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## The Role of Mentors/Advisors in the Doctoral Training of African American Students at Predominately White Universities: Implications for Doctoral Training

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## **The Role of Mentors/Advisors in the Doctoral Training of African American Students at Predominately White Universities: Implications for Doctoral Training**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship and the importance of connecting the African American doctoral students and their advisors in the mentor roles. More specifically, this study brings to the forefront the importance as well as the impact of mentors/advisors and their roles in facilitating academic success for African American doctoral students. Many African American doctoral students are typically misunderstood and misdirected in the types of support that they may need to succeed in graduate school (Gallien & Peterson, 2005). Mentors/advisors and the roles that they have are essential to the success of African American doctoral students. The support structures surrounding the mentor/advisor relationship in this research are essential to how it relates to the needs of the African American doctoral student on a predominately White campus. Given the findings, recommendations are provided for future research and for administrators at predominately White Institutions.

### **Introduction**

Over the past 50 years since the historic *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* decision, the United States has still struggled in how welcoming they would be to African American students in its higher education institutions. Beginning with the setbacks of entry by means of legal denial that included the doctrine of the separate but equal policy with the intention to direct laws that would ultimately segregate schools and the affirmative action debates such as the *Bakke* decision and the rulings in the University of Michigan cases (Garrison-Wade & Lewis, 2005; Gullen & Peterson, 2005; Jones, 2001; McGinnis, 2003). As of the writing of this article, only a very small percentage of African Americans have found entry into doctoral programs at Predominately White Institutions [PWIs] (Lewis, Ginsberg, Davies & Smith, 2004; Lewis & Garrison-Wade, in-press). Once admitted to a PWI, many African American doctoral students drop out at a much higher rate without achieving their educational goals (Lang & Ford, 1988; Isaac, 1998). According to the extant literature (Minor, 2003; Walton, 1979), one factor that contributes to the higher rates of attrition of African American doctoral students is the inadequacy in advising, especially at the doctoral level.

Gallien and Patterson (2005) reported that “the more successful African American doctoral students had a mentor/advisor (or group of mentors/advisors) who encouraged and critiqued their work and followed them through their graduate school experience and beyond, throughout their professional careers” (p. 9). To better understand the circumstances as it relates to the cultural and academic adjustment that has to be made by many African American doctoral students at PWIs, the mentor/advisor may be the answer to the adjustment process at the PWI. This study addresses many of the issues surrounding the mentor/advisor relationship and how it relates to African American doctoral students’ completion rates at PWIs.

### **African American Doctoral Students and their Mentors/Advisors**

In *Reflections of a Protégé*, Parkay (1988) defined mentoring as “an intensive, one-to-one form of teaching in which the wise and experienced mentor inducts the inspiring protégé into a particular, usually professional, way of life” (p. 196). According to Heller and Sindelar (1991), mentoring was simply advice given by a respected and experienced individual to someone in need of assistance. Further, Bova and Phillips (1984) indicated that mentoring is a process by which adults learn through experiences. Cox and Daniel (1983) describe mentoring “as one of the oldest instructional models we know” (p. 53). According to Ellingson, Haeger and Feldhusen (1986), the word “mentor” originated from Greek mythology and is now defined by a host of terms such as guide, advisor, facilitator, counselor, and influencer to address the titles that one has to have to assume a good mentor/advisor track record.

The African American doctoral student and the relationship with their mentors/advisors are important to the success through the various stages of the doctoral study. Farmer (2003) states, “It is therefore evident that more attention needs to be given to the development and experiences of African American students’ matriculation in doctoral programs” (p. 68). The mentors/advisors of African American doctoral students are the link for students to gain opportunities for presenting research, writing and publishing articles, along with working collaboratively with other scholars. The experiences of African American doctoral students in graduate school are extremely important because many are isolated and have feelings of being the only one in the department with something to prove (Fields, 1998). This feeling of being isolated can lead the student into considering leaving the academic program and return to previous jobs and lifestyles (Lewis, Ginsberg, Davies & Smith, 2004; Lewis & Garrison-Wade, in-press).

The benefit of having a good relationship with the university mentor/advisor is essentially having a role model who always inspires one to do better, as well as providing critical feedback. Mentees’ can also build a bond of commonality along with insightful encouragement. Many mentor/advisors do inspire and encourage the mentee to do better based on relationships with prior students, although there are a few mentor/advisors who cannot relate to the mentee based on limited cultural experiences that will result in an unsatisfactory outcome in inspiring or encouraging them to do better. Henrich (2004) this is referred to as a non-cultural mentor/advisor. Henrich documents “the evolution of pro-

sociality rooted in the interaction between cultural and genetic transmission of unlike species” (p.31-32). The non-cultural mentor in this context is used to explain the cultural learning capacities of the mentor/advisor. The non-cultural mentor/advisor has plenty to gain along the way also, by being able to benefit from the opportunity to share in the culture of the mentee. African American doctoral students have a greater outlook on graduating as well as retention through a positive mentoring relationship (Jones, 2001).

As a result, many African American doctoral students are in need of being a part of mentoring programs which are geared to effectively retain and guide minority students toward social and academic success (Jones, 2001). Most graduate schools, when it comes to advising African American doctoral students are behind that of the undergraduate advising experiences (Minor, 2003). Minor states, “the dropout rate among African American doctoral students is significantly high at 55 percent of all doctoral students” (p. 239). The total number of degrees awarded to African American doctoral students increased by 88.9 percent, increasing from 1,202 in 1992 to 2,202 in 2002 (U. S. Department of Education, 2005).

### **Characteristics of Mentors/Advisors**

Within the literature, many characteristics of a mentor/advisor have been identified as critical to the success of doctoral students. Characteristics of a good mentor/advisor included personality traits, work habits, attitude/ values, productivity, professional influence, effective communication, availability, and mentoring track record (Johnson & Huwe, 2003). A few characteristics of a good mentor/advisor included creativity, enthusiasm and a strong belief in the mentee were mentioned as good traits of a mentor/advisor (Halcomb, 1980). According to Hardcastle (1988), “the qualities and characteristics that attracted protégés to their mentors/advisors were wisdom, care, commitment, integrity, high expectations, a sense of humor, and the ability to act as a catalyst” (p. 206). Roche (1979) noted that an important characteristic of a mentor/advisor is a “willingness to share knowledge and understanding” (p. 24).

Johnson and Huwe (2003) posed the question, “what makes a good school mentor/advisor?” (p. 65). One of the most important factors influencing the initial attraction between the mentor/mentee is the notion that the mentor/advisor has strong personality traits (Olian et al., 1993). Johnson and Huwe (2003) describe a few personality traits of the mentor/advisor: (a) being warm; (b) humorous; (c) supportive; (d) encouraging; (e) flexible; (f) dedicated; (g) patient; and (h) empathetic. Doctoral students, African American students in particular, should put considerable thought into selecting the personality traits of a mentor/advisor that they are most drawn to; this step can help in the survival of the relationship between the mentor and the mentee.

Personality traits of good graduate school mentor/advisors have been surveyed by various researchers. Cronan-Hillix, Gensheimer, Cronan-Hillix, and Davidson (1986) asked graduate psychology students to describe important characteristics of good mentor/advisors. The participants in the survey identified the following as important: (a) a good sense of humor; (b) honesty; (c) dedication; (d) empathy; (e) compassion; (f)

genuineness; (g) patience; (h) nonsexism; (i) flexibility; and (j) loyalty as some other important characteristics of a mentor/advisor. Clark, Harden and Johnson (2000) found that good mentor/advisors were described as being supportive, intelligent, knowledgeable, humorous, encouraging, honest, warm, available, caring, and accepting. At best, a good mentor/advisor is kind, competent, and enjoyable to be around. Given these findings, it is clear that effective mentors/advisors commit to knowing each mentee along with having a firm understanding of the talents and the unique aspirations that each mentee brings to graduate school. Effective mentors/advisors value and enjoy demonstrating models of teaching, coaching, and being an excellent resource for assistance to the mentee.

### **Academic Advising for African American Doctoral Student Success & Retention**

Academic advising for doctoral student success and retention is vital for many African American doctoral students to succeed. As a result, the role of the mentor/advisor can provide numerous benefits to doctoral students. The mentor/advisor may guide, teach, advise, and connect African American doctoral students to academic networks. The mentoring/advising relationship with African American doctoral students is often complex, and in some cases the outcomes are not always positive. However, the African American doctoral student that have effective mentors/advisors have access to knowledge and information that may not be as accessible to non-mentored African American doctoral students (Valadez, 1998). Willie, Grady and Hope (1991) reported that African American doctoral students on predominantly White campuses were satisfied for the most part with the administrative services (Financial Services, Health Care Services, and Human Resource Services) that provided a wide variety of services for the students needs. There was a strong correlation observed between the variables that pertained to racial diversity of faculty and the opportunity for interaction with faculty of one's own race. Willie et. al., (1991) also points out that most African American doctoral students are mentored/advised by members of their own race, although effective mentoring did occur across racial and gender categories.

Academic mentoring/advising for many African American doctoral students start with some common concerns that they have once they get to graduate school. Such as how to navigate the system to ensure success along with issues of taking precautions of being isolated, and trying to eliminate stress and frustration. African American doctoral students that find themselves faced with these issues can face the risk of dropping out or falling behind in their program. Isaac (1998) states "graduate students need support from their peers. Student support helps to decrease feelings of isolation. No matter the quality of the mentor (professors, major professor, graduate committee, etc.). African American doctoral students need someone on their level to bounce ideas off of, do reality testing on, commiserate with, learn from, and just hang out" (p. 37). Academic mentoring/advising as it relates to African American doctoral students comes in different forms; therefore, a wise African American doctoral student will have more than one support group in order to ensure success.

Key factors for many mentor/advisors to keep in mind and to share with incoming African American doctoral students that are attending predominantly White institutions (PWIs) to assist with the academic success and retention of these students they will need: (a) assistance in creating an academic development plan; (b) an orientation to the graduate school; (c) be provided the “inside scoop” on the school; (d) acquaint the student with the field, or profession; (e) assistance to develop a research topic; (f) provide writing assistance; (g) read papers, listen to presentations, and give feedback; (h) offer opportunities for publishing and presenting papers; (i) assistance to develop problem-solving skills; and, (j) listening and teaching educational political savvy (Isaac, 1998). To ensure success and retention for many African American doctoral students most or all of the previously mentioned actions will have to be implemented. Building a strong relationship between the mentor/advisor and the mentee through combining facts and experiential learning is very essential in developing qualities that can lead to a successful completion or outcome.

Holland (1993) points out five types of relationships that African American doctoral students have with their mentor/advisor that will ensure success and retention. The first relationship is the formal academic advisement; there is very little interaction between the mentor/advisor and the mentee providing basic advice to assist the mentee. The second relationship is academic guidance; in this relationship, any information other than technical aspects of completing the doctoral program will not be discussed. The third relationship is quasi-apprenticeship; the mentor/advisor provides educational research opportunities that are not available to all doctoral students. The fourth relationship is academic mentoring, provides the mentee with individualized guidance and assistance aimed at helping the mentee prepare for academic life in higher education. Finally, the fifth relationship is career mentoring; the mentor/advisor takes a personalized role in preparing the mentee for an academic career in higher education. The relationship of doctoral students with their mentor/advisors ranged from being very limited to very involved. This interaction enhances and promotes the success and retention of the African American doctoral students at PWIs.

## **Methodology**

### *Research Design*

A qualitative research design utilizing the phenomenology mode of inquiry (Creswell, 1988; Denzen & Lincoln, 1998; Marshall & Rosman, 1999) was utilized for this study. Phenomenology, as a research method, is a discipline that attempts to describe how the world is experience through conscious acts. According to Willig (2001), the phenomenology research design is “concerned with the ways in which human beings gain knowledge of the world around them” (p. 51). As a result, it was appropriate to utilize this qualitative mode of inquiry to understand the impact of mentors/advisors for successful African American doctoral students.

### *Research Questions*

This research study sought to answer two fundamental questions as it relates to the impact of mentors/advisors for successful African American doctoral students:

1. What are the key characteristics of the mentoring/advising relationship that African American doctoral students perceive as influencing their decision to complete the doctoral degree?
2. In what ways do issues of race affect the mentoring/advising relationship?

### *Participants and Data Collection Procedures*

For this study, the researchers interviewed ten African American doctoral degree recipients that completed their doctoral degree during the 2005-2006 academic school years. More specifically, these ten African American doctoral degree recipients were from two predominately White Land-Grant Research Extensive Universities (one in the Rocky Mountain Region of the country and the other in the Deep Southern region of the country). The procedure used in identifying the sample population was gained by means of solicited referrals from various institutional administrators such as the registrar and the dean of students from the two institutions included in this study. Based on the referrals from university administrators, the potential participants were solicited via telephone and electronic mail regarding their interest in participating in this research study. Participant solicitation was primarily based on the mentor/advisor relationship with the mentee in completing the doctoral program from the two predominately White Land-Grant Research Extensive universities involved in this study.

### *Data Analysis*

Data were analyzed after transcribing all interviews and coding them in three phases—open coding, refinement of coding, and axial coding (Glaser, 1978). In the final phase, key themes and patterns were identified and developed that transcended each of the coding categories (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The key themes and patterns identified by the ten participants were not compared between participants from the two institutions, but were treated as one cohort group detailing their experiences with their mentors/advisors in their Ph.D. programs.

## **Findings**

Two major themes characterized the responses of these African American doctoral degree recipients concerning the importance of mentors/advisors in their completion of the doctoral degrees. These themes included, “Mentor/Advisor Relationships with the Mentee” and “Important Characteristics of the Mentor/Mentee Relationships.” Based on these findings, the two major themes are developed, and then, following the discussion of the findings, recommendations for improving the

mentoring/advising of African American doctoral students are provided. Finally, several conclusions are drawn in the last section.

### *Mentor/Advisor Relationships with the Mentee*

For all of the participants in this study, relationships with their mentor/advisor were seen as being paramount to the successful completion of the doctoral degree program at a predominantly white institution. The term “mentor/advisor relationships with the mentee” refers to the close interpersonal relationships between the mentee and the mentor/advisor and how the mentor/advisor relationship with the mentee played an important role in the mentee’s successful performance and completion of the PhD program at the PWI.

The participant responses were clear in portraying a sense that the “mentor/advisor relationship with the mentee” included having a support system and a role model on a predominately white campus, these are very important factors as it relates to successful academic degree completion from a PWI. One participant portrayed her personal experience with her mentor/advisor as a very positive relationship by saying:

“I didn’t have any negative experience with my mentor/advisor. Pretty much, because, I think it was a positive experience because I received research opportunities, financial, as well as direction, material, everything that I needed to be able to do my dissertation and that’s because my advisor made that possible for me [to be academically successful].”

This participant also emphasized in great detail on all of the positive research help and many opportunities that made it possible to successfully finish the doctoral program.

My relationship with my advisor was extremely strong, and I could not have completed my doctorate without my mentor advisor, because I was fortunate enough that I had worked on a grant with my advisor. I was selected to be the research director, and that really helped me to have hands on experience with doing research, and it also helped me to develop a love for research and that is why I am in the position that I am in now. And I would not have finished because I finished in the shortest time frame that I think anyone else has finished it, and I couldn’t have done that without my advisor. I would also like to add, it’s important to have other advisors, I had unofficial mentors, who was not my assigned advisor or mentor, but he helped me tremendously, and was also instrumental in my success”

Similarly, another participant expressed strong positive emotion about the mentor/advisor relationship by saying:

“My advisor’s goal was to help make me successful and she was an encourager, She pushed, she motivated, and she had what a lot of people don’t have, and that’s a sincere interest in me being successful. Without her, I don’t believe I



would be going to the University of Vermont for this Post-Doc fellowship. I would not have some of the research projects that I am working on. If you're pursuing fellowships or tenure track positions, research is what is going to make you marketable. I have a topic that I think my committee, particularly my advisor thought was a very timely topic and there needed to be some research done in the area. My study focused on the socialization experiences of full-time tenure and tenure-track African American male faculty. And I felt that it would make me marketable because there's a shortage of African American males in academia and we need to find out why we don't have any Black professors or any Black male professors.

Furthermore, this same participant expressed in great detail about how the mentor/advisor assisted them to successfully navigate their way through the doctoral program.

My mentor guided me through the job search process. I mean she would do things behind the scenes that I was totally unaware of. I was invited to an institution for an on-campus interview. The week of the interview, they e- mailed me and told me that my paperwork had not been completed and that HR had not approved me for a campus visit. I e-mailed them, they did not respond. Approximately three weeks later I get an e-mail saying the position has been filled, thank you for your interest. Okay, well, I'm thinking I'm an African American male, I got a topic that deals with African American males, okay, this could be racism here because the school was in the South and the department was fairly white. About a month later, I see the exact same position re-advertised for the Spring of 07. So, by now I'm confident that its racism and I've made a vow that I will never work at the institution. I e-mailed my advisor, because we're still staying in contact, beside me being faced with the process and she responds, yeah, I saw the e-mail announcement; I was hoping you didn't see it. And I started laughing, and I just said well, another institution has lied to me because a second institution did the exact same thing. Well, she e-mailed the search chair person and he explained to her that we were bringing him to campus; we were only funded for two candidates. The third candidate was not funded, and we offered to one of the two that was brought to campus and that individual took the job and then decided he/she did not want the job, so we re-advertised. Now, I don't know if he was telling her a story, but what impressed me was, my advisor was still looking out on my behalf, and I didn't ask her to do that. So, those are the types of things that she did to ensure that this was a positive process from the time she became my advisor, through the job search process and until I committed to take the fellowship at the University of Vermont.

Another participant underscored the mentor/advisor relationship by saying:

At times when the workload felt difficult, my advisor encouraged me to get it done because I needed to get it done. He didn't give me an easy way out. He never gave me answers. He always gave me more questions and more books to

read. And even at times when I felt that it was difficult and that he was pushing me hard, in the end it was in my best interest because in my first job in the work place after my doctorate program was in a research position. And so as a professional researcher, I was able to make deadlines and answer difficult questions, and continue to persevere, simply because of the experience with my advisor during the conducting of my research and writing of my dissertation”

Overall, the participants in this study indicated that the relationship with the mentor/advisor played an important role in their successful degree attainment in a doctoral degree program at the PWI. Specifically, mentor/advisors were viewed as being instrumental to the African American doctoral student success. When the relationship with the mentor/advisor was positive, the African American doctoral student found the environment at the PWI to be supportive and more conducive to influence successful degree attainment in a doctoral degree program. The participants in this study indicated that some African American doctoral students had experiences with mentor/advisors that were not positive or productive. For example, negative experiences in the relationship with the mentor/advisor caused the African American doctoral student to feel unappreciated and unwelcome. One participant mentioned that by being in a distance program she felt that her relationship with the mentor/advisor was strained because, “you don’t see the advisor all the time, constantly, once a week or what ever it is. And that contact, that frequent contact was not there.” Another participant stated that his experience with his first advisor wasn’t positive because his study focused on cultural diversity and his advisor was not familiar with it. Thus, this participant added:

“After working with her [advisor], which was real interesting, I found out that she began to do her research through me. And I was not interested in doing her research and that was a little intimidating because some of the advisors, they wanted you to do what they wanted.”

The negative aspects of the mentor/advisor relationship for the participants in this study were viewed as learning outcomes. However, the participants in this study indicated that their mentor/advisor expected them to succeed and the mentor/advisor took a very proactive role to ensure success. Also, the participants held the perception that it is very important to have a mentor/advisor to enhance the academic support to encourage degree attainment. Many of the participants mentioned the fact that they knew many doctoral students that did not have the same type of support system from their mentor/advisor and this had a negative effect on the African American doctoral student academically. In fact, this negative perception led many African American doctoral students to leave and return to prior jobs and familiar surroundings before completing the doctoral degree program.

Finally, the theme “mentor/advisor relationship with the mentee” suggests that the relationship that the African American doctoral student has with the mentor/advisor plays a critical role in the academic success for the African American doctoral student on a predominately white campus. The participant responses were clear in portraying a sense that the “mentor/advisor relationship with the mentee” included having a support system

and a role model on a predominately white campus, mentor/advisors were viewed as being instrumental to the African American doctoral students success. The negative aspects of the mentor/advisor relationship for the participants in this study were viewed as learning outcomes. In particular, the participants in this study were successful in attaining the doctoral degree when their mentor/advisor established a meaningful and working relationship with the African American doctoral student and success was emphasized from the very start.

### *Important Characteristics of the Mentor/Mentee Relationship*

The needs and expectations of the participants in this study was for the mentor/advisor to be available and supportive, it refers to a consensus among the participants. In order for them to be successful in the PhD program at a PWI, an important issue beyond financial and academic support was for the mentor/advisor to be accessible and supportive. The participants in this study indicated that there are many demands placed on them as doctoral students at the beginning stages of the program and there is a need for guidance from the mentor/advisor. The mentee is expected to academically perform in a successful manner and in some cases the guidance is not there. In most cases the demands deal with performance and writing issues.

Almost all of the participants insisted that they expected guidance throughout their doctoral degree programs from the mentor/advisor in order to perform well and academically succeed. As one participant noted:

“My needs and expectations were to be heard and to be guided...when I first met him [mentor/advisor] the first day of class, he asked us what our fear was, and my fear was writing. My anxiety was writing, and he made sure that I overcame that anxiety.”

In regards to needs and expectations, another participant also stated:

“I don’t know other things in terms of things that advisors supposed to do. I mean she did. There was no off the wall things that I expected her to do. In regards to that, certainly, she was the type or at least she has the reputation of being a very difficult person to work with because she had very stringent rules about what she wanted. But what people didn’t understand about her is that she was doing it for a reason. At first, I felt overwhelmed because the first chapter of the dissertation we probably edited about five times and I was getting frustrated about it and that’s when she sat down with me and told me why we were working so hard. She was like, yeah, I know you could probably write the dissertation in a year, but when you’re finished, I don’t want you to have to spend another two or three years trying to turn it into a book, because it’s going to be already a lot closer. So, once I understood that, then we got on the same page. But as far as what I wanted to do with the dissertation and my topic, she was very open to that. Her thing was finding the best way to say it, putting it in the best form. She didn’t worry about changing ideas or anything like that. She would just give me

suggestions; well maybe you should look at this angle and try this angle. And we would try my way and try this and if it didn't work we would go back and agree on it, but she always allowed me to be able to compromise with what I wanted. She never forces her ideas on me. She would tell me, I think this is best. So, certainly under those terms and her availability were excellent and that's very important to. And I don't know why that was the case with me because she was African American, but I think the availability was a big thing because sometimes when students can't reach their advisors, they feel like nobody's helping me, nobody is looking out for me. I've had several friends who have dropped out of the program because they were the only people in the program and they felt very lonely. They didn't have the type of advisor that I did. But they also didn't understand that in choosing an advisor that you need to choose someone who is hands on, like my advisor that you're the type of person that can make deadlines, or you're the type of person that's self-sufficient. And you can take a lot of lead-way, you don't need a lot of guidance, then that's the type of person that you could choose. So, oftentimes graduate students make the wrong choice when they're choosing their advisor when they don't know what to expect. So, certainly she was available and helpful and very aware of the ideas that I had for my dissertation."

In a similar fashion, many participants in this study reported having similar perceptions. For example, another participant reported:

"You know this is your first experience, they've been advisors before. They've been through the process of getting their doctorate degree so they know what it takes to do that. So, the fact that they know that they're there to guide, support, direct, lead, push, pull, all of those things are there for that person."

Similarly another participant stated:

I expected the advisor to be there if I needed to meet with them, that they would listen to you, that they would provide resources; they provide direction for you, they provided information and resources that was needed to help me to be successful, that they provided direction so I wouldn't make mistakes, and if I was having problems, and if I was having a problem in a class, that my advisor could somehow intervene, to somehow be able to talk with this professor or could somehow be a part of the meeting if I needed to do that? I mean that never happened, but that would have been an expectation if a situation like these were to happen. And pretty much, I think an advisor, I expected my advisor to provide whatever kind of guidance or coaching to help me to successfully complete my dissertation and my advisor did provide all those things to me.

The responses of the participants indicated that although they were provided with the tools to be successful they were still in need of guidance, as a result the needs and expectations were very high for the participants in their doctoral degree programs. As a result, some of the participants were very passionate about the needs and expectations

that impacted them during the times that they realized that they were experiencing academic or non-academic concerns. They realized that the mentor/advisor was the key to resolving many of the problems that may arise from time to time. Overall, the participants expressed feelings of being isolated and not belonging in the majority white student setting. In turn, the participants did their best to perform to the best of their ability and they still needed the assurance of the mentor/advisor. In other words, the participants needed validation of their academic achievement to strengthen their motivation in the doctoral degree program at the PWI.

### Discussion

The findings from this study supports the literature review in that the mentor/advisor can assist in the growth and development of the mentee by helping to develop self-confidence, the sharing of ideals and values, having the mentee available and aware of opportunities, act as a counselor in making decisions, as well as building a personal lasting friendship that is built on respect (Duckworth-Warner, 2003). Furthermore, both positive and negative outcomes of mentoring were described in the literature. The outcomes not only affect the mentee, but the mentor/advisor as well. The benefits along with the negative and positive outcomes of mentoring were identified. Mentoring/advising has been an advantage to many African American doctoral students based on the roles that mentors/advisors often assume; like many graduate students across America, African American doctoral students require a successful person that they can identify with in order to academically succeed (Walker, Wright, & Hanley, 2001). Johnson and Huwe (2003) believe that mentor/advisors help their mentees to grow in multiple areas. First, they promote self-awareness along with setting good boundaries between personal and professional roles. Second, there are explicit conversations between the mentor/mentee about ways to maintain the boundaries that work. Finally, good mentor/advisors address unhealthy work habits that may interfere with personal and academic growth.

Academic advising for doctoral students' success and retention is vital for many African American doctoral students to succeed; therefore, the role of the mentor/advisor can provide numerous benefits to doctoral students. The first line of support for the African American doctoral student is the mentor/advisor and the roles that he/she has in the success of the mentee. Further, mentoring/advising has been a powerful instrument in affirming the African American doctoral student in the dominant culture of the university (Duckworth-Warner, 2003).

The ten participants in this study provided an in-depth and detailed look at their mentor/advisor and the experiences related to their successful completion of the doctoral degree program from a predominantly white institution. Overall, they expressed the importance of the relationship that is required between the mentor/advisor and the mentee to be successful in completing the PhD program at the PWI. The participants in this study discussed many of the characteristics that are needed to formulate a positive working relationship between the mentor/advisor and the mentee, such as research interest,

availability, sensitivity of personal issues, cultural sensitivity, and an advocate for issues focused on funding, publications, and job related issues.

In the two major themes of this study, it was explained that there was a strong indication by the participants in this study that the nature of having a good interpersonal relationship with the mentor/advisor played an important role in their completion of the doctoral degree program. Nine of the ten participants in this study recognized their mentor/advisor as a role model, coach, counselor and a friend, this relationship had a direct impact on the participant's academic completion of the doctoral degree program. One of the ten viewed her mentor/advisor as a coach only because she felt they were all combined to describe her mentor/advisor, and she went on to explain that she said coach only because, her mentor/advisor shows her how to do something in order to go on the right path.

Overall, participants in this study communicated the importance of the strong working relationship between the mentor/advisor and the mentee and how this relationship along with guidance and support led to the successful completion of the doctoral degree program at the predominantly white institution. The participants in this study also indicated that there are many forms of pressure placed on them to succeed at the PWI. In most cases, it's not the academic pressures that affect the African American doctoral student at the PWI, it's the pressures surrounding the cultural environmental issues, funding issues, and just coping with an unfamiliar cultural setting. The participants in this study said that their mentor/advisors goal was to ensure that they were successful in completing the doctoral degree. However, it was clear, that in retrospect, the participants in this study saw the relationship with their mentor/advisor as a catalyst that influenced the successful completion of the doctoral degree at the predominantly white institution.

All ten participants in this study had a white mentor/advisor, and two had African American co-advisors. All of the participants in this study stated that race was not an issue in their relationship with their mentor/advisor. The participants agreed that the importance of their mentor/advisor lies in the fact that if they came to the mentor/advisor with an issue that they were there, and was there to help them through the process. The participants felt that it did not matter about race as long as the mentor/advisor fulfilled the needs and expectations they had. One participant said it would help in some instances, but he was really concerned with if he was going to be able to work with that person whether white or black. The participants stressed the fact that it is important to have a mentor/advisor that will help them be successful, race and gender did not matter.

All of the participants reported that it was important to find a good mentor/advisor, but it is really a trial and error process. Because so much of academia is a trial and error process particularly for graduate students and junior faculty as it relates to mentoring and advising. The participants in this study also agreed that they had to go through more than one mentor/advisor until they found the one that fit all of their needs. For these participants, the overall consensus was that race did not matter in their academic success. The reality for these participants was finding a mentor/advisor no

matter what nationality, gender or race, as long as the mentor/advisor was easy to work with, and made them feel comfortable to come to in any situation.

### *Recommendations for Future Research*

As a result of the findings of this study, the following recommendations for further research are proposed:

1. A replication of this study (an in-depth phenomenological interview process) focusing on African American first year doctoral students at a predominantly white institution as this study focused on doctoral degree recipients. The findings of a study of this nature would afford an opportunity to see what the differences are in the mentor/advisor roles for first year doctoral students and students that has attained the doctoral degree.
2. The roles of the mentor/advisor of African American doctoral students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities for comparative purposes since this study focused only on doctoral degree recipients at predominantly white institutions. Such a study might identify the role that environment plays in the relationship of the mentor/advisor on both types of campuses and the types of support needed for success.
3. An implementation of a similar study for comparative purposes focusing on mentor/advisor experiences with African American doctoral students in predominantly white institutions. While this study has found that the relationship a mentee has with the mentor/advisor is important, however this study only focused on the mentor/advisor experiences that could help to identify ways in which these relationships could be enhanced.
4. A replication of this study focusing on white doctoral students at predominantly white institutions since this study was focused only on African American doctoral students. This would yield valuable information as to the many differences between African American doctoral students and the majority doctoral students and determine if race is an important variable in mentor/advisor mentee relationships.
5. A replication of this study focusing on doctoral students that do not have a mentor/advisor at predominantly white institutions. While this study has found that the mentor/advisor mentee relationship has a positive ending result, however this study will focus on doctoral students that do not have a mentor advisor and compare the retention, matriculation and completion rates.
6. A replication of this study focusing on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) areas to see if there are any differences in the findings.

*Recommendations for Administrators at Predominately White Institutions*

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations are directed to predominantly white institutions. Efforts in the directions suggested by these recommendations may be helpful in the recruitment and retention of African American doctoral students in white institutions.

1. Mentoring/advising programs are needed so that African American doctoral students can successfully be paired with a wise and trusted mentor/advisor, one that has successful experience working with mentees. This would afford the mentee a greater opportunity to persist to graduate.
2. Strong orientation programs are needed to assist African American doctoral students in getting acclimated to the environment within the university. This orientation should focus on how to choose a good mentor/advisor, who to go to if there are no mentor/advisors available, institutional rules and regulations, funding opportunities, along with assistance with cultural resources such as Black student services.
3. African American doctoral students at PWIs are in great need of appropriate initiatives that will help them succeed in higher education. It is imperative that administrators and mentor/advisors not only learn what factors affect persistence but look into certain forms of racism that may be harbored on PWI campuses (Jacobs, Cintron, & Canton, 2002). Awareness to improve persistence, retention, and graduation rates of African American doctoral students has to be a priority for administrators and mentor/advisor for these students to be successful.
4. Attempts should be made to include culturally relevant activities, get connected with successful African Americans out in the community, and collaborate with family members that would allow African American doctoral students to make connections with their environment and the world around them (Lewis, Garrison-Wade, Scott, Douglas, & Middleton, 2004).

The following recommendations for administrators and mentor/advisors should be applied to acquire success for African American doctoral students. Administrators and mentor/advisors must make every attempt to: a) include family members in the academic and retention efforts; b) closely monitor the academic progress of African American doctoral students, so they can avoid making unwise academic decisions; c) have special social events that will allow students to meet different faculty in their departments; d) formulate collaborative relationships with African American alumni, this interaction could help with student development and future employment contacts; e) enhance mentor/advisor understanding of the challenges that African American doctoral students experience at PWIs; f) administrators and mentor/advisors should have the names of offices and contact information around campus that specialize in working with African American doctoral students as a resource (Jones, 2001).



## Conclusion

The findings in this study suggest several key conclusions regarding the relationship connecting the African American doctoral students and the mentor roles of their advisors. First, African American doctoral students who attend a predominantly white institution of higher education have a series of unique experiences and feelings which have a direct impact on them being successful. This supports previous research by Duckworth-Warner (2003) which focuses on the interactive process that occurs between the mentor/advisor and the mentee. Clearly, the participants in this study included many positive aspects of their relationships with their mentor/advisor that influenced the persistence to attain the doctoral degree at the PWI. The participants in this study were all successful in completing the doctoral degree program with the help and assistance of their mentor advisor. Duckworth-Warner stated that the mentee has to know thyself and what you need in a mentor/advisor before you choose an advisor/mentor.

The participants in this study believed that their successful degree attainment was aided by the access and support of the mentor/advisor at the predominantly white institution. In fact, for many of the participants there was anxiety in the beginning of the PhD program, as they did not see the academic path that would lead them to success. However the mentor/advisor made success easy by facilitating a successful model for the African American doctoral students to focus on. This meant that the African American doctoral student at the PWI had to have a sense of the importance and the impact of the mentor/advisor on the academic, social, and overall successful completion of the doctoral degree program at the PWI.

Finally, guidance and support were key issues for the participants in this study. Many of the responses of the participants in this study had something to do with the need and support of the mentor/advisor. Clearly, the participants in this study recognized that they were in need of help and guidance as they attended the predominantly white institution. Not only were they in need of assistance and guidance, they had to find the right mentor/advisor in order to be successful. The right mentor/advisor was a key factor for the participants in this study to be successful in completing the doctoral degree program. Just as Zachary (2000) describes the role of the mentor/advisor as being a person that goes through phases with the mentee and celebrates the success of the mentee all the while letting the relationship evolve into one of a colleague and friend.

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