around racial inequality. In this instance, many in the White ingroup tell the story of inequality between Blacks and Whites as being due, at least in part, to a misplaced value system. A counterstory of the Black outgroup could be that the laws and lawmakers who govern society are designed to respond to an idea that many Blacks are not given the opportunities that the dominant cultures have.

In illustrating stories and counterstories as they relate to education (Yosso, 2006, p.4), points out that social scientists offer at least two types of stories to explain unequal educational outcomes - majoritarian stories and counterstories. Furthermore, "a

majoritarian story implicitly begins from the assumption that all students enjoy access to the same educational opportunities and conditions from elementary through postsecondary school (Yosso, 2006, p.4); a counterstory, on the other hand, begins with an understanding that inadequate educational conditions limit equal access and opportunities."

Consequently, the treatment for storytelling according to Delgado (2000) is counterstorytelling. As described by the previous author (2000), counterstorytelling can both build up and tear down. It can likewise inspire some to move up socially, while conversely serve to keep others down. The case of federally funded social aid programs provides a clear example. While few might argue that these programs have served to some as a helping hand to springboard out of poverty and despair, others debate that these same programs do nothing more than provide incentive for a life of destitution and desolation.

Drawing from the experience of people of color to create social justice epistemologies (Lynn & Adams, 2002), CRT seeks to answer questions regarding racism congenital in educational procedures and practice in the U.S. Storytelling is a tool used to counteract narratives dispelled by majoritarian groups. Counterstories contradict the beliefs, norms, and standards that perpetuate racism. The stories of people of color are emphasized at the nucleus of analysis. Hence, CRT is ideal for exploring racial inequality in society and in education. Although similar in many aspects, conventional scholarship and storytelling differ in some crucial areas. As addressed by Daniel Farber and Suzanna Sherry (1995):

First, the storytellers view narratives as central to scholarship, while de-emphasizing conventional analytic measures. Second, they particularly value 'stories from the bottom'-stories from women and people of color about their oppression. Third, they are less concerned than conventional scholars about whether stories are either typical or descriptively accurate, and they place more emphasis on the aesthetic and emotional dimensions of narration (p. 283).

Counterstories were born out of necessity. They were created as a means of conveying stories of experiences that have not been told as well as a way to assess and counter dominant stories. Counterstorytelling is not the same as fictional storytelling that discusses make-believe characters and events. Counterstories are grounded in real life experiences and empirical data, and are contextualized in social situations that are also grounded in real life, not fiction" (Solórzano and Yosso, 2002, p. 36).

Counterstorytelling helps to undo ethnocentrism and the "dysconscious conviction of viewing the world in one way" (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002, p. 172). By listening to counterstories, Whites are afforded an opportunity to see that which the dominant society would never see. Equally important, counterstories offer disenfranchised groups a forum to fully self-express their injustices in a way that the mainstream may comprehend (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

While minority cultures have traditions of resistance, they also inherit traditions of accommodation, a legacy from the dominate culture. This often causes an internal conflict within the individual living with the dominate culture, especially within contact zones where different communities commingle. "Safe houses," those social and academic

spaces where minority groups can be communities of shared understanding, become essential to the emotional and mental survival of the minority race members. African American students become adept at using safe houses to resolve the complexities of their lives (Canagarajah, 1997). In the study, the academy was presented as a place where African Americans' identity is threatened, acting and writing "White" is expected, and the struggle to succeed is intensified. Safe houses provide another way "in which subordinate groups negotiate power in intercultural communication" (Canagarahjah, 1997, p. 173).

Critique of the Studies Reviewed

Current literature in higher education research did not provide an abundance of research on African American male graduate student success. Nor did literature adequately address their dismal outlook as told by the students themselves. Missing was in-depth first person accounts of the concerns, issues, trials, tribulations and triumphs these students faced while pursuing the doctorate. As a result of the scarcity, qualitative research was an ideal way to view how these students made meaning of their success in the doctoral program.

Further, repeated comparisons between African American males and African American females were indicated in the literature reviewed. However, as indicated in the research, a gap exists between measures of success between African American males and African American females. These missing measures include academic performance, grades and academic probation; retention, staying in school; and completion of the matriculation process, graduation; (National Center for Education Statistics, 1997).

It is worth noting that when compared to Whites, African American students had overall lower SAT scores upon admission to college. However, as they matriculated through the graduate program, African American students' academic abilities became comparable to that of Whites. The examined studies pre-selected the intrinsic characteristics to be examined. By predetermining participant questions in a tightly structured interview, essential themes could be missed in the narratives. The literature reviewed indicated that non-cognitive factors positively influence African American academic success, almost to the exclusion of cognitive factors (Johnson, D. 2004; Endecavage, 2000; Johnson, R. 2001). However, which non-cognitive factors are impacting African American males is not conclusive.

The ultimate goal of the study was to gain valuable insight that might better equip present and prospective African American males pursuing their graduate endeavors. The ambition was to identify factors, from the perspective of the subjects, which helped them successfully complete their graduate program.

Current students, prospective students, faculty and administrators can benefit from this study. In a study similar to the one proposed (Peart-Newkirk, 1998), racial identity attitudes, the perceived accessibility and helpfulness of academic and environment were all found to be significantly predictive of subjective academic performance and progression, as well as potential attrition.

With further open and effective communication between students and university officials, it is believed that attrition can be reduced. Speaking openly and honestly with students entering the program as to what might be expected would be an ideal way to begin any graduate program. Obviously, identifying the most effective factors associated

with success in graduate school is impossible, but interactive dialogue among all parties associated within and outside of the collegial facility should make the learning experience of graduate education more enjoyable for all.

The principal researcher conducted an intense and in-depth review of relevant literature. There appeared to be no current research regarding African American male graduate students that were narrative in nature, or that engaged storytelling as discussed in Critical Race Theory. Indeed, interviews were collected, but stories of human lives were distilled to four or five common phrases expressed in cursory academic jargon. A key omission from existing investigations was the full and narrative voices of the terminal degree completers. The literature review indicated that no more than a paragraph served as the basis for any of the studies examined by the principal investigator. Lost in these translations were individuality, reality, and personal truths.

Summary

In this chapter, I have presented research pertinent to the question posed in Chapter One, "Why do you think you were successful in graduate school?" In doing so, enduring enigmas and salient issues relevant to African American male graduate students have been identified; this chapter sets the stage for the study. Chapter Three, Methodology, presents a detailed analysis of how the study was conducted. It also describes the research design, addresses the sampling technique, discusses data collection, and outlines the interview procedure. Furthermore, it expounds on how the data retrieved from the participants was analyzed and interpreted.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Overview

"...we don't expect everybody to make it through this process..."

Earl

The purpose of this study was to explore the meaning, or "sense-making," behind the scholastic success of high achieving African American males who obtained terminal degrees from MWIs. The findings of this study illuminate the pathway of the participants' academic accomplishment in relation to persistence, campus environment and mentoring, social support, and strategies for overcoming barriers to success. It asked the question, "Why do you think you were successful in graduate school?"

This study was qualitative in nature. It utilized an exploratory design to determine the existence of life events among the respondents and contrast them with other studies. Data for this study were drawn from in-depth, unstructured interviews that focused on active listening and open-ended questions.

Qualitative Research

The qualitative approach was chosen in an attempt to understand the empirical matters from the perspective of those being studied (Creswell, 1998). In qualitative research (Langenbach, Vaughn, and Aagaard, 1994), organizational and compositional creativity is acceptable. The essential philosophy of qualitative research entails seeking out a substantially expressive environment, human instruments for data collection and analysis, holistic interpretations, and inductive analysis for significance (Whitt, 1991). Qualitative methods are considered to be superior for achieving an in-depth

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understanding of institutions that have multivarious problems including retention (Garlough, 2004). According to the previous author (2004), nothing about the phenomena being studied is considered extraneous or irrelevant in the collection of raw data.

Creswell (1994) defines qualitative study as an inquiry that attempts to comprehend a human or a societal dilemma, based on creating an intricate, holistic picture, created with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural environment. Qualitative research is extremely effective at producing meticulous data, and has particular significance for examining complex and sensitive issues. To achieve a profound understanding of how people think, in-depth interviewing is necessary.

There is no distinct reality in qualitative research. In qualitative research, reality is based on the perception of the individual, and may change over time. The term "phenomenologic" implies a process which emphasizes the distinct, personal experiences of those contributing to the study - the dimensions of personal occurrences that give existential understanding to these unique phenomena.

Studies that are qualitative in nature tend to produce information that is detailed. By presenting data that are very meticulous, the investigator is empowered to describe the topic of interest in explicit details in the original language of the participant. Thus, data are transformed into a "narrative story" of experience and emotions expressed in the words of the interviewee. Each story is dissimilar from any other participant; although, the same questions are used.

Qualitative interviews are conversations in which the researcher guides the participant through an extensive discussion. The researcher educes breadth and depth

about the area of interest by following up on the interviewee's responses for the duration of the conversation (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). According to the previous authors (2005) the purpose of this type of interview is to explore what happened, why it happened, and what it means.

The nucleus of this study was the personal and in-depth stories expressed solely by the individual participants. Interviews conducted during this study had a narrowly focused scope. Accordingly, all questions posed to the participants during the interview process were directly related to their experiences while in pursuit of their terminal degree. The interview protocol is located in Appendix A.

Phenomenology

Eaton (2006, p. 9) describes phenomenology as the conscious experience of everyday life and the description of things as an individual experiences them. Eaton (2006) further explains phenomenology as the meaning that individuals report to believe, decide, evaluate, feel, judge, perceive, remember, and physically experience. In the study of phenomena, the focus is on the meaning it possesses for the participants (Moustakas, 1994; Schwandt, 2001).

Although the origins of phenomenology can be traced back to Kant and Hegel, the German philosopher, Edmund Husserl is credited with the development of the philosophical method (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Husserl rejected the belief that objects in the external world exist independently and that information about objects is reliable (Groenewald, 2004). He argued that people can be certain about how things appear in, or present themselves to, their consciousness (Fouche, 1993).

A follower of Husserl work, Alfred Schultz, was interested in the ways in which ordinary members of society comprise the world of everyday life. Particularly, he was concerned with how individuals made meaning out of their experiences (Creswell, 1998). According to Welman and Kruger (1999, p. 189) "phenomenologists are concerned with understanding social and psychological phenomena from the perspectives of people involved." Holloway (1997) states that researchers who use phenomenology are reluctant to prescribe techniques and avoid applying a standardized methodology to the process. Hycner (1999) concurs with the disinclination on the part of phenomenologists to focus too much on specific steps in gathering results.

Phenomenological research shares common characteristics with other qualitative approaches including ethnography, hermeneutics, and symbolic interactionism, in that it describes rather than explains, and starts without a hypotheses or preconceived outcome (Husserl, 1900). More recently, humanist and feminist theorists refute the idea of researching with bias or preconceptions, while emphasizing the importance of making meaning of the findings as well as making any disclosure of personal interest by the researcher visible and incorporated within the study (Plummer, 1983; Stanley & Wise, 1993). Germane to this study, phenomenological methods are particularly effective in revealing experiences and perceptions of individuals from a personal point of view that may challenge normative assumptions and generalized theory (Groenewald, 2004). Phenomenology is concerned with the study of experience from the perspective of the individual while highlighting unchallenged assumptions and norms.

The use of the phenomenological approach in this study is to clarify detail and to identify phenomena through the actors in a given situation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). In

actuality, this approach translates into gathering thick descriptives representing the perspective of the informants through inductive, qualitative methods such as interviews, discussions, and participant observation (Whitt, 1991). The methodology of phenomenology obtains information on what influences people within a specified period or event and how they are interpreted by those individuals (Moustakas, 1994). Philosophically, phenomenological approaches are based in a paradigm of personal knowledge and subjectivity, and as such they are powerful instruments to ascertain truth in search of justice (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Participants

Participants for this study were purposefully selected. Purposeful sampling is a method commonly used in qualitative research. The selection plan must be unmistakably defendable and rational (Garlough, 2004). In a qualitative study, the goal in selecting participants is not a random sample (Strauss, 1987), but a knowledge-rich sample that can illuminate the deeper structure of the research question.

African American males who received their terminal degrees from MWIs were selected for this study. The five participants obtained their terminal degrees from doctoral-research institutions (see Table 7).

Table 7

Description of Participants' Institutions (2005)

		Institutional Description		
Participant	Students	Graduate Students	African American Graduate students	African American Male Graduate students
Coach	23,910	2,246	726	171
Polo	26,994	4,266	186	72
Dr. Phil	29,642	5,412	170	62
Tre	26,994	4,266	186	72
Earl	19,950	3,522	154	46

Note. Subjects could be indirectly identified based on combinations of demographic data, often termed indirect identifiers. Due to the relatively minute number of African American male graduate students at each institution, institutional names were withheld to ensure participants' anonymity. Data were obtained from the Institutional Research web pages from each institution on July 5, 2006.

Coach completed his program at a major urban research university with a campus enrollment of over twenty-three thousand students, undergraduate through post graduate. This institution has a graduate student enrollment of approximately 2,200 students with 171 of those being African American males.

Polo and **Tre** graduated from the same university, a doctoral-research institution with a main campus enrollment of 26,994 and a continuing education enrollment of 2,840. **Polo** completed the traditional on-campus program and **Tre** completed the

continuing education program from various locations throughout Europe. In 2005, 73 percent of the students on the campus were White Americans. Of the 4,266 graduate students only 186 were African American and only 72 were African American males.

Dr. Phil attended a comprehensive public university with a long-standing commitment to teaching, research and service. This institution's campus enrollment is close to thirty thousand with a graduate student population of over five thousand. African American enrollment is only 2.3 percent of the total enrollment and there were only 170 African American students enrolled in graduate school.

Earl attended an institution in the same geographic location as **Polo** and **Tre**. The campus enrollment for this institution was 19,950 students with a graduate student enrollment of over 3,500. Only 46 graduate students were African American males.

Each participant completed their terminal degree program within five years of the date of the study. The four qualifying prerequisites for taking part in the study were identifying as an African American male, volunteering for the study, agreeing to participate without compensation, and having obtained a Ph.D. in Higher Education from an MWI.

The principal investigator encountered great difficulty in identifying possible participants for the study. This was due to the relative small number of individuals who met the study's participatory requirements of being an African American male who obtained a Ph.D. in the past five years from an MWI in the field of Higher Education. As pointed out by Tesch, (1990, p. 3) "the limits on the number of participants are imposed by the researcher's available resources in conducting intensive, multiple, in-

depth explorations with each of the study participants." Consequently, the research project was conducted utilizing a total of five interview participants.

Data Collection

After approval by the University of Oklahoma (OU) Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct the study and collect data were granted, a search was initiated to identify prospective participants. Professional colleagues were contacted either in person, via telephone, or electronic mail for assistance in identifying prospective participants. Individuals who expressed interest in participating were given the researcher's personal contact information (email and cell phone) and instructed to contact the researcher either electronically or telephonically to discuss the study and interview process. After the prospective participants were identified, each received an Invitation to Participate in the Study (see Appendix B).

There were seven individuals that met the requirements for the study and contacted the researcher to express interest in participating in the study. Of these seven, five were readily available to participate. One was unavailable during the time the principal investigator had set aside to conduct the interviews, the remaining one was inaccessible. The remaining five were then selected as participants.

Prior to the interview, the principal researcher spoke with each participant about their desire to participate and their expressed willingness to provide authentic and in-depth information regarding their experiences while pursuing their terminal degree. Individual participants were encouraged to select the interview site and time. By allowing the interviewee to control where the interview was held and took place, it was anticipated

that the participant would develop trust with the researcher and was more likely to feel comfortable speaking openly and authentically.

Once a suitable environment that provided both comfort and privacy was agreed upon between the researcher and each participant, the interview time and date were determined. Even though each interview lasted between one and one-half hours in length, the researcher ensured that the interviewee had set aside at least two hours for the entire process. The purpose of the additional time was to allow both the researcher and the participant time to become comfortably situated, to discuss the interview process and address any other concerns and issues that might arise, or emanate. There were none in any of the interviews.

Before the interview process was initiated, participants were briefed on the interview process and the nature of the study. After reading and signing the University of Oklahoma Institutional Review Board's (IRB) approved consent form (see Appendix C) and reviewing the interview protocol (see Appendix A), each participant was assigned a pseudonym to identify the participants and to help ensure both anonymity and confidentiality. The unstructured interviews were recorded on two micro cassette recorders, a primary and a backup in the event that one should be inoperative. Each interview was assigned a ninety minute micro cassette labeled with the participant's pseudonym.

The recorded interview was transcribed by a professional transcriber within twenty-four hours after the interview. After the interviews had been transcribed, the researcher reviewed the transcript and corrections, changes, or additions were made to the data at that time. The transcripts were then sent to the interviewee for review and all

responded within forty-eight hours. Corrections and clarifications were made before the

researcher began the coding process. Contingencies were arranged for subsequent

interviews in case of the following situations: (1) in the event of mechanical failure to

both micro cassette recorders, (2) if either the researcher or the participant became ill, or

(3) if there was an unpredictable and uncontrollable act of nature. In order to ensure that

in-depth understanding is achieved, the researcher was to be an active and attentive

listener (Rubin & Rubin, 1995) focusing on significant words, ideas, and themes that

were critical to the study.

Unstructured Interviews

The study employed unstructured interviews. This type of interview technique

involves direct contact between the researcher and the participant. Initial questions

facilitated the scope of the research, however the researcher had the flexibility to guide

the conversation in any direction that the conversation took while addressing the theme.

This type of interview allowed for a broad, in-depth look at the richness of the subject

being addressed.

Analysis of Data

According to both Creswell (1998) and Moustakas (1994), three integral steps in

phenomenological research must be taken. Phenomenological analysis begins with

bracketing. The principal investigator must take great strides to ensure bias is not

imposed on the study. Remaining objective is crucial and researchers must take steps to

avoid any preconceived notions come into play.

Following bracketing is horizonalization. Here, the goal of the investigator is to

compile pertinent statements while applying the same importance to all. Even if it seems

irrelevant to the study, (Moustakas, 1994) the information should be maintained. Themes may emerge from what initially appears to be trivial or insignificant. The researcher should become "one with the data." This will allow the investigator the ability to authentically understand the data (Tesch, 1990).

After horizonalization is completed, the statements of all the participants are gathered or "clustered." Statements once germane to each participant now emerge as common data or themes. The researcher continually moves between data, text and themes (Wootton, 2006). This is referred to as a constant comparison. The constant comparative method is used for completeness of data and themes (Tesch, 1990).

Because the study involved working with in-depth and rich data, the current version of NVivo software, NVivo 7, was utilized. The NVivo software is a qualitative tool that takes raw, transcribed data and integrates it into the coding process. The examiner employed the software to assist in the compilation and rationalization of information obtained from the participant interviews. The software was used to explore and interpret raw data, thereby assisting in the analysis. The use of NVivo aided the researcher in organizing and managing ideas and information.

Although NVivo was used in the analysis and coding process, the principal investigator utilized the aid of another researcher, a doctoral recipient who used NVivo software in a qualitative dissertation, to member check the data. The principal investigator and the alternate researcher identified similar themes. Themes identified will be addressed later in the study.

NVivo software is specifically designed for qualitative research, including phenomenology. Bracketing was addressed by the researcher working with a second

party coder to establish themes and strive for objectivity in coding the data.

Horizontalization was addressed because codes are not ranked within NVivo and

therefore the assignment of codes is impartial and non-evaluative. Clustering occurred

when nodes were combined to answer the research questions.

Coding Process

The five transcribed interviews were imported into NVivo 7 as five Word

documents. The interviews were prepared for coding according to the interview protocol

listed in Appendix A. The interviews were first coded to the protocol questions and then

coded to sub-categories within each category. Two additional categories that seemed

significant and that overlapped within the questions, Discrimination and Racism, and

Financial Issues were also coded.

Reports

Nine coding reports with 87 subcategories were compiled. Table 8 lists the NVivo

nodes or codes, including demographic data, used for the study. A frequency count

indicating the number of interviews out of five interviews coded to each category is

identified Table 9. The coding reports can also be read and evaluated with respect to

these frequency counts.

Table 8

Coding Report
_____

(1) DEMOGRAPHICS (D1-D5) (5 subcategories)
D1. Birth year
D2. Institution attended
D3. Area of Concentration
D4. Year you received your degree
D5. What is your current occupation

(2) BACKGROUND INFORMATION (Q01-Q03) (8 subcategories)
Q01. Graduate student experiences
1.   Negative
2.   Positive
Q02. Experienced racism
1.   No - did not experience racism
2.   Yes - experienced racism
Q03. When and why pursue terminal degree
1.   Encouraged by mentors and others
2.   Faith in God
3.   Opportunity presented by institution
4.   Self-motivation and persistence

(3) PERSISTENCE (Q04-Q07) (20 subcategories)
Q04. Barriers Challenges Problems
1.   External - Discrimination
2.   External - Financial
3.   External - Institutional
4.   Self - internal
5.   Spiritual enemy
6.   Time management
Q05. Consider leaving university
1.   No - did not consider leaving university
2.   Yes - considered leaving university
Q06. Motivation to persist
1.   Extrinsic
2.   Intrinsic
Q07. What created conditions to persist
1.   Desire to help others
2.   Environment
3.   Faith
4.   Family
5.   Funding
6.   Job experience
7.   Mentors
8.   Prior generations
9.   Self-determination
10.   Upward mobility

(4) CAMPUS ENVIRONMENT AND MENTORING (Q08-Q11) (14 subcategories)
Q08. Encouraged or discouraged academics
1.   No - not encouraged
2.   Yes - encouraged
Q09. Campus climate or culture
1.   Difficult to say - summer session only
2.   Few resources for minority students

3.   Focus on athletics
4.   Low ratio African Americans
5.   Nurturing environment for all students
6.   Recruited African Americans

Q10. Role models or mentors
1.   Institutional mentors
2.   Non-institutional mentors

Q11. How did environment impact success
1.   Individual impact
2.   Institutional impact
3.   Not asked
4.   Societal impact

(5) SOCIAL SUPPORT (Q12-Q13) (6 subcategories)

Q12. Support system on or off campus and impact
1.   Did not have support system
2.   Off campus
3.   On campus

Q13. Describe support systems
1.   Individual support system
2.   Institutional support system
3.   Societal support system

(6) STRATEGIES (Q14-Q19) (25 subcategories)

Q14. Individual strategies beneficial to completion
1.   Affiliation
2.   Family
3.   Planning and Goal Setting
4.   Socializing
5.   Spirituality

Q15. Politics at university
1.   No - did not witness politics
2.   Yes - witnessed politics

Q16. Most integral to success of terminal degree
1.   Academic preparation and development
2.   Identity as Black Race
3.   Self-motivation and discipline
4.   Spirituality and faith
5.   Support systems

Q17. Strategies used
1.   Individual strategies
2.   Institutional strategies
3.   Not asked
4.   Societal strategies

Q18. Advice to other AA males attending MWI
1.   Develop mentors and support system

2.   Establish African American support system
3.   Purpose and commitment
4.   Self-identity
Q19. Examples of success followed
1.   Family
2.   Historical figures
3.   Non-family personal relationships
4.   Other
5.   University relationships

(7) DEBRIEFING (Q20-Q22) (9 subcategories)
Q20. Anything you would do differently
1.   Develop and utilize support systems
2.   Nothing different
3.   Remain flexible and open-minded
4.   Start earlier age
Q21. Anything else to add
1.   Nothing to add
2.   Other - Individual
3.   Other - Institutional
4.   Other – Societal
Q22. Questions like to ask

(8) DISCRIMINATION AND RACISM
(9) FINANCIAL ISSUES

Observations and Limitations

       Table 9 provides the frequency count for the number of documents out of the total

documents that are coded in each category. The number of documents used for the

frequency count calculations is five interviewees. In qualitative studies, it is essential that

reports are read and evaluated qualitatively rather than relying on frequency counts.

Reporting the frequency count serves as another qualitative means to ensure

trustworthiness of data.

Table 9

Frequency Count

Category Name	No of Docs
DEMOGRAPHICS (D1-D5)	
D1. Birth year	5
D2. Institution attended	5
D3. Area of Concentration	5
D4. Year you received your degree	5
D5. What is your current occupation	5
BACKGROUND INFORMATION (Q01-Q03)	
Q01. Graduate student experiences	
Negative	4
Positive	5
Q02. Experienced racism	
No - did not experience racism	3
Yes - experienced racism	3
Q03. When and why pursue terminal degree	
Encouraged by mentors and others	4
Faith in God	2
Opportunity presented by institution	4
Self-motivation and persistence	3
PERSISTENCE (Q04-Q07)	
Q04. Barriers Challenges Problems	
External - Discrimination	2
External - Financial	1
External - Institutional	2
Self - internal	3
Spiritual enemy	1
Time management	1
Q05. Consider leaving university	
No - did not consider leaving university	4
Yes - considered leaving university	1
Q06. Motivation to persist	
Extrinsic	5
Intrinsic	5
Q07. What created conditions to persist	
Desire to help others	1
Environment	1
Faith	1
Family	2
Funding	2
Job experience	1
Mentors	3

Prior generations	2
Self-determination	5
Upward mobility	2
CAMPUS ENVIRONMENT AND MENTORING (Q08-Q11)	
Q08. Encourage or discouraged academics	
No - not encouraged	3
Yes - encouraged	4
Q09. Campus climate or culture	
Difficult to say - summer session only	1
Few resources for minority students	1
Focus on athletics	1
Low ratio African Americans	3
Nurturing environment for all students	1
Recruited African Americans	1
Q10. Role models or mentors	
Institutional mentors	5
Non-institutional mentors	5
Q11. How did environment impact success	
Individual impact	3
Institutional impact	3
Not asked	2
Societal impact	3
SOCIAL SUPPORT (Q12-Q13)	
Q12. Support system on or off campus and impact	
Did not have support system	1
Off campus	3
On campus	3
Q13. Describe support systems	
Individual support system	3
Institutional support system	3
Societal support system	4
STRATEGIES (Q14-Q19)	
Q14. Individual strategies beneficial to completion	
Affiliation	3
Family	1
Planning and Goal Setting	2
Socializing	2
Spirituality	2
Q15. Politics at university	
No - did not witness politics	1
Yes - witnessed politics	4
Q16. Most integral to success of terminal degree	
Academic preparation and development	1
Identity as Black Race	1
Self-motivation and discipline	2

Spirituality and faith	2
Support systems	3
Q17. Strategies used	
Individual strategies	4
Institutional strategies	4
Not asked	1
Societal strategies	4
Q18. Advice to other AA males attending MWI	
Develop mentors and support system	2
Establish African American support system	1
Purpose and commitment	4
Self-identity	3
Q19. Examples of success followed	
Family	4
Historical figures	2
Non-family personal relationships	2
Other	1
University relationships	3
DEBRIEFING (Q20-Q22)	
Q20. Anything you would do differently	
Develop and utilize support systems	2
Nothing different	2
Remain flexible and open-minded	1
Start earlier age	1
Q21. Anything else to add	
Nothing to add	1
Other - Individual	3
Other - Institutional	1
Other - Societal	2
Q22. Questions like to ask	5
OVERALL THEMES	
Discrimination and racism	5
Financial issues	4

The reliability of data was assessed through a variety of means. The principal

researcher, on several instances, was able to personally relate to the respondents'

experiences, and thereby enhance interpretation with further discussion. By doing so, the

researcher was able to triangulate responses and confirm the credibility of the

respondents. "No single item of information, unless coming from an elite and

unimpeachable source, should ever be given serious consideration unless it can be triangulated" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 283).

Triangulation was computed via interrater reliability by allowing another researcher (also a terminal degree recipient not directly associated with any of the participants) to read the completed transcript of each of the interviewees and compare the coding of the principal investigator. Interrater reliability is a measure of consistency of judgment among multiple observers (Boyatzis, 1998). Equally important to reliability of data is reviewing each taped interview numerous times. By repetitively listening to the interviews, (Holloway, 1997) and (Hycner, 1999), the researcher was able to become more acquainted with the words, enabling the researcher to develop a holistic sense or "gestalt." As a means of adding credibility to the study, each respondent was "member checked" and confirmed by reading a completed transcript of their interview. Triangulation was again computed via interrater reliability.

Credibility in qualitative research is enhanced when the researcher conducts the inquiry in such a manner that there is a balance of how the respondent's perspective of their experiences are described and the researcher's reconstruction and representation of same (Schwandt, 2001, p. 258). The researcher had participants "member check" the information they had provided. Member checking is the process whereby the participants review the data for accuracy and completeness (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 2003). Following transcription, study participants were provided the opportunity to read their interview transcripts. Participants were able to confirm, clarify, change and provide feedback on the researcher's notes. By allowing the participants to review the researcher's precision and

fullness, new data can be produced and valuable insight can be obtained (Gall, et. al., 2003).

Further checks of reliability data were completed through intracoding. The principal investigator utilized the services of a qualitative consultant at the doctoral level who is an expert in NVivo software. Further, the researcher worked with this consultant to establish a coding strategy and confirm coding themes. Themes identified will be addressed later in the study. Member checking and intracoding were necessary to ensure reliability of coding analysis. The researcher safeguarded personal information of the interviewees to ensure confidentiality was not compromised.

Furthermore, to ensure success of the study, the researcher ensured dependability of the study. Dependability lies on the "process of the inquiry and the inquirer's responsibility for ensuring the process was logical, traceable and documented" (Schwandt, 2001, p.258). The process involved the researcher keeping comprehensive notes and records of activities by an organized, retrievable method (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 2002). The researcher incorporated an audit trail which consisted of backups of recordings, files of all transcribed interviews, electronic and conventional mailings, a schedule, a calendar, notes, listed phone calls, and a record of observations, and all other contacts made with individuals associated with the study.

According to Guba and Lincoln (1985), trustworthiness consists of the following four tenets: dependability, confirmability, transferability, and credibility. Dependability was obtained by separate but overlapping sources, by creating an audit trail, and by triangulating. An audit trail is described as "the residue of records stemming from the inquiry" (Guba and Lincoln, 1985, p. 319). The audit trail was further broken down into

groups labeled process notes, pilot development, preliminary notes, data analysis, data reduction, and raw data.

During each portion of the audit trail, the four tenets of trustworthiness were examined. Triangulation and audit trail were used to assess the confirmability of findings and analysis. Transferability was obtained by providing a rich and accurate portrayal of the data which made the shift to another tenet achievable. Credibility was attained after findings and analyses are produced. Findings and analysis were produced through extensive meetings to increase discernment, persistent observation to avert misrepresentation and triangulation to examine from various angles.

Trustworthiness in the study was obtained by a variety of means. The participants of the study reviewed the transcribed interviews. This afforded each participant an opportunity to check data for accuracy and clarify or correct any misinformation. Throughout the study, another terminal degree recipient acted as an outsider to confirm accuracy and precision.

Summary

The purpose of the study was to explore success factors of African American males with terminal degrees received from an MWI. The goal was to utilize a qualitative research design to investigate how African American male graduate students succeed in graduate school. A primary focus of this project was to investigate any unique situations these participants have faced. Results of analysis provided data to assist in increasing the African American male graduate student success rate in the United States.

In this chapter, I discussed how the study was conducted. I also addressed research design and analysis. The next chapter will discuss the study's findings. Specifically, I will cover the results of the participant interviews.

CHAPTER FOUR

Findings

Introduction

"...I was predicted to not even finish, before the classes even began."

Tre

The aim of this study was to investigate the gist of the academic success of high achieving African American males who obtained terminal degrees from MWIs. Using a depository of personal narratives spoken in their own voices, the participants chronicled their lives as they pursued their educational goal. This was accomplished by viewing their success from an individual, institutional and societal perspective.

Demographic Profile of Terminal Degree Recipients

The five individuals who participated in this study graciously gave of their time, energy and soul to contribute to this study. Ranging in age from 36 to 44, they represented four different institutions of higher learning. Although two participants were from the same institution, one was enrolled on the main campus while the other participated in a distance education program that was based outside the continental United States. Each received a Ph.D. in a discipline of Higher Education.

Two of the participants have held the doctorate since 2002 while two others received their doctoral degree in 2006. One participant in this study obtained the doctorate in 2004. Four of the individuals are professors at the university level, although, one is currently on sabbatical from teaching and is currently working as an educational

consultant. The final member of the study is a principal. Table 10 depicts the

participant's personal demographical data.

Table 10

Terminal Degree Recipients Demographics

Participant	Birth Year	Institution Attended	Year of Degree	Area of Concentration	Current Occupation
Coach	1962	University of New Orleans	2002	Educational Administration	Educational Consultant & Administrator
Polo	1969	University of Oklahoma	2006	Educational Psychology	Assistant Professor
Dr. Phil	1970	University of Iowa	2004	Counseling Education	Professor
Tre	1965	University of Oklahoma	2006	Interdisciplinary Studies	Principal
Earl	1966	Oklahoma State University	2002	Higher Education, Educational Applied Studies	Adjunct Professor

The interviews generated data in the areas of academic success in terms of

persistence, campus environment and mentoring, social support, and strategies for

overcoming barriers. Findings pertaining to these and additional emerging themes are

discussed later in this section.

Interview Findings

The interview methodology is dependent on the accuracy of each participant's

memory and the level of motivation that existed during the actual interview (Eaton, 2006,

p. 11). The candor of the participants throughout the interview process was carefully

noted in the researcher's field notes. Each contributor responded authentically and openly

to the principal investigator. One of the participants, **Dr. Phil**, in discussing his feelings on the challenges of pursuing the terminal degree shared, "I say bitter sweet to say that hey, there was some challenges but ultimately I overcame those challenges and now I am successful." **Coach** shares another example of challenges by stating, "The challenge was never ever a problem; it was something that I enjoyed." **Earl**'s view on challenges was, "the only challenge or problems was the ones I was facing within myself."

Similar to these remarks, the other men in the study expressed that the strength to endure the rigors toward academic success for the most part had to be found within one's self. The personal motivation for the scholastic endeavor of the participants varied. Nevertheless, once admission to the degree program had been gained, the option of failing or quitting the program was not an option for any of the study participants. The data illustrates the unfaltering resolve of the participants to reach their goal.

Each of the participants contributed selflessly to the interview process by answering personal questions that dealt with issues of ancestry, loneliness, discrimination, stereotypes, racism, university politics, and self-disclosure with sincerity and forthrightness. Each one spoke openly and freely and appeared to genuinely welcome the opportunity to share their individual experiences. All enthusiastically agreed to take part in the study, knowing that the information they provided would be used to assist other African American males to be successful in their quest for higher education's "brass ring."

Their accounts focused on the educational process and were full of anecdotes that spoke of adversity, self-doubt, anger, brotherhood, humor and ultimately triumph. The narratives were inspirational and gave deep and uncensored insight in the psyche of the

African American male in higher education. This is a rare and unique perspective that is critically deficient in American society and thus in the scholarly literature of higher education.

The data were comprised entirely of the transcribed responses generated by the participant interviews. The rich, in-depth conversations delineated each participant's unique personality and the mechanisms they utilized to assist them in obtaining the terminal degree. The following vignettes reveal the distinct backgrounds, interests, and personalities of the participants, allowing a comprehensive glimpse into the soul of those that contributed. Each one chose his own pseudonym that was used throughout the interview process and this study. The purpose of the pseudonym was to aid in storytelling and to maintain confidentiality.

Interview Participants

Coach:

A former college football coach and university professor, **Coach** currently works as an administrator and a consultant for a large metropolitan public school district located in the Southern region of the U.S. His primary functions are consulting and research. **Coach** also conducts disciplinary hearings for the K-12 school district. In addition to the above, he is a Field Grade Officer in the U.S. Armed Forces with nearly twenty years of military service.

Coach is not the first in his family to attend either college or graduate school. He stems from a long lineage of college educated family. **Coach** was indoctrinated at an early age on the experiences and expectations of graduate school. He had a vast amount of first hand observations of seeing family members matriculating at the undergraduate

and graduate levels. **Coach's** experiences in graduate school while pursuing the terminal

degree were pleasant.

> My graduate student experience was a very good experience. Prior to my gaining
>
> admission into the program I had to distinguish myself with some of the
>
> professors because my hard work and because of the good grades that I had
>
> earned and also they saw a certain level of maturity and responsibility. They
>
> noted that I was an officer in the military and noted that I was distinguishing
>
> myself with the local school system. So they recommended me very highly that I
>
> apply to and I was able to gain entrance into the program. The challenges of
>
> academic coursework were never ever a problem; it was something that I enjoyed.
>
> I enjoy academia and I still have a close relationship with a couple of universities
>
> in the area.

Unlike other work settings where he experienced politics, problems and bias,

Coach saw the university as a welcome reprieve. In contrast to other environments,

Coach found the academy to be one where equity and demonstrated performance was

more of a measure of a man than race and ethnicity:

> I was able to not experience any biases or any problems on any arena. My only
>
> problem was time management. I had to manage my time with my professional
>
> responsibilities at the school district. I was coaching ball at the time. I was an
>
> officer in the military so I had to juggle all of these things and did an awful lot of
>
> extra work and I also at this time had family responsibilities. But it was really a
>
> source of relief and because there was less pressure and less tension on me as I
>
> articulated through my studies than it was in a professional workplace. Because in

a professional workplace I experienced a lot of problems with politics in the

workplace and some other factors in the workplace. But I felt that the university

setting was a place where I could stretch myself and work. I happened to be

judged based upon my character and also based upon my performance in the

classroom.

Coach's story demonstrates a long history where striving for excellence is the

rule and not the exception. His natural leadership ability equipped with his lifelong love

for learning brings an upbeat and positive attitude to his home and work environments.

Other aspects of **Coach's** leadership abilities are presented in emerging themes later in

this section.

Polo:

Polo is an example of dogged determination. This fortitude makes him the type of

professor that students will either like or despise. Either way, he will get respect. Unlike

the other participants, **Polo'**s undergraduate and graduate degrees were from the same

institution that he obtained his doctorate. He had a reputation on campus and a history

that preceded his initial efforts at obtaining the doctorate. Although he was not accepted

on the first attempt, he continued to apply.

> When I applied for the department, it was like I was like first an undergrad I was
>
> this person who wrote in paper all the time. I got my undergrad from the same
>
> university. And as I wrote in the paper what I would do is that I was like the hip
>
> hop columnist. I turned into becoming a black racist and became an infamous
>
> person on campus through my undergrad career. And when I came into the
>
> department I was trying to get into the department of Educational Psychology.

And as I tried to get in it was pretty much like you know I am going to try this

out. And the first time I submitted my application to get into it they said no.

Then professors was like you know hang in there try it again, take some more

classes. So what they did was put me in their masters program and they said they

was going to bump me up it was just going to be a little formality. Anyway,

second time I ended up trying to get in after I am still taking classes, they said no

again. So then all my home boys was like you know what I'm saying their taking

your money dude their taking your money. But one professor you could tell he

was fighting for me and stuff. He was like you know we are going to try it again.

So when I tried it again I got an interview for that last one the third time. I had

already taken like 80 percent of the coursework by this that time.

Polo's terminal degree pursuit began as an uphill battle. In spite of making

multiple attempts before being granted entry into the doctoral program, **Polo** was quite

clear of the obstacles he faced. Whether actual or perceived, **Polo's** "way of being" and

"attitude" concerned a member of the interview panel.

So when I came into the interview I was all smooth, had a suit on and stuff

looking clean you know what I'm saying. Went off in there and there was like 20

of them in there you know what I'm saying usually everybody else only got 2 or 3

and there is like 20 of them in there. They all had their poker faces on and stuff.

They are sitting up there asking me like you know "[actual name removed] or

Polo when you take instructional design I see you focus on cultural identity, how

you see yourself not slacking in my class?" You know what I'm saying? This one

lady asked she said "(participant's actual name) you seem a little bit oppositional"

and felt like opposition being like defined as doing well in school is a burden of acting white. Like they are always trying to get you white so she said "you are a little oppositional when we ask you to do things don't you think we are trying to get you to act white?"

Polo's very blunt and brutal honesty was extremely beneficial in his perseverance at the doctoral level. His no-nonsense, true grit, straight from the hip, tell it like it is demeanor is characteristic of someone who does not take "no" for an answer. With dogged determination, if **Polo** knocks once and the door is not opened, he will surely knock again but this time only louder; the knocks will continue to increase with intensity until the door is either opened or the door is knocked down. **Polo** would be quite content in either case whereas the bottom line is accessibility and not necessarily how access was gained. Data supporting this claim is discussed later in emerging themes.

Dr. Phil:

Dr. Phil is a gentle, caring soul that always places the needs of others before his. This unconditional regard he has for his fellow man makes him sought after by both those in the academy as well as those outside the community. His doctoral experiences were mixed.

> I say bitter sweet to say that hey there was some challenges but ultimately I overcame those challenges and now I am successful. I am doing what I sought out to do and I fulfilled my goal. But it was bitter because I often felt that my professors lacked the sensitivity and the awareness of my culture identity.

Dr. Phil's easy going but assertive demeanor makes him very effective as a counselor. He is described as hard but fair, caring but challenging. He is very committed to sharing all that he has learned throughout his life and educational career with both students and colleagues alike. Further traits and characteristics are covered in emerging themes.

Tre:

Tre has seen higher education from a truly global perspective. A former member of the US Armed Forces, Tre is married to an Active Duty US military member. As a military spouse and as a former military member himself, Tre has virtually traveled the world over, witnessing education from perspectives that most are not privy. Even though his undergraduate was taken at a traditional institution, Tre noted some key differences between the conduct of his doctoral and his undergraduate degree programs.

> The classes, I am not sure how they are done here on campus but it's a little bit different overseas so you can help me with this one so please excuse my ignorance because other than the summer residence I have never had any classes on main campus. For those of us overseas the masters coursers would begin on a Tuesday and run through Sunday from five in the evening until nine or ten and Saturday or Sunday from eight to six. The doctoral courses took place Friday from five or five thirty until ten and then from eight to six, Saturday and Sunday.

Despite the fact of the long hours, Tre did see benefits of pursuing the terminal degree in the accelerated format. This freed up time to devote to his family and to his duties as a principal at a private religious school. An accomplished musician, the advanced program also afforded him time to pursue his love for music.

While working full time I found it to be advantageous because it was in the evening, you still had enough time to do some typing or preparation for the next day without having to miss work to get to class. However, I would definitely agree that it was a highly accelerated program. I thoroughly enjoyed and would strong recommend it to anyone serious about advancing their personal education as well as making a significant contribution to the body of knowledge.

Tre's kindness should not be taken as a weakness. While it may be true that Tre is steeped in spiritual values and morals, he is quick to let others know when he has issues or concerns that need to be addressed. More data from Tre's interview is presented in the forthcoming section on emerging themes.

Earl:

Earl married into a family where education is no option. His wife and both of his in-laws are recipients of the doctoral degree. Each one graduated from the same HBCU where he met his wife. **Earl** has held various positions in higher education throughout his brief, albeit successful career. He currently serves as Adjunct Professor while simultaneously serving in Admissions, Registration, and Counseling. **Earl** might not have considered pursuing the doctoral degree earlier in life but his determination and dedication has more than made up for that.

I had not thought about it [doctoral program] in great detail earlier in my life and career but in my career lineage it was impressed upon me that it was something that I should think about seriously and do. The longer that went on and the longer I worked in my field I began to very seriously look upon completing entering the program to complete my degree.

Earl, in like manner as the other participants, was committed to supporting the principal investigator in any way possible. Before the interview began, **Earl** and his wife insisted the researcher spend time getting to know both his wife and his in-laws. This gave the researcher valuable insight into the participant's world. **Earl** was very open in sharing his experiences while pursuing the doctorate.

> My graduate student experience was one that I was looking forward to very much during that time. Having completed grad school just prior to attending post-grad, it was a very how should I say, I was a little bit nervous and I was a little bit uneasy not knowing what to expect but at the same time I was looking forward with great eagerness because completing my doctoral degree was something I really wanted to do.

Earl conducted himself during the interview as statesman and consummate professional, displaying the character and demeanor of a world leader. The environment of a wide open space free for any topic that might come up during the discussion was created prior to the start of the interview. The emerging theme section will present additional evidence of **Earl's** candid and sincere demeanor.

Emerging Themes for Success Factors of African American Males

Theme: Persistence.

Findings indicate that the pursuit of a doctoral degree by the African American male is an undertaking that requires a certain degree of intestinal fortitude. This characteristic may be described as the trait of persistence. The participants of this study viewed persistence on a continuum that ranged from barriers, problems, and challenges effecting persistence. **Dr. Phil** often felt that his professors lacked the sensitivity and

awareness of his cultural identity. To the identification of those conditions which

solidified the individual's determination to complete their degree, **Dr. Phil** reported:

I would have to say that my experiences were at what I have labeled

before as being bitter sweet. I say bitter sweet to say that hey there was

some challenges but ultimately I overcame those challenges and now I am

successful. I am doing what I sought out to do and I fulfilled my goal.

Major challenges to the participants' resolve to persist in doctoral study were

associated with both intrinsic and extrinsic factors**.** The internal factors recalled by the

participants included "time-management", the sense of a "spiritual enemy", and the most

frequently mentioned internal factor which carried the most significant weight to this

group was the sense of self. **Earl** stressed the importance of knowing one's self and

identifying one's personal motivation for obtaining the degree:

You have to know that if you want to do this you are doing it for the

reason that it's going to make a difference and you want those differences

to be well thought out and well planned. You have to conquer self-doubt

and face the challenges within yourself.

Dr. Phil identified the self challenges of "obtaining balance and a consistent

installation of hope" that must be found along this journey. Tre found that the "belief in a

Higher Being" assisted in meeting the internal challenges faced, yet also stressed the

importance of facing one's own fears in order to properly detect the issues at play in this

scenario. Tre demonstrates this inner dynamic in the following passage:

I think more of my challenges as I look back on it, were myself or my own

fears. And one of the things that I learned through this program is that

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fear is nothing more than a false expectation appearing real. However, my

insufficient belief within myself allowed these barriers or challenges to be

much larger than they really were.

The misperception of internal issues periodically led participants to have negative

views or perceptions of others and the encounters experienced. **Dr. Phil** recounts feeling

"mentally and physically hazed throughout the process," scrutiny from other students,

stereotypes regarding professors, comparing and contrasting graded papers all resulted in

Dr. Phil feeling discriminated against; as though he was not being honestly evaluated;

consequently, he lowered his personal standards but eventually, complacently was

replaced with the resurrection of his initial goal and the process was completed with

gusto. A similar experience was encountered by Tre, who shared:

Anyone that is serious about graduate or even post graduate school that has

the determination and drive they can do it, if they really want it, if they're

hungry enough.

Although its presence was not an intrinsic factor, the discussion on information

did identify discrimination as an extrinsic barrier to success for the participants**.** The

intense inquiry regarding personal practices, writing ability and classroom behavior was

experienced by two participants. Dr Phil described his experience with perceived

discrimination as follows:

I know they say they just challenging me or whatever. No, I can't tell you

that there is any real clear evidence of discrimination but yes, there are

distinct differences. I felt like if I compare my experience with some of

my white counterparts like I said I think we were challenged a little more

in certain areas than they were in my opinion.

Polo recounted an experience that he labeled as discriminatory:

He gonna tell one of the professors who was skeptical of letting me in I

would tell my major professor he is talking in the back of my class.

Granted you this mother f***er haven't said nothing to me. It is like the

teacher going to tell the principal on the student the teacher ain't even said

nothing to the student. So yeah, you saw some whacked out stuff that go

on.

These events served to strengthen the participants resolve to complete doctoral

study, additional external barriers included "financial considerations" "time

management" and "institutional practices" such as feeling as if one's presence is wanted

to assist in meeting enrollment quota and multiple attempts for admission. **Dr. Phil**

described it by stating:

Because to tell you the truth I felt going through the program that I was a

number. Like yeah we need to recruit so many minorities to get our

numbers up but I didn't really feel like they was all that committed to

helping me get through the process.

Surprisingly, the previously mentioned extrinsic barriers were only minimally

discouraging to participants. The data demonstrates that only one of the five ever

considered leaving doctoral study. In fact, eighty percent of the participants vehemently

denied they ever considered leaving the university program but expressed a thorough

enjoyment of the education process and an acceptance of the good and bad. For example,

Coach verbalized, "it was an enjoyable experience for me. Of course there were times that it wasn't perfect when there were various different frustrations but, you know, no situation in life is perfect." Other responses ranged from simple three word responses such as "Never, not once" to more detailed explanations such as the following declared by **Earl**:

> So leaving the university environment never really came across my mind but because I am going to affect people and change regardless wherever I am and wherever I go.

However one participant, **Dr. Phil,** did contemplate leaving the university; the following vignette reveals the turmoil, this participant felt:

> Yes. Oh my God, yes. I did get discouraged a number of times and in which sometime I felt like my professors didn't care whether I left or not. Because I felt like they had the attitude of hey well we recruited one he just couldn't cut it. So we couldn't make him stay, he just quit. They will push you and test you so much until they want you to quit…. certain white institutions do not pay attention to the contextual influences that they are bound to have on people of color.

Several motivators were present in the lives of the participants that strengthened their resolve to persist with doctoral study. Again these factors were both intrinsic and extrinsic in nature. **Earl**, **Tre** and **Dr. Phil** contributed "family" as the primary extrinsic motivator in their pursuits of the doctorate. **Coach** recognized the benefit of an increase in pay as an extrinsic motivator while **Polo** declared the utilitarian claim of "I work for black people" as his inspiration for persisting with the doctoral degree. However, the

strong influence of these extrinsic motivators paled in comparison to the intrinsic motivators to persist that were as discussed. The internal driving forces which guided the participants' endeavors to complete doctoral study were deeply rooted personal characteristics which were defining characteristics of each participant. The individual accounts of internal motivation are delineated by **Earl** as follows:

My desire to learn and my desire to always wanting to know more and then my desire to share information to give that information to others who could use that information… those who have knowledge just about have the power. I don't want to start this process and feel good about being all but defended. I don't want to be one of those ABD who fall into the category of student that from the institutional standpoint are not expected to make it through this process anyway. I say 'no'; I want to go to the end of this process and complete this process. That's my goal, that's the high mark.

Tre expressed similar views regarding his internal stimulus to persist as he verbalized:

I have always enjoyed the educational process first of all. I love learning something new and being actively engaged in participating in educational processes. And then again, I have never started something without finishing. Once the decision was made, I wasn't going to change it.

The tendency to enforce the refusal to quit was a dominant quality among participants, whether based on love of the educational process as previously mentioned or

the desire to finish what one has started; giving up or surrendering to the process was not an option.

Coach illustrated this attitude when he affirmed his personal incentive below:

I'm the type of person that once I begin something in life number one, of four basic factors, is that I don't give it up until I have accomplished a goal, number one. Number two I have some additional professional goals and those goals will be easier met if I, once I completed my degree and I was aware, cognizant of this.

Dr. Phil embraced the same stalwart approach even in the face of opposition, he verbalized his struggle as:

I was just stubborn, I developed a me against you mentality and I wasn't going to let you win. You, meaning the white man. You had to kick me out of the program because I was going to do my best until it was done. And I actually had to spend an extra year in the doctoral program for pure rhetoric, in my opinion.

The development of a seemingly militant stance became a necessary ally for some of the participants in order to renounce the longing to succumb to overwhelming pressure, frustrations and tremendous workload of doctoral study. In the same manner that soldiers refuse to retreat, Polo explained his motivation though internal, reached out beyond himself.

Cause I worked for black people and sh** I know I done made it this far sh**. I be no f***ing quitter at this point in the game, it wasn't ever a question of could you not make it, it was just like will you put your mind

to it and get this sh** done. I see what needed to be done. I recognize I

am blessed. F*** I work for black people.

Previously, the discussion regarding persistence has presented various factors

which have functioned in the roles of stimuli and obstructions to the success of African

American males obtaining doctoral degrees. The final question in the domain of

persistence questioned participants on the individual, societal and institutional conditions

that created the ability for participants to persist with doctoral study. Initially, the

discussion will focus on the individual conditions. The most frequently mentioned

characteristic was self-determination. Each participant declared the personal resolve

which guided them to persist with their education.

Tre:

My mind was made up long before I enrolled or applied.

Earl:

I also have a heart and a mind to want others to come in to this place to learn what

I have learned.

Coach:

When I applied was just apply and work hard and commit myself. And there

weren't anything in my way other than just applying myself, I was just so

focused that I was, wasn't going to let anything step in my way.

Polo:

I was one of them mother f***ers who say I got to make A's too so I need to go

get a Ph.D. I want to be a big fish. I don't want to be a little fish.

Dr. Phil:

I got the opportunity and once I was admitted it wasn't an option as to whether I was going to complete it or not. I didn't care what I had to go through. I made a personal stand that I was going to follow through.

Additional individual conditions listed by participants included the following:

Earl expressed the desire to help others:

First you have to know individually that you can make it to be able to share that with another individual and that process is not just for any one group of people or two groups of people but for anyone who has drive and determination who want to better themselves, who want to find out what is going on out there and how they may change and affect this world. So from the individual side that was my persistence to get into have that and to know that I would have an affect on the society.

Coach credited his environment with providing him the assistance required:

The city where I'm articulated at, the University of New Orleans, is a city where they are pretty open to all cultures and [inaudible] societies……… It's a city, they call it the Big Easy, and everyone is pretty much is mellow and also a progressive type of place. I wasn't going to face some of those normal types of barriers that African Americans sometimes may come up against whenever they are pursuing their terminal degrees.

Tre attributed his faith and belief in scripture as his guiding inspiration, but also recognized his family upbringing and encouragement as did **Coach**.

Societal conditions which created conditions to persist included the presence of

mentors in the lives of three of the participants. The contribution of mentors is most profoundly verified by the following statement by **Polo**:

> I had two people who really believed in me and when I doubted myself
>
> and I was and when they told me 'no', they spent extra time with me.
>
> They spent time with me and taught me the skills in order to be effective.
>
> They became parents donating knowledge, teaching in ways of life.

The parental role or action was supported by other participants who stated that prior generations prepared the way for their persistence; reference to ancestors mentioned by two other participants established the sense of responsibility and accountability placed on an individual when the sacrifices of those who have gone before are realized.

The following quotes are by **Dr. Phil** and **Coach**, respectively:

> If we look through our ancestral past you will see that a number of our
>
> ancestors have been just as committed. Even if you look through the civil
>
> rights movement and all other initiatives. (**Dr. Phil**)
>
> So based upon the openness of the society there and the close relationship
>
> of the cultures there that made it much, much easier for a person, such as
>
> myself, to go into the local universities and to gain admittance and to work
>
> through their programs free of any barriers or discriminatory practices.
>
> (**Coach**)

Tre recognized the nature of our society, the situation in which it places individuals, and the wish of previous generations for us to do better. These factors resulted in the creation of the condition and/or desire for upward mobility as a stimulus for persistence.

American society is more competitive than any other and it is within itself

an individual society. I need mine now, I don't have time to wait and it's

because we live here temporarily, the only way to provide for our families

is to advance as far as we can possible go career wise. One of the ways to

achieve that in my belief is education. But societally, definitely

understanding that its a hierarchal society and it is a very competitive one.

So with that I threw my hat into the game and put my jersey on you know.

According to the study participants, the institution created conditions integral to

persistence. These circumstances, depending on the participant, had positive or negative

effects that shaped his diligence to complete the degree. The following illustrate specific

circumstances of participants.

Job Experience (**Earl**)

I have worked in an institution now for a number of years and seeing the

lack of African Americans who come through the system, gave me more

credence and more willingness to want to enter into a program that was

going to help me give some answers and some attitudes to attract others

like myself and show them that they could do it.

Funding

The institution provided me with financial support. So that was good.

(**Dr. Phil**).

The people in the bursar's office put me on a payment plan and sh**. I

guess that would be institution. So you know when you couldn't enroll

you just call them. Call them up on the phone and say hey dude he end up

giving you end up blocking you. When you owe three thousand and I'm

giving you two hundred and get you more when my financial aid come in.

I was one of them brothers where when you graduated hell it didn't show

up on your record until a year later because you didn't pay your tuition.

(**Polo**).

Theme: Campus Environment & Mentoring

The preceding theme discussed the internal elements of African American males

which synergetically collaborated to foster success in the completion of a terminal

degree. Of course the inner workings of the individual are a significant domain to

analyze, but one must also establish understanding of the external world in which these

men must interact. The prominent theme to be discussed in this component of the study

is the domain of campus environment and mentoring. Aspects of the campus environment

that will be delved into include the campus climate and/or culture, freedom of expression,

opportunities for socialization with other student groups, development of relationships

and accessibility and availability of university faculty for mentor/mentee relationships.

This discussion will begin with a discussion of the atmosphere or campus climate

participants encountered at their various universities.

Overall, the campus climate was considered appropriate for its purpose. **Coach**

stated, "the climate I think was parallel to the environment…very conducive to studying

in a higher education institution." Tre reported only being on campus during summer

session. Despite this minimal time on campus he verbalized the opinion that "I don't

think there was enough time on campus or enough interaction in diverse cultures other

than the same twenty or thirty that were in our cohort to base a true definition." **Earl**,

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who performed course work at a satellite campus of the University, deduced that the student population at the satellite campus was different from that on the main campus which changed the campus climate. His stated view is below:

> Our campus culture fostered minority students coming in as opposed to the main campus where we would often go for class sometimes but did not see the number of males or African American males there.

Despite the fact that participants viewed campus environments as conducive to the pursuit of a higher education, a few environmental inadequacies were mentioned. **Dr. Phil** mentioned the lack of support of activities that supported Black culture; Blacks were not excluded but the environment created didn't make Black students feel comfortable. Support of this claim can be verified by the following response from **Dr. Phil**:

> I'm Greek and when we tried to have parties on campus it always seemed like it was a problem. And when we tried to have those events that were predominately Black events like, it seemed like they were too far in between. Mainly we didn't receive the funding for certain events where certain other white organizations received all kinds of funding.

The basic underlying principle of this statement made by **Dr. Phil** is the lack of, or few resources available to minority students. Many universities are accused of allocating their resources on other extracurricular activities. For example, **Polo** complained that the climate of the university he attended was "religiously football," yet allowed individuals to "be whoever the hell you want." The remaining inadequacy participants' view was the low ratio of African Americans on campus. Responses to this occurrence were varied and incorporated the following:

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Earl:

I did not see a lot of students on the main campus that looked like myself or knew

of a lot of students that looked like myself on the campus or the program.

The main campus where we would often go for class sometimes but did not see

the number of males or African American males there.

Dr. Phil:

So that is a process we have to face if we want to earn our doctoral degree in

education. Yeah there is going to be some challenges wherever you go and for the

most part you know the white institutions, most institutions are heavily populated

by whites, and not blacks. So what are you going to do, not pursuer it, you are

going to do what you got to do. And persevere through whatever the problems

are. I am just glad that I had the strength and endurance to do so.

Polo:

"White people rule."

Participants also reported that the campus environment did have some impact regarding

their success; their dialogue on this impact explored the impact of the individual, society

and the institutional perspectives.

Individual outlook.

Tre:

I don't think I have achieved success yet. I think the door is just opening

and the path is just beginning to be traveled. I think the attachment of

these three letters is a beautiful thing, I am not slighting that by any

means. However, I don't think I have really reached success yet.

Earl:

> The setting and you are going through that process, you always want to
> find someone you can identify with and I think like any situation you want
> to find that common bond or that common link, to question, to ask about
> and sometimes just a shoulder to cry on but more so to have that
> camaraderie. First of all you are doing it for you and you know you are
> doing it for a greater purpose than yourself once you complete this process
> and that is something that is going to make all the difference. So the
> impact that you are hoping not only to gain from the experience is also the
> impact that you want to process after you have gone through the process.

Dr. Phil:

> Having the support of those mentors you know whether
> institutionally or socially, they had a very significant impact on my
> success. I try to look at the cup being half full not half empty. At
> least I had somebody, all I needed was one, for the most part, all I
> needed was one person to say hey (participant's actual name) you
> can do it. So that was one person more than I needed to help me
> succeed and matriculate through the program. I tried to bond and
> connect with white students but there wasn't any white students I
> felt like that cared about my development. I can't say that.

Interestingly, **Dr. Phil's** comments combined individual and societal perspectives
of the environment's impact on his success. At times he appeared to have difficulty
separating his individual and societal perspectives; maybe he interpreted them as one and

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the same. Other participants' views of societal standpoints of environment impacts are depicted below:

Societal view.

Earl:

> You put yourself in a situation where a lot of people are not going to understand what you are going through and when you try to explain why, what you're doing, they are not really going to have a lot of information regarding that process because this process is a very guarded process and it is a very exclusionary process to where people around may feel excluded. They may not feel that they know what you are talking about when you bring certain topics and subjects and the process itself is what has everyone in such a illusion state of mind. It is because you are trying to explain a part of you and what you are going through and why you are going through this process to make a difference. It can be a very lonely experience but at the same time you know you have people in your environment that are praying for you or hoping the best for you and wishing you well. But as far as the understanding and what that part of the process is about, they are not going to really understand what you are talking about or what you're going through.

Tre:

> I am thankful to repeat the profound words that my father shared with me
> at the graduation: he is one statistic they can't have. Statistics would say
> that those in my age group are unfortunately minimally educated, probably
> more likely to have been had serious run-ins with the law, if I could put it
> that way, if not even unfortunately incarcerated. But unfortunately for
> society's sake I am none of the above.

Institutional standpoint.

Tre:

> From an institutional standpoint, I don't know. I think a lot of the societal
> factors were congruent to that of the institutional findings in that there
> were some comments directed about my attendance and participation in
> this program. So the expectation of me was that the equivalent to that of
> what society would say about me, one of myself that fits this demographic.
> So to those that felt that way all I can say is, thank you.

Dr. Phil:

> Like I said just having the support of those mentors you know whether
> institutionally or socially, they had a very significant impact on my
> success. I think institutionally he (person, who started program at the
> same time as he did) was more of an influence than any other professor to
> tell you the truth. This is another student of mine that was a brother.

Earl:

From a social and institutional standpoint, I see it being one as the same because at that time. From the institutional standpoint the expectation was that we don't expect everybody to make it through this process anyway. When you come across that you quickly begin to realize that oh no how many people are out there that are termed ABD, I don't want to be one of those. I don't want to start this process and feel good about being all but defended. I say 'no', I want to go to the end of this process and complete this process.

Repeatedly, one of the participants has discussed the institutional expectation that individuals will not complete the doctoral degree process. In retrospect, the appropriateness of the next question is validated as it provides a method to estimate the amount of encouragement participants received to pursue professional development; pursuits such as attending academic conferences, presenting papers, conducting research and publishing articles. Regarding the question of being encouraged or not for this pursuit, twenty percent of the participants stated they were not encouraged, and eighty percent reported that they had been encouraged. The reports focusing on "not encouraged" will be discussed initially.

Familiar ideas shared among participants integrated the following observations: participants' had to encourage themselves. For example, **Earl** shared "it was really never encouraged to the point to where it was seen as a necessary benefit for the university in which I was working." Other observations included that colleagues encouraged each other and participants felt encouraged in word but not deed. For instance, **Dr. Phil** stated:

"it seems like we were encouraged, but discouraged by not providing us with the financial support. Living on a student budget, oftentimes it was hard to initiate, as far as publishing I don't think they didn't do enough to really push me to publish… It seems like they systematically recruit their own and exclude other students of color. I was just really kind of dumbfounded by it. Like what made that particular so because I mean I am in the research area of ethics, that was one of my strong areas."

Observations from those participants who were encouraged to pursue academic professional development made the following statement:

Coach:

> I was always encouraged to do so. It was something that it was always held in high esteem there at the university and always encouraged, but the only persons who this was really a requirement for were those persons that worked there full-time at the university. The university's policy was that full-time persons, instructors or professors should work there and they were the ones that were required to submit articles to publications or books, or to submit papers to conferences.

Earl:

> I was encouraged by some of my professors early on that knew that if I was going to pursue degrees of higher learning that this would be something needed that I would have to do.

Polo:

> I was encouraged to do all of those things. Matter of fact, I was just told that's what we do.

Dr. Phil:

> I presented at national conferences in which I was encouraged by one professor to
> present.

The final interview question in this domain was aimed at the identification of role models

or mentors within or outside of the university setting. All participants reported having

mentors in each of these classifications. Participants' views of experiences with role

models and mentors will be discussed according to the setting of the relationship.

Institutional mentors.

Polo:

> Role model number two was a professor who was the dean and the chair
> of his own department of human relations. He still was black, pro-black
> and that was why I respected him. But you saw he got sold out so you
> know.

Coach:

> The persons that took a very, very personal interest in my growth and
> development and my obtaining of my terminal degree was a person at the
> university. He was the Dean of the Education department…every time I
> think of him to this day I really smile because he's always been keenly,
> keenly interested in my professional growth and also in my academic
> growth and performance. And he is of the majority race by the way.

Tre:

> Unofficially. From the day I met Drs. Noley, Henderson and Butler, each
>
> of the three of them, whether they knew it or not, were significantly
>
> creating a path that I could just not wait to follow.

Dr. Phil:

> I had mentors at the masters level. My mentor was the president of the
>
> university. He had a major influence on my life in which he allowed me
>
> to travel with him. I finished and I had a professor, Dr. Beck, in which he
>
> was a white professor but he was married to a Mexican, a Latino lady and
>
> I grew to have a relationship with him, he supported the idea of me
>
> pursuing a doctorial degree and I went from there. I set goals for myself
>
> that hey I want this too. But did I have someone to really guide me
>
> through, yes and no. I met other doctoral students that were men of color,
>
> or ladies of color and actually had succeeded. So I knew of them not to
>
> say that they served as a physical mentor but as a mental mentor. Just
>
> seeing that someone actually completed it that was black. I knew other
>
> black professors they were in my program and I went and sought them out.
>
> I needed someone who looked like me…on my committee.

Earl:

> I knew of a few people. He was a very complimentary and very
>
> encouraging to see that black males were pursuing degrees of higher
>
> education and very much encouraged us to continue on with through the
>
> program and offered any assistance and help. A few black professors were

very encouraging and I did regard them as role models. They never

missed the opportunity as well, to question or to ask me about my progress

and about the process.

Non-Institutional mentors.

Coach:

 An African American who had obtained his terminal degree in 1992. I

observed that and I was very proud of it.

Earl:

My own family.

Polo:

I had this one mentor who inspired me when I was an undergrad, She

always told me well if you want to fight for black people statistics change

laws, emotions don't do nothing. So that was my role model number one, I

couldn't even participate in the conversation all I could do was listen.

Tre:

Those that struggled before us. The short list but it's my family and friends

that are around me that constantly supported, those I didn't want to let

down you know, those that were telling me you can do it, get back to work

or let me get off the phone you got some more typing to do. So I have got

a lot of big brothers, I have got a lot of angels, I'll put it that way, a lot of

angels whether they know it or not.

Dr. Phil:

> I went out in the community and found those people of color of supported
> me wholeheartedly and gave me balance. I met other doctoral students that
> were men of color, or ladies of color and actually had succeeded. Just
> seeing that someone actually completed it that was black. So that gave me
> some sense of installation of hope. But mainly my faith in God and my
> mother you know really, her unconditional support and high regard, really
> helped me a lot.

Theme: Social Support.

In this study **s**ocial support is defined as that support stemming from factors
outside of the campus environment and not provided by the institution. Literature
indicates that the social support of African American males who succeeded in college
came from family, friends, mentors, faculty, religious associations, other African
American students, their spirituality, and an academic ambition to achieve a college
degree (Endecavage, 2000). Most of the information provided by the interview data
confirms these earlier claims as participants' responses to the inquiry yielded reports of
having no support system whatsoever. For example, **Coach** discussed the tragedy of
being placed in a position by which an individual is viewed as a threat to those whom
have gone before him:

> Within my school district there were African Americans who had Ph.D.s
> but it was such a competitive nature for the job situation that most of them
> were not going to support you. I was seen as an up-and-comer within the
> school district so I was seen as a threat to them. Someone who could

potentially have their jobs someday so they were not going to encourage

or support me.

The lack of any type of encouragement produced an individual who became totally self-reliant and who did not reach out to anyone. For instance **Tre** exclaimed, "No one completes a Ph.D. by themselves, what the truly humble understand is that I can't do it by myself." **Polo** agreed with this affirmation with the statement, "If you ain't got support system, the sh**'s too hard. You need a support system, people who believe in you, people who are going to be proud of you because you worked hard and need people who can help ease the anxiety." **Dr. Phil** referred to his support system as that of family, friends, those individuals who gave unconditional love, money, and insight in difficult times ().

Participants in the study also reported only having support from sources off campus. These recipients of off campus support stressed the importance of this support system yet testified that on campus support could at times be more detrimental than constructive. First, the benefits of on campus will be explored. **Earl** praised the presence of his support group, stating:

We were fortunate in my program to have a support system from the very

beginning. Having that support system gave us the environment in which

to express ourselves, to question the process and also to gain slighted

information that would help us chart our way through it. We called this

process an acronym, MIS, "Make It So." This group would probably meet

about once a week and we talk, converse, amongst each other and in the

company of an advisor and without an advisor. A lot of times a lot of us

would also act as impromptu editors for each others writings so those that were a little bit more along or advanced in the process they would really serve as a big brother or big sister type for us who were coming along. In turn when it was our turn to be the big brother or sister we were big brother or sister advisors to the ones under us.

On the other hand, this same participant reported that in some instances the unconditional support received from this group and other supporters also gave him the permission to fail. A consent which really acted as a hindrance to **Earl**. The following quote embodies the struggle he encountered when on the receiving end of this support:

I think the weirdest thing that I encountered is that I had more people motivating me in an understanding if I quit or fail mode. They understood if I wanted to give up, how that would be okay too, even if as if I wanted to complete the process that either way that would be okay. I found that to be a negative advisory type of influence rather than a helpful one. Because why would you want to advise somebody it's okay to leave the process or to leave what you started what you feel is your goal or your dream or your destiny and not have completed it knowing that I started it that dream and goal with the determination in mind that this is what I want to do with the rest of my life or the next level in my life.

Kind of like telling someone its okay there is no shame in failing. I found it to be very disheartening and I would get away from those folks as quickly as possible.

After discussion of the location of support systems, individuals were asked to describe their support systems from an individual, societal and institutional standpoint. Examining the individual standpoint, the researcher found common links among sources of support as participants revealed that foundational backing and confirmation came from "mothers, a wife, colleagues or peer in a Ph.D. program especially other students of color." Support systems from a societal stance were illustrated as emerging from the following structures: "people who are like-minded and in like situations, groups outside of the work environment." **Dr. Phil** reported, "I often times went and got support outside of my department;" "friends and rap music." **Polo** depicted an interesting stance as he made the effort to distinguish "rap music" as a societal support system. His rationale for this assertion is listed below:

> Rap was a way for people suffering in silence and who didn't have a voice
>
> to have a voice… rap being consciousness, telling the story of the
>
> neighborhood getting our stories told. So rap music gave me that
>
> fortitude.

Support systems from an institutional stance were identified by participants as "college fraternal connections, staff within the graduate college, and departmental or university employed mentors." These support systems, although not one of the strongest sources of support did have a positive impact on participants.

Tre eloquently expressed his appreciation for institutional support in the following quote:

> If I considered it from a university standpoint, there were two or three
>
> individuals within the graduate college and I think that these individuals

for the time that they dedicated, the professionalism that they exuded on a

daily level, each of these individuals were underpaid without question. I

think that these folks were probably more significant to the completion of

this program than probably a couple of professors I had.

University professors who acted in the role of mentors also received a verbalized positive

reception from **Earl** in the passage listed below:

It was a great impact having it from a mentor institutional standpoint. I

believe that is an area where you are secluded and you're basically

somewhat cutoff outside of your group; but if there is mentors outside of

that who are willing to engage you and answer questions, you seek the

advice of those that understand that and will be willing to support you that

way.

Theme: Strategies.

The purpose of this study was to explore the meaning behind the academic

success of African American males who obtained terminal degrees. The journey toward

acquisition of these terminal degrees was a road plagued with many obstacles. The next

set of interview questions required participants to identify "how they made it over."   The

strategies for overcoming barriers to success are psycho-social factors defined as

pertaining to either social or psychological behavior which assisted with the quest toward

completion of the degree. Among the individual tactics beneficial to degree completion,

affiliation emerged as the paramount strategy. The ability to form relationships with

others that benefited all individuals involved assisted participants as they were able to

learn from those who had gone before them and advise those coming after. **Earl** recounts this trend with the following example:

A lot of those strategies came from our groups, our support groups and you would formulate what you would do personally once you left those groups and to say okay we are going to work on definitions or I am going to go work on my lit review, doing more research to support my topic. So your strategies were based on what you saw others who had gone before you and were more advanced in the process and of course those who had completed the process so you would know exactly what you were going to do next.

Dr. Phil recounts similar experiences within his circle of colleagues:

People were at different stages of development as they were matriculating through their various different programs. So you had those brothers who may have been a senior when you were kind of a freshman at the doctoral level that say hey you know, focus on this, don't let this get to you, yes you are discriminated against, you know I just have something that a colleague said to me, that talked about you know?

These affiliations contributed to the implantation of another strategy beneficial to completion, that of socializing. The need for recreational outlets was a necessity for participants the "opportunity to go out and develop a mental health break," this action of socializing with the affiliated group created a "pseudo family" for one of the participants. **Dr. Phil** explains it as:

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There weren't that many of us, there was like twenty of us, but that was

enough. We would have different things and what not so I had someone

to really connect with who had a, that I could have a common bond with.

It might have been outside of the institution but I needed that outlet. I

needed those friends. You kind of develop a pseudo family. It is kind of

like being institutionalized in prison in which you develop those pseudo

families within. Having that bond of being able to connect with other

students of color, it really was a strength within itself.

Other avenues for stress relief resulted in those activities labeled as strategies focusing on

spirituality. Actions which execute these procedures included prayer, leaning to a faith

base, referring to scripture for encouragement. **Tre** presented a unique demonstration of

faith and spirituality as he shared a very personal coping mechanism.

I have got a cousin who was unfortunately taken out of here a couple of

years ago long before it was time and he was more like a big brother to me

than my own brothers. I would literally two or three o'clock in the

morning, sit on the patio and talk to him for an hour and I can see him, I

can see his face telling me what I need to do and it's interesting cause

when he and I would have those conversations I would engage in prayer

and one of his brothers would either call me or email me within the same

day.

The utilization of spirituality and socialization in no means subtracted from the presence

of actual family as a beneficial strategy. Participants reported that "this program is going

to perhaps make a better life for my children." Preparation for this better life could only

be achieved through the last strategy acknowledged as beneficial to completion; "planning and goal setting." **Coach** itemized the value of adequate preparation below:

By planning ahead and setting aside time and making sure that it was the best time for me to take this particular course or perform this particular step of my program then that allowed me, that's the most successful strategy.

In his dialogue of strategies, **Coach** also expounded on the actions which were most integral to success of the terminal degree. He continued in the same vein as he unceasingly talked about the significance of academic preparation and development, speaking to an advisor and his personal talents, such as "My ability to organize, to manage my time and to be very focused." **Earl** also supported the basic strategy of self-motivation and discipline as essential to success. He stated that:

The process of dealing with everything the process has to throw at you. Being a self-directed learner or person who wants to make a difference what I define as being the key element outside of knowing that this is something I wanted to do is determination. Knowing that in my determination there is purpose. And what I am trying to accomplish is something not only for the future but something I know is going to have impact. So when you look at the key elements having that determined motivation, having that self-determination and drive to accomplish to set out what I set out to do. I learned from my step-mom years ago that whatever you start you should finish and never stop until you finish it.

Interestingly, the last statement made by **Earl** reinforced the previously dissected theme of support systems. Three of the study's participants reiterated the influence this encouraging network has on their accomplishment of this degree.

Earl:

> Knowing that there is a beginning and an end, a start and a completion, this is something that I was taught from my family and knowing that there are other people in my life that are watching me. They served as a key component because the expectation level at that time so you have great expectation not only from yourself but from others. That is very important that when you start something or when you go after something your family and friends are there to support you.

Dr. Phil:

> My family support, my mother's support, I should say. My mother's support and having that colleague. Even when we had trouble or problems we would have that support system of most people of color don't have. Most of the time you are standing alone in this process. I won't underestimate the power of having a peer support.

Tre:

> Faith and belief in God. The support and active involvement with my family. Let me be clear when I say involvement. I think the support that came from them was even more meaningful than those types of things and I gained more by doing them myself. What do I credit most, those folks involved in my life that saw something in my future that was obtainable. I

give God the glory and I give my family the credit. It is not me. I may

have done the typing but no these folks made it happen.

The final strategy listed as integral to success of terminal degrees ventured into a

different frame of reference. **Polo** referred to his "being Black" as a strategy that

influenced the completion of his degree. He expanded on this concept of identity, and

categorized himself as Black as an empowering act. The validation of this mind set is

encompassed in the subsequent statement:

We need to you know being black is just being black just being all

of that. So that is what I guess never being never ignorant, getting goals

accomplished, having all those things connected to the world. You got to

do what you supposed to do. That's just what being black. Being black is

you know if Malcolm was alive today how would he feel about it and then

do that sh**. You know that's being black you know, Being black is

knowing that after the darkest night gonna shine the bright of day. Being

black is having faith that it's all good even thought its f***ed up and this

sh** gonna work out one day. Being black is being a soldier, believing in

yourself, believing in your people no matter what not giving a f*** what

nobody else think. That's being black.

Following the dialogue that identified, described and credited strategies for degree

completion, participants were asked to classify strategies into individual, societal and

institutional classes.   Strategies classified under the category of individual included:

"watch, listen, and take careful note," "religion and my faith," "being black," "faith,

prayer, family and friends." Grouped under the class of societal strategies; the participants registered the ensuing comments.

Dr. Phil reported having his church and fraternity brothers but stated a desire to reach out and connect with others; his efforts to achieve this goal during graduate study are illustrated below:

I tried to reach out to other white students but we just never really developed that bond like I did with James (a fellow African American who started the program at the same time). That helped me, that made a big, I can't underestimate the significance of having a relationship with him how it helped me. And societally just knowing that other blacks had actually indeed completed the Ph.D. program at Iowa that was encouraging.

Tre, like **Dr. Phil** identified the "fraternal connection which provided a brotherhood of similar young men following similar aspirations and understandings of life." The ideal of being connected was an overall idea regarding the societal strategies. **Polo**, like the previous participants emphasized the concept of being connected however, he accentuated a personal call to "being black." His acclamation is as follows:

To be connected to the gutter, black people. To be connected to the slum of black people, to be connected to the black people who want you to do well and who gonna speak up for that, care about them, do something that means something that's going to help them. Just thinking about the best interest of black people so it's the societal and group identity.

Institutional strategies consisted of "university provided funding" and "administrative staff or the actions of those behind the scenes which assisted students." Explicit

statements on strategies utilized to work with the university institution will be considered

by the proclamations made by **Earl** and **Polo**, respectively:

> When in Rome do what the Romans do but there is some logic to
>
> understanding that statement. So you have to know your environment,
>
> you have to know your paradigm and learning that paradigm is a very vital
>
> and key strategy.
>
> Because without that you know you are going to run into some brick
>
> walls, and tell them whatever they want to hear do what you gonna do
>
> anyway.

This statement seemed to imply that participants were playing a game of some sort.   In

reality the participants were referring to the age old pastime of politics. The spoken and

unspoken norms associated with the administration of organizational structures. In this

study, the bureaucratic system under scrutiny is the university or educational system.

Only one of the participants reported not experiencing any politics. **Coach** reasoned that

"I did not experience any politics because basically I was there for academic purposes, if

I would have been pursuing other types of benefits that a university other than the

academic pursuit then politics would have come into play."

The other study participants affirmed that politics were practiced at the

institutions they attended. The individual perceptions of experiences with the political

systems at the universities will be detailed below as well as the individual conclusions

that were made:

Earl:

I think politics is in everything. You can't get away from politics so as you learn what's going on and how the process is you learn not to take things personal. You learn not to overreach and over analyze what the process is doing or what it's not doing to make you feel the way you may be feeling at the time. But we are warned as most students are that this process is not for the faint of heart or the weak-minded as it was stated but to those who are willing to endure to the end. A lot of times we did feel that some things were motivated by culture differences. We did feel that some things had a biased nature or attitude when we looked at the differences in treatment we also looked at just how our counterparts, white males, white females as opposed to ourselves and I probably realized that at this point I probably have been more politically correct than I should have been.

Dr. Phil:

It was very political, like I say there is such thing as white privilege. Yes, I do. It wasn't clear how they made selections for certain grant opportunities or for certain students to have grant opportunities to assistantships to teach or what not. It seemed like all the white students had opportunities to teach and get paid for it. Where there were no more certain opportunities for blacks. So yes, you start to feel like it is political.

Tre:

Wow, the level of political actions or actions that one would classify as politics were again hidden. One of the committee members of a colleague

and that particular student were not exactly seeing eye-to-eye and rather

than that particular student remembering that they were at the time still a

student, even though defending, they chose to engage in argumental

discussion. I think that would be where the greatest level of politics

became personally involved in that cause this student was denied an

opportunity to immediately.

Polo:

Yeah they didn't let me in until the third time I guess that would be

politics. I mean I got censored I used to write some challenging articles.

The recollection of their graduate experiences potentially brought to mind "how

they made it over" and helped answer the next interview question which asked

participants to provide advice to other African American males attending MWIs. The

responses to this question were divided into three sub-sections. The first sub-section

focused on guidance from the participants that encouraged other African-American males

to "develop mentors and support systems." **Dr. Phil** stressed the following points:

- Get a mentor.

- Don't try to do it by yourself.

- Keep an open communication with your professors.

- Take initiative yourself to know where you stand within your own racial

  identity.

- Be confident within that and know how, what it means to be different.

- Know that you are a minority and know that you can succeed.

- Join those other organizations like a local church or a fraternity or other support systems.

- Learn from others so I would encourage to not try to fight your battles by yourself.

- Connect with those students that you may have more in common with and allow them to mentor you.

- Being open-minded that professors are indeed there to assist and advise you.

- Don't let your nerve desert you.

    While **Coach** simply stated:

- Speak with an advisor.

Interestingly, these suggestions emphasized the importance of establishing a network of individuals, groups, and/or communities, within which an African American male could experience the liberty to interact, self-disclose, openly communicate and create a connection within and outside of the university setting. Seemingly, these connections would serve the purpose of enforcing a man's sense of self by assuring the individual that he is not alone in the undertaking of higher learning.

The second sub-section or strategy the participants endorsed was that of "Self-identity." **Polo** very assertively stated that African American male should do the following:

- Be yourself, don't be a kiss a**.

- Care about black people, about your culture, care about your people, know who you are.

- Think about you wanting the best interest of black people.

- You standing on the shoulders of other black people before you.

This approach to self-identity through the identification of one's cultural was not wholly supported by other participants as **Tre** encouraged a more individualized approach to self-identity as he declared that African American males must remember:

- You are what you think you are and the way you carry yourself is the way society is going to define you.

- You can become anything that you set your mind to.

- Don't allow the societal underpinnings and historical negative perceptions of us to stop you from doing anything that you want to do or that you need to do.

Each of these two participants, in an effort to get their point across, refer to the fact that self-identity is deeply rooted in society. Whether one's fight is against "the man", "for the people", or an attempt to "achieve the dream" the manner in which one was socialized is directly related to how the battle will be waged and for whom the victory will be won. The ability to recognize the mechanism that internally and uniquely motivates the African American male is the core element to the strategy of "Self-Identity." The capacity to know one's self prepares the stage for implementation of the third sub-section which was labeled as strategy of "Purpose and Commitment." This strategy received responses from four of the five study participants. Their answers are listed below:

Earl

- Know why you are doing it.

- Know how long it is going to take you to do it.

- Be dedicated, committed.

- Know that you are going to have some people out there who will be pushing you, not in the direction of completion but in the opposite direction of non-completion.

- Realize that institutions don't expect everybody to make it through this process.

Dr. Phil:

- Take initiative yourself to know where you stand within your own racial identity and to be confident within that and know how, what it means to be different. Know that you are a minority and know that you can succeed.

- Hold fast to your goals, follow through, if you become admitted to the program know that you will actually succeed.

- Regardless of the stereotype, regardless of the scrutiny or the negative experiences but there is always a positive outcome.

Coach

- Don't let anything get in your way.

- Get a plan together, speak with an advisor, and do diligence through your research, and just go at it.

Tre

- Don't take 'no.' Barriers are going to be there but as Frederic Douglas said without struggle there is no progress. You gonna have to fight to get something.

Overwhelmingly, the participants exhorted African American males to hold fast to their initial vision and reason for the pursuit of this degree; to maintain personal resolves that are forged in iron, reiterating the earlier mentioned sub-theme that "failure is NOT an option." A strategy that was suggested by only one participant, **Dr. Phil,** was to "Establish African American support system" which he supported with the following rationale:

- Students of color who are going through a Ph.D. program should develop an outlet for yourself.

- Find some other scholars in other departments because you may not have a person of color within your department.

Emphasized was the importance of finding or associating oneself with others who "look like" and/or have similar experiences to them. Taking in to account the population being studied, it is not illogical to see the relevance of the statement made by **Dr. Phil**, and the need for these men to identify similar counterparts. Consider the reality that African American males encounter everyday. For the manner in which "he" is personified in our country is not complimentary, in addition to the fact that pursuing a terminal degree makes him a double if not triple minority. The influence of being surrounded by other African Americans who are of a like-mind would be empowering. For it would provide these men with examples of individuals pursuing success, as well as those examples of success previously followed. Thereby allowing a merging of the past, present, and future examples to serve as a rousing force for success.

The examples of success followed that were acknowledged by participants are presented below:

Family:

Earl:
- My wife. She really helped inspire me to not only push me through but to

    pull me through.

Coach:
- Others who had their terminal degrees.

Polo:
- Your momma, your father, your grandma, your father-in-law, ancestors I

    mean sh**. Hell I think I am all of those people are vicariously my role

    models. I represent all of those folks. All the people who put time in all

    my mother f***ing role models.

Tre:
- My grandparents, my dad.

Historical figures:

Tre:
- The ten young men in Indiana University in 1911, each of those stories are

    extremely profound. Most emphatically, the dreamer. I sort of

    superimposed my life on theirs to see what I could do.

Polo:

- It's mother f***ers who been dead a long time like Harriet Tubbeman.

    Hell I think I am all of those people are vicariously my role models. I

    represent all of those folks. All the people who put time in all my mother

    f***ing role models.

Non-family personal relationships:

Earl:
- Pastor.

Polo:

- It's f*** it's vipers, football players, it's basketball players, it's singers it's the man across the street, old man across the street, it's friends, mother f***ers who know mother f***ers I mean hell it's a bang of folks. Hell I think I am all of those people are vicariously my role models. I represent all of those folks. All the people who put time in all my mother f***ing role models.

University relationships

Earl:

- A couple of colleagues who had gone through the process in my program that I would talk to very often about what it took for them to make it through and again this goes back to social group, our make-it-so group (MIS).

Dr. Phil:

- Renown scholars.

Summary

This chapter presented the findings of this study. The findings illustrated the experience of African American males who obtained terminal degrees from majority white institutions. The demographic data made available indiscriminate information while the vignettes provided individualistic information of the study participants. Emerging themes and sub-themes were born out of the dialogue data.

The next and final chapter, Conclusions, will make sense of the data collected, presented, analyzed and interpreted. It will illustrate how the elements of CRT emerged in the narratives told by the interviewees. It will describe how this information benefits higher education. Also included in this discussion are not only findings that run counter

to the literature, but findings that reiterate the literature and findings that came as a

surprise to the researcher. Finally, it will conclude with implications for further study.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusions and Recommendations

Overview

"...you will be a success and a credit to the fraternity of those with terminal degrees..."

Coach

This study explored the meaning behind the academic success of high achieving African American males who obtained terminal degrees from Majority White Institutions (MWIs). Information regarding the academic success of African American males was extrapolated from the data collected. Information was provided on persistence, campus environment and mentoring, social support, and strategies for overcoming barriers to success.

In looking at factors integral to the achievement of high-achieving Chicanos, Gándara (1982) found that mothers as strong role models were critical to academic success. In her book, *Over the Ivy Wall*, Gándara (1995) determined that families that created a "culture of possibility" were a common thread in individuals who were educationally successful. Further, Rodríguez (2001) posited that a strong sense of self and feeling connected to the university was crucial to academic success.

This study entailed interviewing five African American males that obtained their terminal degree from an MWI within the past five years. Emerging themes that the research questions addressed were: (1) How do African American males with terminal degrees from Majority White Institutions make meaning of their success? (2) Do their stories of success include narratives of the following:

- Persistence?

- Campus environment and mentoring?

- Social support?

- Strategies for overcoming barriers to success?

African American males make up a small number and percentage of the doctorates earned in the United States (Isaac, 1998; National Opinion Research Center, 1999; Willie, C., Grady, M. & Hope, O., 1991). By 2002, more African Americans were enrolled in degree-granting graduate schools than ever before, yet only 29.5 percent of the 170,241 of them were Black men (Graduate, 2005). The recruitment and retention of African Americans in graduate school remains a significant problem (Onwuegbuzie, 1999). This study shed light on the path of academic success in relation to persistence, campus environment and mentoring, social support, and strategies for overcoming barriers to success by use of gathered data from African Americans who had obtained a terminal degree.

Findings Applied to Research Questions and Literature

The methodology for this study involved interviewing five African American males who had obtained terminal degrees from Majority White Institutions. Themes rising from the interview data include persistence, campus environment and mentoring, social support and strategies to overcome barriers to success. The two research questions proposed in Chapter Two are the foundation for the discussion of the conclusions of this study.

Research Question One: How do African American males with terminal degrees from Majority White Institutions make meaning of their success?

The African American males in this study lived a variety of experiences during the pursuit of their terminal degrees. The acquisition of the Ph.D. is testimony to the tenacity with which each individual ran the race. This competition was not against another individual but was against the institutional, societal, and individual judgments regarding the character, work ethic and abilities of the African American males interviewed.

The outward expression of success was the conferring of the doctoral degree. However, for most of these participants the true significance presented itself in their ability to withstand the process. The individuals that participated in this study demonstrated scholarly ambition accompanied by the determination that regardless of the cost the degree would be obtained and failure was to be avoided (Clark 2003). This mind-set presented these males with the possibility of facilitating a change of view in the looking glass through which African American men are seen. The possibility of being that man who is viewed by family, friends, peers, colleagues and other individuals of African American descent as one who "finished what he started," "accomplished the seemingly impossible feat," "made it in the White Man's world," or "first one in the family to do something like this," holds the most significance for participants.

These proclamations have the capacity to serve as a catalyst in freeing the African American male from the societal stereotypes placed on this population. Success in obtaining a terminal degree from an MWI opens the door for a new perception, one which envisions the African American male as a scholar, a man of worth, and role model

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for future generations. Clark (2004) also indicated that African American males have a strong desire to be successful in mainstream society and saw a college education as an opportunity for their entire family to move forward and to create something new.

Research Question Two: Do their stories of success include narratives of the following: Persistence; Campus environment and mentoring; Social support; and Strategies for overcoming barriers to success?

The accounts or stories of success supplied by participants did include narratives in all of the previously listed domains. The most prominent theme which produced the most interview data from participants was the area of strategies to overcome barriers. These detailed tactics which took the form of individual, institutional and societal approaches produced a variety of activities. Ranging from prayer, self-motivation, networking, identification of institutions formal and informal power bases as methods to facilitate degree completion, and strategies listed by study participants were consistent with the therapeutic themes listed by Graham, Furr, Flowers, & Burke (2001).

The second most frequently discussed domain by participants was that of persistence. The participants in the study repeatedly expounded on the necessity of self-determination and resolving within one's self the commitment to complete the degree, a finding supported in the literature by Jones (1997), who discovered that individual commitment is a major factor in persistence. Another enduring enigma effecting persistence was the presence of support systems. Participants affirmed the need for support systems to enable the appropriate coping methods. The power of the family as an encouraging network was oftentimes expressed by participants. Stories of a mother giving her thirty-six year old son a ride to class or that of a wife's consistent gentle

encouragement, backed by scripture, to a husband enforcing his ability to succeed are tributes to the dedication of family members to see their young men succeed. Endecavage (2000) concurs that African American male completers experienced a great deal of social support from parents and other sources.

Many of the participants confirmed that this educational process was a very lonely undertaking, which frequently induced feelings of being overwhelmed, self-doubt and multiple frustrations. The presence and availability of support systems whether on or off campus were beneficial to participants. Bingman's (2003) and Tinto's (1993) research contributed to the strength of this finding as the need for social integration and a feeling of belonging were positively related to retention.

Mentoring relationships were typically considered a key factor of student success. Participants in this study bemoaned the insufficient number of mentors on campus and in response to the deficit, sought mentors outside of their school setting. The need for mentors, role models and advisors was greatly endorsed by participants. Many that participated said that they plan on fulfilling the role of mentor to other African American males.

Unfortunately, stories that revealed interactions with the campus environment described experiences of discrimination, racism, politics and a general feeling of not being fully accepted. Similarly, the students felt that they were expected to fully assimilate into the campus environment even though they felt excluded. This dichotomy caused the participants to be distrustful of the institution, which is an understandable consequence considering the fact that some of the universities attended did not fulfill

their moral obligation to provide a culturally diverse environment (Dawson-Threat, 1997, Howard-Hamilton, 1997).

A comprehensive examination of this study reveals that the success of these men stems from their desire to empower their families and others of the African American race to do better. The degree of their commitment was evident when exploring their beliefs, values, attitudes, intrinsic and extrinsic motivators, and interactions with key players in the educational process. Each kept their "eye on the prize" and all, seemingly repeated the mantra: "Failure is NOT an option."

The possibility of performing in the future role of mentor/role model excited the participants. Each one eagerly awaited a chance for their communities to benefit from their new found knowledge and educational status. These African American males reported that the most disheartening issues they faced were discrimination, racism, and educational debt. The students struggled with the reality of too few "familiar" faces and the scarcity of financial resources to offset their educational costs. The clash that arose between these issues and completion of the terminal degree were common occurrences.

The likelihood of becoming thousands of dollars in debt to obtain a terminal degree and scholarships being unavailable were also concerns the participants voiced. This scenario did indeed play out for two of the participants; one was indebted over $108,000 and the other to the tune of $60,000. Despite the financial burden upon completion, both participants felt that it was money well spent.

Findings Applied to Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is considered a development of African American thought. Its key tenets of microagressions, counterstories and augmentation of safe or

counter spaces provide the possibility of establishing a contextual understanding of the lived experience of the participants in this study. Upon further scrutiny of the findings, the principle investigator was able to organize data under the framework of CRT. The table presented below illustrates the application of these elements to the study findings.

Table 11

Showing CRT in Findings

Participant	Microagressions	Counter Stories	Counter/Safe Space
Coach	-not addressed	-none identified	-interview -family
Polo	-admission attempts	-none identified	-interview -rap music
Dr. Phil	-denied admission	-grade sharing -mentoring	-interview -mentors and peers -faith
Tre	-predicted failure	-differential treatment	-interview -faith -family and friends
Earl	-not addressed	-not addressed	-interview -study group

The information presented in the preceding table recounts the richness of the data. It provides examples of the manifestation of CRT in the responses of the participants in this study. Each element of CRT will be discussed as they pertain to the findings and literature in the following paragraphs

Counterstories

Counterstories are those testimonies that cast doubt on existing ideas of the dominant culture (Howard-Hamilton, 1997). As reported in review of literature, Stamps

and Tribble (1995) claim that "most background characteristics do not contribute to the academic success or failure of African American male students."

A majoritarian story is that African American males don't succeed at the doctoral level. However, as indicated by the study finding, African American males enrolled in the doctoral programs do not quit. For African American males accepted in the doctoral program, failure is not an option. This belief is conjectured by the researcher and by each of the participants in the study, all of which vehemently resisted dropping out of the program.

A second majoritarian story is represented as follows: Give them (Black males) a chance (i.e. admit them into the doctoral program) and they won't take advantage of it. Simply being admitted into the doctoral program is not necessarily an opportunity if it is given begrudgingly. The minimum needed is a sponsor to facilitate the process; at best, a mentor should be provided to help ensure success in navigating through the program. Contrary to the majoritarian story, African American males need more than merely to be admitted to the doctoral program. Simply being admitted is not enough for African American males to succeed at the terminal degree level. Black males need mentors and role models to nurture, support and guide them along the path to the doctorate to help ensure their success. Despite the fact that each of the participants in this study had a mentor, according to the literature, African American males rarely have mentors.

Retrospectively, a balanced view of findings must be presented. To this end, the study findings also supported claims made in the review of literature. For example, claims regarding the crucial role of faculty, nurturing environments, and cross-cultural relationships in regard to the success of the African American males were supported.

Participants emphasized that "no one completes a Ph.D. by themselves" and encouraged the establishment of support systems. In all actuality, it was these identified support systems that were the participants' "safe spaces."

It was with these venues that participants found unconditional love, support, the ability to relate, and even received the permission to fail. The recounting of a group of African Americans pursuing graduate degrees named their group with the acronym MIS (Make It So). The group was a continual source of inspiration and encouragement as the name empowers the individual to persist in their individual quest. The identification of individual "safe spaces" produced rich data due to the fact the individuality of each participant surfaced, which consequently required the researcher to examine societal implications on a deeper level.

Safe spaces

The participant, **Polo**, identified two very unique safe spaces. One was during his quiet time, in which he communed with a departed relative. Although, initially ominous in the hearing, the researcher had to objectively analyze this response and consider how often individuals reach to the past in an attempt to find the peace and comfort encountered during a difficult time in one's life. To embrace the memory of the figure or place of one's childhood where one felt safe, secure and loved is a clear depiction of the tenet of a safe place. The use of this internal site for **Polo** was clearly an effective method for him to combat the sense of loneliness and isolation that he experienced at different times during his academic journey.

Microaggressions

This final tenet of CRT is characterized as a form of subtle abuse aimed at minorities that takes many forms (Solorazno, Ceja & Yoss, 2000; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, Yosso, 2000). In this study, four of the five participants acknowledged they often overlooked acts of racial discrimination. The only participant not to report an incident of microaggression, **Coach**, simply failed to address this tenet. Perhaps it was not witnessed or maybe the participant inadvertently omitted discussing it.

Each participant that did report experiencing microaggression attributed it to the politics present in university settings. Encounters with official procedures that resulted in delays, setbacks and feelings of discouragement among participants served only to strengthen the resolve of participants. Yet, the occurrence did bequeath to these men the realization that the allocation and distribution of resources, whether human, material or financial, is not always carried out in an impartial manner.

Earl asserted, "you can't get away from politics: you just have to learn not to take things personal." Likewise, responses from other participants indicate that the denial of these resources brought to mind the struggle of African Americans who had gone before them and that this strengthened their individual resolve to succeed and complete the degree. The participants refused to allow society, the university or negative experiences to stop or define them; instead, they embraced the struggle in order to progress.

Contrast to Literature

According to the literature reviewed, African American doctoral students were thought to seldom have mentors. Finding from this study argue against that belief. Each of the five participants interviewed reporting having a mentor. Consistent with the

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literature (Johnson, 1993) noncognitive factors determine the level of academic success of African Americans at the doctoral level. Desire to make their family proud and committed to paving the way for their community was also strongly reported by the participants. From the data recorded, the participants indicated that the desire to succeed and the pursuit of the terminal degree counts more for increasing the likelihood of academic success than any other qualification observed during this study.

The information presented by the participants was ofttimes like looking in a mirror for the researcher, as it defines his lived experience. In much the same manner that for **Polo** rap music defines his life, the principal investigator was able to hear himself spoken through the words and mouths of the participants.

Consistently having to confront the challenges of the doctoral program was a difficult process. Yet, the experience stimulated personal and professional growth and made the researcher a stronger academician. Equipped with the knowledge acquired through nearly a decade of academic pursuit, the investigator will pave the way for the achievement of forthcoming successes of others; some will be like him, an African American male, while others will not.

Although it was reported by the literature, a surprise of the study's findings by the researcher was the level of intrinsic motivation the participants possessed. The participants' impetus and eagerness to advance resounded throughout the process. As stated previously, each of the five interviewees looked at quitting the program as failure and failure was discussed as not an option. This failure was not looked at simply failure to succeed by an individual. It would be as if an entire community or a people had failed.

Consistent with the literature (Johnson, 1993) was the influence on success by noncognitive factors. Pride in one's self and in one's culture seemed to greatly influence persistence. This unseen but ever present feeling that kept both the principal investigator and the study participants engaged in pursuit of the doctorate can best be described with the following phrase, "*Desire counts more than any other qualification and seriousness more brilliance.*"

Another revelation that came as a shock to the principal researcher was the amount of time from entry into the degree program until completion. Despite repeated attempts before finally being admitted into the program, and not being granted entry into one doctoral program but choosing to pursue the degree at another institution, the participants in this study finished in less than the average time it takes to complete a doctoral program. Perhaps, the most ironic note to add, is that one participant that completed in less than the average time had been predicted that he would not even complete the program.

The researcher was surprised to not find any outward or blatant signs of discrimination. Although microaggressions and subtle racism was noted, it came to a surprise to the investigator that none of the participants discussed more overt signs of racism. Either racism had been eradicated altogether or its delivery had become more sophisticated. The investigator would assert the latter.

Each participant was quite open in sharing, even eager to find someone like themselves that was genuinely committed to hearing them. The participants did not, at any point in the interview, appear to "hold back" or hesitate in sharing. Seeing this

interview as a safe space created an environment whereby the interviewee and the researcher could address salient issues and enduring enigmas associated with the study.

Implications and Recommendations

By recognizing the factors associated with success, current students, prospective students, faculty and administrators can benefit in a number of ways. One such way would be for educational institutions to create policies to increase the rate of success of African American male graduate students. Another way this study could add to the knowledge base and benefit the university is to help faculty and administrators become aware of factors that enhance terminal degree attainment of African American male graduate students.

- The African American male must be allowed to tell his own story.

- Cultural sensitivity must be learned and implemented by all university personnel.

- Facilitation of mentoring programs, teaching faculty how to be mentors.

- Reduction, if not elimination, of the negative stereotypes associated with African American males.

- Universities should re-evaluate the distribution of financial resources.

The principal investigator acknowledges that this study's findings are not conclusive. It is recommended that further exploration be devoted to the success of African American male terminal degree recipients. This would progress the understanding of their experience. There are numerous implications for a study of this nature and for future studies in the area of African American male terminal degree recipients. A few are offered by the principal investigator.

- It would be interesting to investigate other advance degrees (e.g. Ed.D.,
  J.D., M.D., Th.D.).

- Also, an exploration into terminal degree recipients of other people of
  color may or may not report similar meanings of success.

- A replication study looking at African American female terminal degree
  recipients could be contrasted with the present study.

- A study that simultaneously examines high academic achievers at multiple
  institutions would lend itself to interesting outcomes.

- A study that investigates the factors of success of White males that attend
  HBCUs would be an interesting contrast to the present study.

Summary

Although it is seldom heard, the story of successful African American males at
the terminal degree level is one that needs to be told. The journey for the acquisition of
terminal degrees by African American males is begun by far too few. Many that begin the
journey fall by the wayside and are soon forgotten. Those that are steadfast and
unmovable are literally giants among those who would follow in their path. Oftentimes
for many African American males, the path leading to the doctorate is the road less
traveled: that makes all the difference.

To some, obtaining the doctorate is but one small star in the vast solar system of
higher education. For others, it may be like the sun, beaming rays of possibility across the
sparsely populated land of African American males privileged to higher education. It is
my sincere prayer that in accomplishing this, at times seemingly impossible feat, that
someone might be empowered to take this road less traveled, albeit, void of some of the

trials, tribulations and pitfalls discussed herein by my fellow brothers in the academy and me.

As I look back on nearly ten years of the doctoral pursuit, I can honestly say that much of what has transpired throughout the process is now a blur. Maybe it is filled with memories so painful to remember that they have been suppressed deep within my psyche. Despite oftentimes knowing that quitting would have been deemed a failure and that failure was not an option, I sit here putting the final touches on my first attempt at this type of scholarly writing and I wonder why I never quit. Perhaps, it was the voices of those from my past that had preceded me and paved the way, pushing me, and urging me to continue on my sojourn. Or, it may have been those of my unborn, future generations reaching back with outstretched arms, guiding me and pulling me along the path to educational success.

In either case, perhaps my reason that against all odds, the meaning of my story of success in making it over the ivy walls can best be described as something told to me by mentor, advisor, friend, and Christian sister, Rosa Amalia Cintrón Delgado, "I admire your attitude and focus...really, your story would be a powerful one for others to hear; The problem is that it is just too frequently experienced by so many other students." If anyone were to ask, that is why I did it; I simply have a success story to tell to anyone who will listen.

CLOSING VIGNETTE

During Elmer's 10 years of doctoral pursuit, 8 African American males were accepted into the doctoral program in his department, 2 dropped out and only 3, including Elmer, completed. He knew that from research and from personal accounts that what he experienced while pursuing his terminal degree was frequently experienced by many other African American male doctoral students. He also knew that the prognosis for completion for these students was bleak.

Against all odds, Elmer was determined that in the end, he too would have a success story to tell. He knew that his story was a powerful one and that others, both within and outside the university, needed to hear it. Whether or not people wanted to admit it, Elmer was convinced that there was something that needed to be done to increase the chances of African American males surviving at the doctoral level. He believed that by sharing his story, one that is too infrequently told, others might learn from the experiences of Elmer and others like him that had already made it over the ivy wall.

So, after nearly 10 years of classes, chaos, disruptions, distractions, meetings, mobilizations, presenting, publishing, trials, triumphs, tuition, tears, fees, faux paus, books, bursars, worrying, war, and too much to do and too little time, it all boils down to this-Elmer, the first generation college attendee and grandson of a functionally illiterate has finally reached the top rung of the educational ladder. Elmer decided shortly after the doctoral pursuit began that the best way to acknowledge those that had supported his triumphant quest would be to support others in their voyage, thereby helping ensure more success stories are told.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

Respondent:_____

Introduction
Thanks for agreeing to participate in this study of African American males in higher education. As was mentioned when we set up the interview, I am researching this issue to fulfill the requirements for doctorate in higher education. My goal is to explore the success factors of African American men who obtained terminal degrees from Majority White Institutions. The interview will take about 90 minutes complete. We will begin by asking you some general questions. I will then ask more specific questions about your experiences and insights.

Demographics
     Age _____
     Institution attending _____
     Degree type_____
     Year received _____
Background
1. Tell me about your graduate student experiences.
2. While pursuing your terminal degree, did you either personally experience or witness any racism, either covert or overt, from either faculty or students?

Persistence
3. What do you feel were barriers, challenges, or problems in pursuit of your degree?
4. Did you ever consider leaving the university?
5. What motivated you to persist in completing your degree?

Campus Environment and Mentoring
6. Were you ever encouraged or discouraged to attend any academic conferences, present papers, conduct research or publish articles and if so, did you?
7. How would you characterize and describe the campus environment/climate/culture?

Social Support
8. Did you have a support system either on or off campus?! Please, elaborate and in both cases, discuss in detail what you feel is the impact of having/not having a support systems affected your pursuit of the terminal degree.

Strategies
9. What individual strategies were beneficial to in your degree completion?
10. How would you assess or describe the campus climate
11. Did you experience any politics at your institution and if so, please describe.
12. What do you credit most as key or integral to your success of a terminal degree?

13. What advice would you give or recommend to other African American males pursuing a terminal degree from a MWI that you feel might increase their likelihood of success?

Debriefing

14. Is there anything you would have done differently?
15. Would you like to add anything?
16. Are there any questions you would like to ask?

Thank you very much for your time and cooperation.

Appendix B

Invitation to Participate in Study

Principal Investigator: Harlan E. Ballard, M.Ed.

Study Title: An Exploration into Success Factors of African American Males Who Obtained Terminal Degrees from Majority White Institutions

Invitation to Participate

First of all, thank you for taking the time to share your experiences. You are invited to be a part of a study that is interested in understanding your thoughts and feelings about your educational path.

Description of Procedures

You will be asked a variety of questions related to your thoughts, feelings, and actions regarding your graduate education experience. The interview should take approximately 90 minutes to complete. Research designs often require that the full intent of the study not be explained prior to participation. This is so your responses are not influenced in one particular way or another, and meant to encourage you to respond as honestly as you can. You will also be given an opportunity to ask any questions you might have regarding the study.

Confidentiality

The responses you will give will have a unique identification number that will be used on any follow-up sessions. This allows a link the responses from today with the future responses. Each person has a pseudonym. To ensure that your pseudonym is not lost between this session and any future sessions, a copy of your email address will be kept with the pseudonym next to it. Once the last session is complete, the paper that associates the e-mail address with the pseudonym will be destroyed. This is done to preserve your confidentiality and anonymity so that you feel free and to respond as openly and as honestly as possible. You should also know that the University of Oklahoma Institutional Review Board (IRB) may inspect study records as part of its auditing program, and that these reviews will only focus on the researchers and the study's protocol. They will not focus on your responses or involvement.

Appendix C

Informed Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT
TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

PROJECT TITLE:	*An exploration into success factors of African American males who obtained terminal degrees from majority white institutions*
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:	**Harlan E. Ballard**
CONTACT INFORMATION:	**405-650-0283**
	Harlan.ballard@tinker.af.mil
	HBallard@aol.com

You are being asked to volunteer for a research study. This study is being conducted at a location that will be in a quiet comfortable setting that affords privacy and convenience for you, such as your home or a library. You were selected as a possible participant because you are an African American male with a Ph.D. from majority white institution between the ages of 25 and 45 and you obtained your degree within the last 5 years in from a College of Education. Please read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to take part in this study.

Purpose of the Research Study

The purpose of this study is: This study will shed light on the path of academic success in relation to persistence, campus environment and mentoring, social support, and strategies for overcoming barriers to success.

Procedures

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following things: Your participation will involve answering questions related to your thoughts, feelings, and actions regarding your graduate education experience and the interview will be audio tape recorded. The interview should take approximately 90 minutes to complete and the total estimated time of your participation is approximately 90 minutes. The location of the interviews will be in a quiet comfortable setting that affords privacy

and convenience for the respondent, such as the respondent's home or a library. There will be one interview per respondent.

The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used. Published results will be presented in direct quotes and summary form. Your identity will not be associated with your responses in any published format.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study

The study has the following risks: There are no risks beyond every day activities.

The benefits to participation are: There are no benefits to participation.

Compensation

You will not be reimbursed for your time and participation in this study.

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you decline to participate, there will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to participate, you may decline to answer any question or may withdraw at any time.

Confidentiality

The records of this study will be kept private. In published reports, there will be no information included that will make it possible to identify the research participant. Research records will be stored securely Audio tapes will be stored at the researcher's home in a locked safe for one month. Tapes will be erased after one month and only approved researchers will have access to the records.

Audio Taping Of Study Activities:

To assist with accurate recording of participant responses, interviews may be recorded on an audio recording device/video recording device.   Participants have the right to refuse to allow such taping without penalty.   Please select one of the following options.

    X I consent to the use of audio recording.
    ☐ I do not consent to the use of audio recording.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher(s) conducting this study can be contacted at 405-650-0283, Harlan.ballard@tinker.af.mil or HBallard@aol.com for Harlan Ballard or 405-701-5229 or rcintron@ou.edu for Dr. Rosa Cintrón. You are encouraged to contact the researcher(s) if you have any questions.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University of Oklahoma – Norman Campus Institutional Review Board (OU-NC IRB) at 405.325.8110 or irb@ou.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records. If you are not given a copy of this consent form, please request one.

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received satisfactory answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature	Date