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## BELIEVING IN ACHIEVING: EXAMINING AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN'S DOCTORAL ATTAINMENT

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Dr. Michael D. Toland, Director of Graduate Studies

BELIEVING IN ACHIEVING: EXAMINING AFRICAN AMERICAN  
WOMEN'S DOCTORAL ATTAINMENT

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DISSERTATION

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the  
College of Education  
at the University of Kentucky

By  
ReShanta Camea Hazelbaker  
Lexington, Kentucky  
Director: Dr. Kenneth M. Tyler, Professor of Educational  
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Lexington, Kentucky  
2018

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## ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

### BELIEVING IN ACHIEVING: EXAMINING AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN'S DOCTORAL ATTAINMENT

This research explored the intersectionality of race, class, and gender within the sources of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) underlying the socialization messages influencing African American women's doctoral attainment beliefs. Twenty African American female/woman doctoral achievers completed an online survey, consisting of open-ended and multiple-choice response items, designed to identify and explore the sources of self-efficacy influencing African American women's doctoral attainment beliefs. Eleven participants participated in focus interviews to expand upon and clarify initial survey responses.

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and tenets of critical race theory (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015) were used to analyze the sources of self-efficacy and the intersectionality of race, class, and gender within the socialization messages identified by participants as influencing their doctoral attainment beliefs. Among the sources of self-efficacy, participants frequently described vicarious experiences (co-op and internship opportunities) and social persuasions from family, friends, and faculty as influencing their doctoral attainment beliefs. The following themes were identified as salient in shaping African American women's doctoral attainment beliefs: 1) a voice at the table; 2) faith; and 3) experiential knowledge and support.

Findings from this study illuminate the salience of doctoral attainment beliefs to African American women's doctoral pursuit and attainment. Recommendations and implications for African American women's doctoral program retention and completion are discussed.

**KEYWORDS:** Critical Race Theory, Sources of Self-Efficacy, Intersectionality, African American, Women

ReShanta C. Hazelbaker

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*(Name of Student)*

12/07/2018

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Date

BELIEVING IN ACHIEVING: EXAMINING AFRICAN AMERICAN  
WOMEN'S DOCTORAL ATTAINMENT

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### DEDICATION

First and foremost, thank you God for the grace, mercy, and bountiful blessings you bestowed upon me throughout this journey. I am thankful to be a child of God. Jeremy, Brayden, and Chloe Brielle, you all are the loves of my life. I dedicate this dissertation to each of you. Thank you for loving and supporting me throughout this process. You all are my blessings!!

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The value of education was conveyed to me at an early age. My parents would discuss their missed opportunities for education and explain to me “why” they would not allow me to travel a similar path. I can recall our weekend walks through the city; my parents would have frank discussions with me regarding the consequences and rewards of education. They shared examples, such as the man who went to school with my dad but later dropped out, only to become addicted to drugs and live a life on the street that consisted of begging for money; the once beautiful and ambitious woman whose drug addiction caused her to wander the streets and later be committed to a mental institution; the family members who pursued and achieved higher education, who were leading the life my parents wanted for us; and those who, because of their education, were afforded jobs that allowed them the family time we so deeply coveted with our dad, but were relegated to weekends due to his long work weeks. “One choice” he would remind me, “...is all it takes.”

From my childhood through adulthood, my parents exemplified the value of education. My father provided an example, kissing me on the cheek as he left for work before the sun had risen and returning home to kiss me on the cheek right before bed. His enduring sacrifice to provide a better life for our family did not go unnoticed. My father often reminded me that he worked long hours to provide for us but never wanted us to work like he did. He’d often say



“Shan, I want you to have a career, go to college and graduate school, earn degrees and have a career so that you won’t have to work like I do.” My mother, who forewent her college education so she could devote her life to her family and ensure that we had the knowledge to make it in a world where we would have to work “twice as hard,” exemplified what it meant to never give up on your dreams. She’d often tell me, “You just wait, one day I am going to go back and earn my degree” and she did. At the age of 55, my mother earned a bachelor’s degree in Social Work.

I began my journey toward doctoral attainment inspired by the challenges and successes experienced by those who came before me and those who I walk with today. It is their unwavering resolve to pursue a better life for our family, their family, and the African American community that sustained my journey toward doctoral attainment. This journey was not easy; it tested my resolve, challenged my self-beliefs, and left me with questions. As an African American woman pursuing a doctorate, I felt challenged in every aspect of my life. I questioned: Will my research be embraced? After all, I am exploring African American women who have succeeded, rather than failed, at achieving their doctoral degrees. How do I reconcile the familial sacrifices I made, as a wife, mother, daughter, and sister, to achieve the doctoral degree? Does my family really understand?

I was inspired to never give up, so when I was confronted with challenges that tested my resolve, I pushed forward. I sacrificed over

a decade of my life to achieve doctoral attainment with many asking WHY didn't I quit? WHY did it take me so long? I reflected on my familial experiences, my family's beliefs in me, my self-beliefs, the sacrifices of my family, the sacrifices of others, the sacrifices that were made FOR ME. I recalled the afternoon when I received notification that my application for acceptance to a graduate program had been denied. I was distressed. I sat in the university hallway crying and feeling like a failure because I felt my rejection would let everyone down. After all, I would have been the first of my parent's and in-law's children to achieve acceptance into a doctoral program. As I sat there crying, in shock, an African American man, a former dean of the college, approached me in the hallway concerned by my distress. He spoke with me and, in that brief conversation, conveyed his beliefs in me and my potential as a doctoral student. He took me to meet the African American woman who would become my chair, who also believed in me. My chair would later introduce me to an African American man, fairly new to the department, who would become my co-chair; he believed in me. My husband who, when confronted with the prospects of me leaving my job to pursue my doctoral studies full-time, looked at me and said, "we've got this"; he believed in me. My children, who have only known life with their mother as a doctoral student, believed in me. My siblings, who continuously encouraged me, they believed in me. My parents, who claimed my doctoral attainment when my confidence faltered, they believed in me. It is these experiences, and others alike, that

influenced and sustained my beliefs for doctoral achievement. I didn't quit because even when I had difficult days, God believed in me, I still believed in myself, my family believed in me, others believed in me, and ultimately it is those beliefs that influenced my doctoral research and achievement.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

An examination of African American women's degree completion rates at the post-secondary and doctoral level shows that African American women have achieved the vast majority of degrees conferred to African American students (Snyder, de Brey, & Dillow, 2018). Data illustrating post-secondary graduation rates for African American women reveal that only in 1940 (1.2 % vs. 1.4 %), 1970 (5.6 % vs. 6.8 %), 1990 (10.8 % vs. 11.9 %), and 1995 (13 % vs. 13.7 %) did African American women not earn the majority of bachelor or graduate/professional degrees awarded to African American students (Snyder, de Brey, & Dillow, 2018). Further, a recent report (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017) examining the 2013-2014 percentage distribution of master's and doctorate degrees awarded by race and gender to White, Black, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, and two or more race students found that African American women earned the highest percentages (64 %) of doctoral degrees awarded to students.

While such statistics illustrate, quantitatively, the doctoral degree achievements of African American women, they fail to explain these experiences within the intersectionality of African American women's race, class, and gender. From a majoritarian narrative, the increased doctoral degree attainments of African American women could be interpreted as an indication that race, class, and gender are no longer significant issues in African American women's pursuit and

attainment of the doctoral degree. However, through a critical lens, it is recognized that the experiences of African American women extend beyond a veneer of statistics to include the experiential knowledge that only the African American women behind these statistics can provide. For example, while African American women attain the majority of doctoral degrees awarded to African American students (Snyder, de Brey, & Dillow, 2018), they also have the longest median time to degree (Sowell, Allum, & Okahana, 2015). Moreover, African American women graduating with a bachelor's degree carry the highest student loan debt (Miller, 2017), and are among the African American graduate school students owing more than \$50,000 in student loan debt thereafter (Scott-Clayton & Li, 2016). Upon graduating with their doctorate, African American women are confronted with a reality that includes lower salaries (Bradburn & Sikora, 2002), as well as decreased tenure status among all men and women (Curtis, 2014). However, despite the potential reality of amassing increased amounts of student loan debt (Scott-Clayton & Li, 2016), decreased salaries (Bradburn & Sikors, 2002), and being less likely to receive tenure (Curtis, 2014), increased numbers of African American women continue to pursue and attain doctoral degrees (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017). The percentages of African American women achieving their doctorates suggest these women believe in achieving and achieving at the highest levels, but until African American women doctoral achievers share their truths, the story behind the statistics, the beliefs that influenced them to achieve cannot



be understood. Understanding African American women's doctoral attainment beliefs is salient in explaining how these beliefs are influenced and who and/or what influences them. Through a critical lens, one can elucidate the doctoral degree achievements of African American women within the intersectionality of their race, class, and gender and glean the understanding this research seeks.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study examines African American women's doctoral attainment beliefs through an intersectional lens of race, class, and gender. Specifically, through an application of Critical Race Theory framework, this research sought to explore and understand the sources of self-efficacy that were influential in African American women's ability to complete doctoral education. Intersectionality refers to "the theoretical concept that race intersects with other subordinated identities (such as gender, class, religion, ability/disability, and sexual orientation) and forms of oppression (sexism, homophobia, ableism) to influence People of Color's lived experiences" (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015, p. 93). The four sources of self-efficacy included mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasions, and physiological state (Bandura, 1997). I believed that the messages, mindsets, and experiences explored among the African American female participants could be aligned with the four sources of self-efficacy beliefs. Below are research questions selected for this study.

### **Research Questions**

Critical race theorists posit that educational disparities are often

explained through a majoritarian narrative, which draws on the experiences of those from privileged groups (i.e., Whites, males, and those from higher socioeconomic status) and is constructed to make the experiences of the privileged normative (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Critical race methodology counters the majoritarian narrative imposed on marginalized groups; hence, countering majoritarian stories (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Through the application of a critical race framework, experiential knowledge (counter-narratives), intersectionality, and commitment to social justice (McCoy & Rodrick, 2015) were applied in exploring the socialization messages, from the sources of self-efficacy (i.e., mastery experiences, vicarious learning, social persuasions, physiological states), identified by participants as influencing their doctoral attainment beliefs. To this end, a thematic analysis, informed by a critical race framework, of participant survey and narrative responses was employed to answer the following questions:

1. What factors have influenced the doctoral degree pursuit and attainment of African American women?
2. How does the intersectionality of race, class, and gender shape the sources of self-efficacy that influences African American women's doctoral attainment beliefs?

---

It should be noted that "People of Color," "Students of Color," "Faculty of Color," "Scholars of Color," "Women of Color," "Men of Color," and "Scientist of Color" are capitalized throughout this manuscript as a means of rejecting the marginalization of these groups and edifying their significance in extant literature.

The following section discusses the theoretical selection for this research.

### **Theoretical Selection**

Social cognitive theory advances reciprocal determinism, the view that personal, behavioral, and environmental factors facilitate one's actions and reactions to their environment (Bandura, 1986). Reciprocal determinism illuminates the interactive relationship between personal, behavioral, and environmental factors influencing African American women's doctoral attainment beliefs (Bandura, 1997). This research seeks to explore the socialization messages influencing African American women's doctoral attainment beliefs. Thus, the inter-relationship between personal, behavioral, and environmental factors influencing, and influenced by, African American women's behaviors is central to their self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy is defined as "people's judgment of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances" (Bandura, 1986, p. 391).

From the lens of reciprocal determinism, an African American woman may believe she can attain a doctoral degree given that her personal, behavioral, and environmental factors aligned with this belief. This self-belief (i.e., personal factor) may have developed from environmental factors, such as her school and classroom environments, and/or experiences over time. Such environmental influences may result in her engaging in academic behaviors that forward her goals of doctoral degree attainment. Thus, personal, behavioral, and environmental factors are central to the agency

exercised in the African American woman's self-efficacy beliefs. Paramount to the agency African American women exercise in forwarding their doctoral attainment are the sources that underlie their self-efficacy beliefs. Self-efficacy beliefs are developed through four sources: 1) mastery experience, 2) vicarious experience, 3) social persuasions, and 4) physiological state (Bandura, 1997). The following section provides a detailed description of the sources underlying self-efficacy beliefs and the contribution of each to African American women's doctoral attainment beliefs.

### **Sources of self-efficacy**

**Mastery experiences.** Mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion, and physiological state comprise the four sources of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) and each has centrality to the doctoral degree attainment of African American women. Mastery experiences, defined by an individual's experiences of failure and success in achieving a goal, have been shown to be a significant source of self-efficacy, as repeated successes serve to increase one's appraisal of efficacy, while repeated experiences of failure serve to lower it (Bandura, 1997). For example, an African American woman who is uncertain of her capabilities to achieve in a certain class may gain confidence by repeatedly doing well on exams in the class, which could positively influence her beliefs in her capacity for continued success.

**Vicarious experiences.** The second source of self-efficacy, vicarious

experience, is provided through observation and interactions with social models like one's self (Bandura, 1997). For African American women pursuing or considering doctoral degree attainment, vicarious experiences involving direct and/or indirect contact with an African American woman who has attained a doctoral degree could positively influence her beliefs in her capabilities to achieve doctoral attainment. Fry Brown, Collins, Watson, Bell, and Crowell's (2014) examination of the reflective self-efficacy beliefs of 11 recent college graduates (nine African American, one European American, one Bi-Racial African American/Asian; 10 women, 1 man) identified role models as significant sources of support, as they exemplified the benefits of a college education.

**Social persuasions.** In addition to African American women's vicarious experiences, social persuasions are an additional source of self-efficacy and are defined as the social expression of beliefs in a person's capabilities. For example, having a parent express belief in their African American daughter's capabilities for pursuing a doctorate encourages her and thus, strengthens her belief in her capabilities to pursue a doctorate (McCallum, 2016). McCallum's (2016) research examining familial contribution to the doctoral pursuit of 41 African Americans (62% female) found that familial expectations contributed to their doctoral pursuits.

**Physiological and affective states.** The final source of self-efficacy, physiological and affective state, is defined as "somatic information conveyed by physiological and emotional states"

(Bandura, 1997, p. 106). An example of physiological and affective state in an African American woman could be described in terms of her experiencing stereotype threat or feelings of “being at risk of confirming...a negative stereotype about one's group” (Steele & Aronson, 1995, (p. 797). Stereotype threat can invoke feelings of anxiety within an African American woman, taking a science exam in a class of predominantly White male students. As the only African American woman in the class, she may fear performing poorly on the exam will confirm the stereotype that African American women are not good at science. Bandura (1986) asserted “by conjuring up fear-provoking thoughts [such as those associated with stereotype threat] ...people can produce the very dysfunctions they may fear” (p. 401).

Bandura (1997) noted “people's level of motivation, affective states, and actions are based more on what they believe than on what is objectively true” (p. 2). Accordingly, an African American woman’s appraisal of her capabilities, her internalization of others’ appraisals of her capabilities, the observing of social others being successful, and her own experiences with success within a valued domain are central to her doctoral pursuits. For this reason, gaining an understanding of how the intersectionality of African American women’s race, class, and gender shapes the sources of self-efficacy influencing African American women’s doctoral attainment beliefs is important.

## **Significance of the Study**

Within the field of educational psychology, qualitative research exploring the sources underlying self-efficacy beliefs among African American college students has been limited (Charleston & Leon, 2016; Fry Brown et al., 2014; Noble, 2011), with most primarily focused on predominately White college student populations within science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) disciplines (Hutchinson-Green, Follman & Bodner, 2008; Usher, 2009; Usher, Mamaril, Li, Economy, & Kennedy, 2015; Usher & Pajares, 2008; Zeldin, Britner, & Pajares, 2008; and Zeldin & Pajares, 2000). Over a decade ago, educational psychologists began declaring the need for research that explores sources of self-efficacy amongst Students of Color, including African American (Pajares, 2007; Usher & Pajares, 2008). This exploration is still needed, as there is still much to be learned about the sources of self-efficacy among Students of Color, particularly African American women. Extant literature exploring the sources of self-efficacy among African American women doctoral achievers is scant, with the stories of African American women hidden behind: a) statistics (Turner, González, & Wong, 2011); monolithic studies of African American students as a group (Fry Brown et al., 2014); or within studies of predominantly White college student population (Usher, et al., 2015).

Identifying and expanding the existing body of self-efficacy literature to include the sources of self-efficacy that are resonant to African American women's doctoral attainment beliefs and how race,

class, and gender intersect to shape these sources is an invaluable tool for educators and students. Understanding how the sources of self-efficacy influencing African American women's doctoral attainment beliefs are shaped by their intersecting identities also adds to the research base on African American women doctoral achievers. Patton (2015) asserted "the curriculum . . . excludes diverse perspectives and allows the rights of use and enjoyment via a Eurocentric lens that aligns more with White people's experiences" (p. 320). Given this, the academy should pursue substantive steps toward fostering African American women's doctoral pursuit and attainment. This can begin with research executed for the purpose of understanding the lived experiences of African American women doctoral achievers and translating what is learned from their stories to inclusive practices that sustain them through the academy and beyond.

### **Glossary of Terms**

1. Black/African American- A person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa (NCES, 2014)
2. Doctoral Degree- the conferment of an Educational Doctorate and/or Doctorate of Philosophy degree.
3. Intersectionality- denotes the various ways in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of [African American women's] ... experiences... (Crenshaw, 1989, p.1244).
4. White- A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North (NCES, 2014)



## **Organization of Dissertation**

The following, chapter two, consists of two sections: (1) Self-efficacy and (2) Critical Race Theory. The first section provides a detailed review of self-efficacy literature attendant to sources of self-efficacy and related methodologies. The second section concludes with a review of Critical Race Theory literature and its significance as an analytical framework. The section reviews literature pertaining to the history of Critical Race Theory (Ladson-Billing & Tate, 1995), including CRT tenets in higher education (McCoy & Rodrick, 2015), and CRT in the academy (Patton, 2015; McCoy & Rodrick, 2015).

I utilized online databases in obtaining literature for this chapter, using the terms, African American, Critical race theory, CRT, doctoral degree, higher education, Intersectionality, Ph.D., Self-efficacy, socialization, and women in varied combinations. This study aims to utilize Critical Race Theory as an analytical framework to analyze the sources of self-efficacy (i.e., mastery experiences, vicarious learning, social persuasions, physiological state) identified as influencing participants' doctoral attainment beliefs. As such, studies included in this research were limited to literature that explored theories, methodologies, and populations relative to this aim.

## **CHAPTER II: COMPREHENSIVE LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Self-efficacy**

Within the field of education, of significance is redressing educational disparities (American Psychological Association, 2014). In 1996, Pajares asserted research in educational psychology should include qualitative inquiries “aimed at exploring how efficacy beliefs are developed, how students perceived that these beliefs influence their academic attainments and the academic paths they follow” (p. 566). In the current year, Pajares’ (1996) assertion is still relevant to research. This research, in part, answers Pajares’ (1996) call to action in that it critically explores how African American women developed their doctoral attainment beliefs. In exploring the intersectionality of race, class, and gender within sources of self-efficacy, this research draws from previous qualitative research exploring sources of self-efficacy beliefs among college students (Charleston & Leon, 2016; Fry Brown et al., 2014; Hutchinson-Green et al., 2008; Noble, 2011; Usher, 2009; Usher et al., 2015; Usher & Pajares, 2008; Zeldin et al., 2008; and Zeldin & Pajares, 2000). The following section illuminates qualitative research that has explored the sources of self-efficacy relative to collegiate degree and career attainment.

### **Qualitative self-efficacy research**

In their seminal work, Zeldin and Pajares (2000) explored sources of self-efficacy to identify how the self-efficacy beliefs of 15 women (13 White, one Latin American, one Japanese American) with

careers in STEM were developed and contributed to their academic and career paths. Zeldin and Pajares (2000) utilized a nine-item, open- interview protocol from their previous study (Pajares & Zeldin, 1999). Four of the questions included in the protocol directly explored sources of self-efficacy interview protocol from their previous study (Pajares & Zeldin, 1999). Four of the questions included in the protocol directly explored sources of self-efficacy:

1. What experiences contributed to your decision to pursue your occupation? - Mastery experiences
2. How were you influenced by others? -Vicarious experiences
3. What did people (family/teachers/peers/and culture) say to you as you were pursuing mathematics (science or technology)? What sort of sociocultural messages did you get? -Social persuasions
4. How would you describe your feelings and beliefs about mathematics (science or technology) as you were pursuing it?” (Zeldin & Pajares, p. 243) - Physiological state.

Utilizing a case-study analysis, Zeldin and Pajares (2000) explored commonalities and patterns of relationships between the data. Findings revealed vicarious experiences and social persuasions — among family members, teachers, peers, and supervisors — were central in the development of participants’ confidence in a STEM-related career (Zeldin & Pajares, 2000).

Consequently, 10 out of 15 women recalled vicarious

experiences and social persuasions with family members who modeled STEM skills or had a STEM-related career (Zeldin & Pajares, 2000). Women participants also asserted the significance of support, such as working in groups with their peers (Zeldin & Pajares, 2000). Moreover, Zeldin and Pajares (2000) found participants were “especially attentive and susceptible to encouragement from those about whom they cared and with whom they felt a relational bond” (p. 238). Zeldin and Pajares (2000) suggested that messages from significant others (e.g., parents, teachers, peers) conveying confidence in women’s capabilities served to bolster their self-efficacy beliefs and encourage them when confronted with challenges.

Hutchinson-Green et al. (2008) sought to qualitatively extend self-efficacy research to include an exploration of how students form their self-efficacy beliefs, interviewing 12 engineering students (five women, one African American) in a first-year engineering course to explore how experiences in a first-year engineering course influenced their engineering efficacy beliefs, and how interpretations of these experiences shaped their engineering confidence. Students completed pre- and mid-semester, semi- structured, open-ended interviews (Hutchinson-Green et al., 2008) in which they answered questions relating to each source of self-efficacy. Hutchinson-Green et al. (2008) posed the following interview questions:

1. What experiences have contributed to how confident you are that you will be/have been successful in ENGR 106? How did these experiences affect you? - Mastery

experiences/Vicarious experiences

2. How have other people influenced how you think you will do/are doing in ENGR 106? - Vicarious experiences/Social persuasions
3. What have people said to you that has affected your confidence in your success in ENGR 106? - Social persuasions
4. When thinking about [or doing] ENGR 106, how do you feel? - Physiological state (p.181).

Data from the interviews were coded relative to the four sources of self-efficacy: 1) mastery experiences, 2) vicarious experiences, 3) social persuasion, and 4) physiological state (Bandura, 1986). Additionally, a fifth code, other, was created to categorize data outside of the four sources of self-efficacy. Reliability and validity of the data were obtained through member checking, which provided participants an opportunity to review and verify the researchers' conclusions (Hutchinson-Green et al., 2008).

Pre-semester interviews revealed that students were confident in their ability to succeed based on their previous academic successes in classes they had completed while in high school. Conversely, mid-semester interviews indicated that vicarious experiences, by way of comparing their performance to peers, became the dominant source of students' confidence. Notably, the self-efficacy beliefs of women were negatively influenced when they compared their performance to that of their peers (Hutchinson-Green et al., 2008). Although racial and class differences were not discussed in this study, gender differences were. Relative to mastery experiences,

Hutchinson-Green et al. (2008) found that women often described the challenges they experienced prior to their mastery experiences when citing performance accomplishments, while men tended to focus only on their accomplishments, not the failures they experienced along the way. Hutchinson-Green et al. (2008) suggested that this difference may result from women's propensity to focus on negative experiences. Among participants, only women described instances of non-verbal persuasions as affecting their confidence in ENGR106. For example, an African American woman participant noted she gleaned indirect encouragement through her ability to communicate her questions and contribute to projects asserting, "...that's how I get encouragement. Because it's never directly, "[Jenny] you're doing a good job," but just to know that I'm able to, um, I guess kind of, ah, like we're equally yoked" (Hutchinson-Green et al., 2008, p. 185).

Similar to Hutchinson-Green et al.'s (2008) exploration of sources underlying self-efficacy among students in engineering, Zeldin et al. (2008) explored how the sources of self-efficacy were formed and influenced the confidence of men and women with STEM careers. Zeldin, Britner, and Pajares (2008) qualitatively examined the sources of self-efficacy beliefs among 10 Caucasian males to ascertain how their self- efficacy beliefs were formed and influenced their careers in STEM disciplines. Further, Zeldin et al. (2008) sought to compare their findings from their study with data collected from Zeldin and Pajares' (2000) previous research, which explored the development and influence of self-efficacy beliefs on the career and

academic paths of 15 women in male- dominated fields. Employing a case study methodology, Zeldin et al. (2008) asked open- ended questions relative to participants' background and sources of self- efficacy including:

1. What experiences contributed to your decision to pursue your occupation? - Mastery experience
2. How were you influenced by others? -Vicarious experience
3. What did people say to you as you were pursuing mathematics (science or technology)? (Family/Teachers/ Peers/ Culture) What sort of sociocultural messages did you get? -Verbal persuasion
4. How would you describe your feelings and beliefs about mathematics (science or technology) as you were pursuing it? - Physiological state
  - a. How did pursuing mathematics (science, technology) make you feel?
  - b. What are your beliefs about what you do, or the area for which you were preparing yourself to have a career?
  - c. What are your emotional responses about your area of interest? (p. 1056).

Utilizing a cross-case analysis, Zeldin et al. (2008) analyzed data in two stages. First, responses given by the male participants were analyzed collectively as an individual case, with the researchers seeking to ascertain commonalities and patterns of relationships relative to the career

beliefs of the men participating in the study. Next, a cross-case analysis between data from their study and data collected from Zeldin and Pajares' (2000) previous research was employed.

Zeldin et al.'s (2008) results revealed that mastery experiences were the central sources of men's self-efficacy beliefs and instrumental in the formation of their STEM careers, with men recalling their innate abilities and successful internships in STEM. Social persuasions, in the form of indirect encouragement from family members, teachers, and peers were recalled by male participants (Zeldin et al., 2008). Men viewed vicarious experiences as reinforcing their self-efficacy beliefs for and informing how they achieved STEM careers (Zeldin et al., 2008). As compared to men, women participants from Zeldin and Pajares' (2000) previous study cited vicarious experiences and social persuasion as instrumental in their STEM paths, and in influencing their beliefs in their capabilities to pursue and achieve in a male-dominated field. Zeldin et al. (2008) highlighted the distinctions in the sources underlying the self-efficacy beliefs of men and women with STEM careers, and the need for research exploring self-efficacy among underrepresented and minority populations.

Noble (2011) explored the mathematics self-efficacy beliefs of six African American men attending Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) located in the south Atlantic states. Noble (2011) employed qualitative methods, collecting mathematics autobiographies in which participants detailed their mathematics experiences within and beyond the educational setting. In addition to submitting their mathematics



autobiography, participants participated in individual interviews which were audio-taped and lasted up to one hour. Individual interviews were conducted to expound upon findings from the mathematics autobiography and “to discuss the interplay of self-efficacy, motivation, and academic achievement” (Noble, 2011, p. 195).

Data analysis occurred in many stages. First, the data were analyzed for errors and consistency across findings and triangulated to ensure the reliability of codes and themes (Noble, 2011). Noble (2011) coded the data for transparent, abstract, and intricate themes, developing a codebook to further triangulate data collected from participants’ transcripts. Noble (2011) employed quality and reliability strategies including: 1) data triangulation - collected data from multiple sources for analyzing and increasing reliability of finding, 2) member checking - allowed participants to provide feedback relative to interpreting the data; and 3) peer debriefing – a colleague reviewed the researcher’s interpretation of the data for confirming and/or challenging data interpretation.

Findings from Noble’s (2011) analysis revealed that, among the four sources of self-efficacy impacting the mathematics experiences of the African American male participants, vicarious experience and enactive attainment were the most significant. Noble (2011) highlighted the importance of vicarious experiences in African American men’s’ mathematics experiences. Specifically, participants in Noble’s (2011) research cited vicarious experiences

with: a) teachers characterized for their caring, motivating and knowledgeable nature; b) peers relative to academic comparisons and teaming; and c) family “as academic role models” (p. 202). Noble (2011) cited the centrality of increasing the number of African American male educators, encouragement and support of mathematics abilities from family, teachers, and peers; and exploring the initial development of African American males’ self-efficacy beliefs to African American males’ confidence and success in mathematics.

Fry Brown et al. (2014) examined the reflective self-efficacy beliefs of 11 college graduates (nine African Americans, one European American, one Bi-Racial African American/Asian; 10 women, one man) relative to their abilities to overcome obstacles and successfully attain an undergraduate degree. Fry Brown et al. (2014) utilized a 16-question interview protocol, with seven open-ended questions from the General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE) (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995, as cited in Fry Brown et al., 2014).

Seeking to enhance the robustness of findings, Fry Brown et al. (2014) continuously grouped statements and themes to achieve a master list of the most frequently articulated responses conveyed by participants. Findings identified the following themes as forwarding participants’ degree goals: “support received from family, peers/friends, and institutions; the role of faith or religion played in the handling of adversity; and personal commitments these students have made to themselves, family members, and to others” (Fry

Brown et al., 2014, p. 101). Among the four sources of self-efficacy, social persuasion and physiological/emotional state experiences were cited across all three themes; mastery experience was attendant to personal commitment; and vicarious experiences were relative to support and personal commitment. Interestingly, several participants attributed their perseverance to a female/woman relative. Fry Brown et al. (2014) suggested future research investigating the role of male relatives in fostering and supporting familial educational pursuits. Usher et al.'s (2015) exploration of sources of self-efficacy also cited the significance of family in fostering self-efficacy beliefs; the results from that research are discussed below.

Usher et al. (2015) investigated sources of self-efficacy among 365 (106 female) undergraduate engineering students from two universities located in the southeastern United States. Data from participants were collected through a computerized survey which included five open-ended questions, and one open-selection question, grouped into categories based on the four sources of self-efficacy: mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion, and physiological and affective states. Usher et al. (2015) sought to explore “how students describe and recall experiences related to their engineering self-efficacy” (Purpose of the Study, para.1).

Usher et al. (2015) created four categories, corresponding to the sources of self- efficacy; and one category, other, for outlier responses. Two researchers cross-checked data to ensure inter-rater reliability (i.e., consensus regarding ratings among raters). Inter-coder reliability

(i.e., consistent conclusion regarding codes among raters) was achieved through randomly sampling participants' (100) responses and calculating "the ratio of the number of coding agreements to the total number of agreements plus disagreements" (Usher et al., 2015, Analyses, para. 3). Coding consistency among data was cross-checked by two researchers. First-level coding assigned responses to sources of self-efficacy — mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion, physiological and affective states — or the category designated as other. Second-level coding was employed to highlight intra-source distinctions. Results from Usher et al. (2015) were explored within the context of each source of self-efficacy and its corresponding questions. Participant responses are discussed below.

Questions for mastery experiences included: "What events have affected your confidence in your engineering skills?" and "Can you think of a specific event that made you feel more confident in your engineering capabilities?" (Usher et al., 2015). Responses to these questions and accompanying examples were assigned to one of three categories: mastery experience, social persuasion, and vicarious experience. Relative to each category, the most frequent responses given by women were as follows: 1) mastery experience-performance attainment, 2) social persuasions-teachers/professors, and 3) vicarious experience-social comparisons. Similar to the findings of Hutchinson-Green et al., (2008), Usher et al. (2015) found that the performance attainments of some participants were relative to performance comparisons with their peers and performance

persuasions, which included perceptions of unfair grading policies.

Women in Usher et al.'s (2015) study also answered questions relating to their vicarious experiences: "Which ways were you exposed to engineers in your life?" and "Of the ways you have been exposed to engineers in your life, which one has been most influential to you?". Just as the women participants in Zeldin and Pajares' (2000) and Zeldin et al.'s (2008) research, women participating in the research of Usher et al. (2015) most frequently cited vicarious experiences and social persuasions from family members as the most influential sources of self-efficacy. Relative to vicarious experiences, women indicated they were most frequently exposed to engineers through reading about engineers or having a family member who is an engineer. Usher et al. (2015) noted that, among the participants, women (35%) were most likely to have had a parent who was an engineer.

Although women most frequently reported being exposed to an engineer through reading, participants did not cite this exposure as a significant influence (Usher et al., 2015). The most influential source of engineering among women were vicarious experiences with parents/family (44%). Similarly, parents/family were frequently identified in women's responses to the social persuasion question, "Has anyone encouraged or inspired you to be an engineer? If so, who? How did they encourage or inspire you?" (Usher et al., 2015). Direct messages were also frequently cited by women participants as the main form of social persuasion.

Finally, Usher et al. (2015) explored physiological and affective states by asking participants to “Please describe how you typically feel when doing engineering work?”. Women most frequently expressed positive feelings when doing engineering work but, in contrast, the second most frequent response cited by women described negative feelings toward doing engineering work, with women describing feelings of angst and pressure (Usher et al., 2015). Usher et. al (2015) highlighted the benefit of qualitatively exploring sources of self-efficacy, particularly physiological and affective states, asserting: “Results from the open-ended questionnaire used in this study demonstrate the complexity of efficacy-relevant physiological states and feelings associated with engineering work. This might have been difficult to capture quantitatively” (Physiological and Affective States, para.2).

Charleston and Leon (2016) explored factors within the context of the sources underlying self-efficacy beliefs that contributed to the computer science degree and career pursuit of 23 African American graduate students (10 female, 3 male), and professors (4 female, 6 male) who attended or were attending a predominantly White institution (PWI) or historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU). Utilizing qualitative inquiry, Charleston and Leon (2016) conducted individual interviews in which participants answered questions, closed- and open-ended, relative to their experiences within the field of computer science; data were analyzed using a directed approach in which coding of data was guided by a theory.

Charleston and Leon (2016) coded and categorized data relative to the four sources underlying self-efficacy beliefs: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, encouragement from others, and emotional arousal. To enhance the robustness of findings, Charleston and Leon (2016) employed member checking, in which participants provided feedback relative to the interpreting of data; and reviewing the data findings to determine the need for additional codes and ensure consistency of the coded data. Findings from the study revealed participants identified “parents, professors, advisors, teachers and friends (who either majored in computing sciences, encouraged, supported and in some cases sponsored their interests) [as] enhancing and nourishing their interest and persistence in the field” (Charleston & Leon, 2016, p. 155). Performance accomplishments and vicarious experiences were conveyed through positive peer modeling and peer pressure from other African American students, with participants identifying their peer relationships as sources of encouragement for facilitating and sustaining them in their program of study (Charleston & Leon, 2016). Verbal persuasions from peers, particularly from those that were pursuing or had established a career in STEM, motivated participants’ socialization into STEM-related degree and career choices. Physiological and emotional arousal was expressed by way of the anxiety participants described relative to their persistence. For example, Charleston and Leon (2016) described the significance of mentorship in reducing the participants’ “emotional stress associated

with taking classes and performing well in classes” (p.160) and contributing to their doctoral attainment aspirations. Interestingly, female/woman participants attributed a lack of mentors and female/woman professors as reasons for their pursuit and attainment of a doctoral degree in the sciences.

The research presented in this section was selected to illustrate how the sources underlying self-efficacy have been studied in qualitative research and to illuminate the limited research that has qualitatively explored the sources of self-efficacy among African American women, particularly those who have earned a doctoral degree. The research discussed in this section highlighted the significance of vicarious experiences and social persuasion relative to women, including self-efficacy beliefs toward academic and career paths (Charleston & Leon, 2016; Hutchinson-Green et al., 2008; Usher et al., 2015; Usher & Pajares, 2008; Zeldin et al., 2008; Zeldin & Pajares, 2000). Central to the sources underlying the sources of self-efficacy among women participants were their vicarious experiences in the forms of performance comparisons (Hutchinson et al., 2006; Hutchinson-Green et al., 2008); familial modeling of STEM-related careers (Hutchinson et al., 2006; Hutchinson-Green et al., 2008; Usher, 2009; Usher et al., 2015); and social persuasions stemming from direct messages (Charleston & Leon, 2016; Hutchinson et al., 2006; Zeldin & Pajares, 2000; Zeldin et al., 2008; Usher et al., 2015), and indirect messages (Charleston & Leon, 2016; Hutchinson-Green et al., 2008; Usher et al., 2015). Consequently, family was a source of vicarious



experiences and social persuasions cited by participants in most of the research (Charleston & Leon, 2016; Fry Brown et al., 2014; Hutchinson-Green et al., 2008; Noble, 2011; Usher et al., 2015; Zeldin et al., 2008; Zeldin & Pajares, 2000) reviewed in this section.

Relative to women, the research reviewed in this section revealed the saliency of vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and family underlying the self-efficacy beliefs among White women research participants. However, questions such as the saliency of vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and the contribution of family relative to African American women's self-efficacy beliefs were only illuminated within the research of Charleston and Leon (2016) and Hutchinson-Green et al. (2008). To date, research that has directly explored the sources of self-efficacy underlying the doctoral attainment beliefs of African American women remains scant. A total of 442 individuals participated in the research discussed in this section; among them, 40 were African American and 23 identified as African American women. While 23 African American women were included in the research presented within this section, their voices were heard less than 12 times (Charleston & Leon, 2016; Hutchinson-Green et al., 2008), with the voices of the other African American women identified in the research "buried within studies that report results under categories such as women" (Turner, González, & Wong, 2011, p. 200). By exploring African American women's doctoral attainment beliefs within the context of the sources of self-efficacy, the voices of African American women doctoral achievers and the

experiential knowledge they possess is illuminated and no longer relegated to an inconsequential presence in extant research.

### **Critical Race Theory**

Critical race theory (CRT) emerged in legal scholarship in response to the Civil Rights Movement (Tate, 1997). CRT scholarship seeks to illuminate race and racism and its intersectionality among dominant and marginalized groups (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Critical race theory is utilized in educational research as an analytical framework that examines and challenges issues of race, racism, and the intersectionality of subordinated identities with race (Ladson-Billings, 2013; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Within extant educational literature, critical race theory has been used to illuminate the experiences of African Americans within the academy (Harper, 2012; Johnson-Bailey, Valentine, Cervero, & Bowles, 2009; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015; Patton, 2016) and has been generally employed by education scholars (Daniel, 2007; DeCuir & Dixon, 2004; Harper, 2012; Harper & Davis III, 2012; Harris, Barone, & Davis, 2015; Hiraldo, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2013; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; McCoy, 2014; Patton, 2016; Yosso, Parker, Solórzano & Lynn, 2004) as a framework for illuminating the experiences of Students and Faculty of Color within the academy.

The studies included in this section were selected to enhance an understanding of CRT as a framework for exploring the intersectionality of race, class, gender within the sources of self-efficacy underlying the socialization messages influencing African American women's doctoral attainment beliefs. While the selected

literature does not focus exclusively on the population identified for this study (i.e., African American women doctoral degree achievers), each study described below enhances an understanding of CRT and its salience as an analytical framework.

### **Critical Race Theory (CRT) in higher education.**

Ladson-Billings and Tate's (1995) seminal work, *Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education*, identified the absence of, and need for, critical race theorizing in education. Their work offered three propositions: "1) race continues to be significant in the United States; 2) U.S. society is based on property rights rather than human rights; and 3) the intersection of race and property creates an analytical tool for understanding inequity" (p. 47). Ladson-Billing and Tate (1995) spoke to the necessity of critically theorizing race in educational scholarship and its utility as an analytical tool in illuminating racism and White hegemony within education. In commemoration of Ladson-Billings and Tate's (1995) scholarship of CRT in education, Patton (2016) extended their work (Ladson- Billing & Tate, 1995) to include an understanding of CRT in higher education. Patton (2016) offered three propositions:

**Proposition 1:** The establishment of U.S. higher education is deeply rooted in racism/White supremacy, the vestiges of which remain palatable.

**Proposition 2:** The functioning of U.S. higher education is intricately linked to imperialistic and capitalistic efforts that fuel the intersections of race, property, and oppression.

**Proposition 3:** U.S. higher education institutions serve as venues through which formal knowledge production rooted in racism/White supremacy is generated. (p. 317)

Patton's (2016) analogy of the first proposition was illustrated through Wilder's (2013) research examining the connection between slavery and Ivy League institutions of higher learning. Patton (2016) argued the establishment and maintaining of wealth amassed by Ivy League institutions is resultant of slavery. Citing Wilder (2013), Patton (2016) asserted "Governors and faculties used slave labor to raise and maintain their schools, and they made their campuses the intellectual and cultural playgrounds of the plantation and merchant elite" (p. 138). Thus, institutions of higher learning were established and maintained, to this day, through slavery. Citing Harvard University as the beholder of the largest university endowment (\$36.4 billion), Patton (2016) highlighted the failures of institutions, such as Harvard, to make substantive efforts towards acknowledging the slaves and slave labor that perpetuated their wealth: "it would be naïve to expect institutions to make more than symbolic efforts toward remedying their histories unless they have a vested interest that would ensure benefits" (p. 319). Consequently, shortly after Patton's (2016) publication, Harvard announced its intentions to install a plaque in memory of four African American slaves "who lived and worked there during the 18th century in the households of two Harvard presidents" (Faust, March 30, 2016, para.1) and plans to host a future conference exploring universities and slavery.

Given that institutions of higher learning were “beneficiaries and defenders” of slavery (Wilder, 2013, p. 1), indoctrinating its students (i.e., White men) into the slave trade proved central in facilitating and maintaining White supremacy in the academy. Wilder lamented “the founding, financing, and development of institutions of higher learning were thoroughly intertwined with the economic and social forces . . . through the slave trade” (p. 1), with many of the views espoused from the past, resonant in the academy today.

Patton (2016) explored her second proposition in terms of racist laws and curriculums through the intersection of race, property, and oppression in higher education, specifically, “the construction of race through law determined citizenship and property” (p. 320). Institutions of higher learning were premised on White hegemony. Thus, White supremacy was established and maintained in the academy based on laws that did not give African Americans citizenship which resulted in them being denied access to higher education. As such, racism, classism, sexism, and White supremacy can today be cyclically remanufactured (Harper, 2012) in higher education, and experienced by African American female/women doctoral students in the academy through its property: 1) Research minimizing racism (Harper, 2012), 2) White canon (Patton, 2016), Faculty (i.e., 84% White) (Kena et al., 2016); and 4) Doctoral degree conferment (i.e., 68% White female) (National Center Education Statistics, 2015).

Harper (2012) explored race-related research in 255 articles from seven peer-reviewed academic journals — The Review of Higher Education, The

Journal of Higher Education, Research in Higher Education, Journal of College Student Development, Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice, Community College Journal of Research and Practice, and Community College Review — to determine how scholars explain and rationalize race-related findings in their research. Harper (2012) found that scholars attributed race-related findings to: 1) “anything but racism” (p. 16) (i.e., institutional policies, level of comfort, student’s social background); 2) “common semantic substitutes” (p. 20) (i.e., word substitutes for “racism” and “racist”); and 3) “[Un]Critical Race Theory in higher education” (p. 20) (i.e., absence of CRT analysis in race-related findings). Harper (2012) concluded scholars’ failures to identify racist actions and racism as antecedents of their race-related findings demonetizes consideration of how racism impacts higher education and its ancillaries. Simply put, the failures of scholars to attribute and term their race-related findings as racism contribute to the legitimization of racism in the academy because it renders the racism experienced by subjugated groups invisible.

Similar to Harper’s (2012) conclusion, Patton’s (2016) third proposition identifies institutions of higher learning as bastions for the promulgation of knowledge steeped in racism. Patton (2016) asserted higher education has long perpetuated racism (i.e., White superiority); and eugenics, under the guise of “intellectualizing” its’ students. However, the “intellectualizing” of students serves to sustain and encourage the subordination of subjugated groups, such as African American women. Scholars of the academy should approach their research through a critical analytical lens that illuminates race and its

intersectionality with marginalized groups such as African American women pursuing doctoral degrees. Moreover, without efforts to combat and reconstruct the majoritarian hegemony developed and reinforced in higher education, the “cyclical remanufacturing of racism” (Harper, 2012, p. 23) will continue.

### **CRT as an Analytical Framework**

Hiraldo (2010) illuminated critical race theory as an analytical framework in higher education, describing the merit of the five tenets of critical race theory in analyzing higher education: 1) counter-storytelling, 2) the permanence of racism, 3) Whiteness as a property, 4) interest convergence; and 5) the critique of liberalism. Below is a summary of each tenet.

**Counter-storytelling.** Counter-storytelling is a tool for analyzing experiences of those marginalized by dominant ideologies permeating the academy (Hiraldo, 2010); including and conveying the lived experiences of People of Color and marginalized populations; and placing value on the experiential knowledge members of these groups possess (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015).

**Permanence of racism.** The permanence of racism can be applied as a tool for analyzing systemic racism and the perpetuation of racist ideologies within institutions of higher learning (Hiraldo, 2010) and how racism influences the doctoral attainment beliefs of African American women. For example, the permanence of racism can be remanufactured through majoritarian scholarship (Harper, 2012), faculty, and institutional

structures that privilege the majority while simultaneously “othering” the minority (Decuir & Dixon, 2004; McCoy & Rodrick, 2015).

**Whiteness as a property.** Whiteness as a property is the third tenet of CRT. Whiteness as a property in higher education can be explored in terms of ownership (Hirald, 2010) of curriculum, instruction, access, and opportunity. Examined through professors as the purveyors of knowledge, it must be noted that White professors represent 84% of those in the professorate, with over half (58%) being White men (Kena et al., 2016). Thus, as purveyors of knowledge, White men are the gatekeepers of what is selected, produced, and disseminated in the academy. As such, African American female/women doctoral students are reliant on the majority to provide them with access to “property” that encourages their growth and prepares them for the professorate.

**Interest convergence.** Interest convergence in higher education is a tool used to analyze how the gains of marginalized groups, such as African American female/woman doctoral students, are sought and advanced for the benefit of White hegemony. Interest convergence suggests that access and opportunities extended to minorities are contingent upon the potential benefits gained by the majority.

**Critique of liberalism.** Critique of liberalism is the fifth tenet of CRT. In higher education, a critique of liberalism “challenges the concepts of objectivity, meritocracy, color blindness, race neutrality, equal opportunity, and incremental change” (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015, p. 91). Within the academy, critique of liberalism can be examined in terms of an African American woman’s acceptance into a doctoral program and the efforts that extend beyond her doctoral acceptance to include work done to foster an inclusive climate that is



cognizant of her needs and fosters her growth as an African American female/woman doctoral student.

In 2015, McCoy and Rodricks expanded the tenets of critical race theory in higher education to include intersectionality and a commitment to social justice. The addition of these tenets provides for additional analysis of how the experiences of Students of Color are shaped by race and racism in higher education. As such, a description of each tenet is provided below.

**Intersectionality.** The term, intersectionality, was first introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) in her seminal works examining the challenges encountered by African American women in legal, feminist theory, identity, and antiracist politics discourse. Intersectionality, applied as an analysis is “the relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject formations” (McCall, 2005, p. 1771). Crenshaw (1991) critically explored how the experiences of Women of Color are shaped by the intersectionality of their race, class, and gender. As a tool of analysis, intersectionality identifies how the messages received by African American women pursuing doctoral degrees are shaped by their intersecting identities, such as race, class, and gender.

**Commitment to social justice.** Commitment to social justice is the final tenet of Critical Race Theory. Commitment to social justice is applied as an analysis of efforts to eradicate racism, sexism, and classism while empowering marginalized groups (Yosso et al., 2004), such as African American women pursuing doctorates. Two tenets of critical race theory were initially selected to inform this study’s illumination of the sources of self-efficacy that influence

African American women's doctoral attainment beliefs. Within this research, counter-storytelling is applied as a tool for elucidating the experiential knowledge shared by African American women doctoral achievers and conveying how the intersectionality of race, class, and gender shaped their doctoral attainment beliefs; and intersectionality serves as an analytical framework for exploring how the experiences of African American women doctoral students were shaped by their intersecting identities. Through a critical exploration of the voices of African American women doctoral achievers, CRT provides a contextualized understanding of the cognitive, social, and psychological factors (i.e., self-efficacy sources) that shape African American women's doctoral attainment. The following are examples of CRT frameworks applied to research in higher education.

### **CRT in the Academy**

Daniel (2007) employed critical race theory in examining the experiences of 15 African American and Latinx graduate students enrolled in a Master of Social Work program at a public predominantly White institution (PWI), specifically applying the following components of CRT in her study: personal narratives, permanence of racism, and a critique of liberalism. Daniel (2007) conducted semi-structured interviews exploring how participants' graduate experiences influenced their career paths. Daniel's (2007) analysis revealed participants' feelings of cultural and racial isolation, limited curriculum relative to Communities of Color, invisibility, inept relationships with faculty, saliency of Faculty Members of Color as mentors, significance of relationships with peers, lack of attention to race and diversity exhibited in field experiences, the

need for proactive measures that are responsive to Students of Color. Daniel's (2007) study contextualized the challenges experienced by graduate Students of Color and asserted the imperativeness of graduate programs to engage in practices that prepare its students for working in a multicultural society.

Harper and Davis III (2012) analyzed the counter-narratives of 304 Black male undergraduates attending colleges and universities throughout the United States, conducting a systemic content analysis of 304 essays submitted by African American males applying for admission to a graduate school prep academy. Harper and Davis (2012) explored how African American males

...philosophies of education were shaped, why they appeared to be so invested in education systems that were consistently criticized by them and others . . . , and how they reconciled career commitments to education alongside prior encounters with inequitable schooling (p. 110).

Findings from their study identified three prominent themes: "1) awareness of educational inequities; 2) beliefs in education as the great equalizer; and 3) purposeful pursuits of the Ph.D. in education" (p. 111). Harper and Davis' (2012) scholarship informs this proposed research by exemplifying a methodology to be used in the current work.

McCoy (2014) employed a critical race methodology with a phenomenological approach in exploring the experiences of eight (four males and four females) first- generation college Students of Color — two Asian Pacific Islanders, three Hispanic/Latinos, two African Americans, and one Antiguan/Black — transitioning from large urban areas to an "extreme"

predominantly White institution (EPWI). An EPWI is defined as:

... a predominantly White institution (PWI) where Students, Faculty, and Administrators of Color are significantly or grossly underrepresented (all Students of Color comprise eight -10% of the total enrollment); the institution possesses a history of racism and exclusionary policies and practices; the local/surrounding community is overwhelmingly White (exceeding 90%); offers limited resources and/or services for People of Color; and has no or few visible local [C]ommunities of [C]olor... (McCoy, 2014, p. 156).

McCoy (2014) employed stories and counter-stories to glean an understanding of the experiences of Students of Color transitioning from large, racially diverse urban areas to an EPWI. Utilizing audio-interviews, students responded to questions pertaining to their transition from racially and ethnically diverse communities to an institution lacking in diversity; the admissions process; who helped them transition; and how that person supported them. Findings from the study indicated four salient themes: high familial expectations/influence; a challenging and arduous admissions process; surmounting the challenging transition; and “culture shock in a sea of Whiteness.” (p. 163).

Two of the four themes emergent in this study illustrate the significance of self- efficacy sources within the experiences of Students of Color. At the EPWI, one self- efficacy source, social persuasion, is exemplified in the students’ narratives of “high familial expectations/influence”, as it is described as influencing the students’ pursuit of higher education. Cynthia, a 20-year-old junior majoring in secondary education lamented:

I had to go to college. It wasn’t, oh, do you want to go to college? It was ... you must go to college. [There] wasn’t a

question about it. My mom pushed me to go to college I was the first and she wanted me to do that. (McCoy, 2014, p.160).

The second theme, “culture shock in a sea of Whiteness” (p.163), has implications for the physiological and affective state source of self-efficacy, particularly when study participants had limited opportunities for socializing with other minority students due to the campus and community being overwhelmingly White. Dawn, a 21-year-old African American majoring in philosophy shared:

I never noticed how it could affect me until I got here. [Prior to enrolling at NEC] I was always around different people ... so it never really affected me or mattered but, when I [arrived] here and stood out and being in a classroom where I am the only Person of Color, it definitely made me feel different and awkward at times. (McCoy, 2014, p. 164).

McCoy’s (2014) examination of the experiences of first-generation college students’ transition from large urban areas to an EPWI supports the current study by illuminating the factors that influenced the experiences of Students of Color in higher education. CRT affords a contextualized understanding of these experiences for Students of Color by examining their academic lives through the lens of race. Research examined in this section sought to illuminate the application of CRT in the academy and its utility as a framework applied to research in higher education. The following methods chapter, chapter three, will provide a critical discussion of Critical Race Theory and its significance as an analytical framework.

### **Clarification of Researcher Bias**

As an African American woman pursuing a doctoral degree, this

research has personal meaning to me. I am exploring contextual, interpersonal, and cognitive/psychological factors that support or hinder African American women's doctoral attainment through the intersecting lenses of race, class, and gender. I chose this line of inquiry based on its limited inclusion in the extant literature, and to elucidate the voices of African American women who have achieved doctoral degree attainment. That personal meaning is reflective in this proposed research. It was the messages that I received from others that bolstered my self-beliefs and have sustained me throughout my doctoral pursuit. Given my passion for the proposed research, I will employ peer debriefing, allowing another colleague to review transcripts, to ensure that the eliciting and collection of data was obtained without bias; member checking, to allow participants an opportunity to confirm or disconfirm my interpretation of participant's responses; and data triangulation to ensure that participant's responses are accurately conveyed in data analysis.

### CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

Qualitative research seeks to describe and understand how individuals interpret the world around them within a socio-historical context (Glesne, 2016). Employing a qualitative methodology for this research was salient in that it forwards the voices of African American women doctoral achievers and the messages that influenced their doctoral attainment beliefs in extant literature. This research illuminated the lived experiences of African American women doctoral achievers and intersectionality of race, class, and gender within the socialization messages influencing their doctoral attainment beliefs. The lived experiences of the African American women doctoral achievers discussed in this research serve to illustrate the stories behind their statistics. Their shared stories convey the saliency of socialization messages and how these messages influenced the African American women participating in this research as they traveled the road to doctoral attainment.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) in education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) underpinned this research, as it contributed to the manner in which African American female/women doctoral students interpreted their doctoral experience. CRT in education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) is utilized by critical race theory scholars (Daniel, 2007; DeCuir & Dixon, 2004; Diggs, Garrison-Wade, Estrada, & Galindo, 2009; Dixon & Lynn, 2013; Harper & Davis III, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2013; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; McCoy, 2014; Yosso et al., 2004) in examining race and its intersectionality with other forms of subordination such as

sexism, classism, and heterosexism (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002) in the educational experiences of People of Color. I believe that Critical Race Theory provides an analytical lens through which to explore the sources of self-efficacy underlying African American women doctoral achievers' beliefs about their abilities. Thus, critical race theory was selected as an analytical framework for this research.

### **Research Questions**

This research sought to explore the intersectionality of race, class, and gender and their influence on African American women doctoral attainment beliefs. Below are the research questions selected for this study.

1. What experiences and factors have shaped the pursuit and attainment of the doctoral degree by African American women?
2. How does the intersectionality of race, class, and gender shape the sources of self-efficacy that influences African American women's doctoral attainment beliefs? These research questions were addressed through this study's exploration of the lived experiences influencing the doctoral attainment beliefs of African American women doctoral achievers. Below is a discussion of sampling procedures employed for this research.

### **Sampling**

#### **Online sampling**

I employed snowball sampling strategies to identify participants for this study. Snowball sampling is a technique in which the researcher



secures a few participants meeting the study's criteria for participation who, in turn, recommend or refer other interested participants (Merriam, 2009). Participants selected for inclusion in this study encompassed the following criteria: 1) female; 2) African American/Black; 3) United States (U.S) citizen; and 4) earned a doctoral degree from a U.S. university. The rationale for participant criteria is discussed below.

**Criterion one and two: Female and African American.** I selected African American women to participate in this study due to their historical commitment to educating their race (Cooper, 1892; Coppin, 1913; Perkins, 1981, 2005, 2010; Slowe, 1933) and limited inclusion in self-efficacy literature. The history of African American women is steeped in educating other African Americans (Perkins, 2010). Therefore, it is informative to examine the socialization messages influencing African American women's beliefs toward doctoral attainment.

**Criterion three and four: U. S. citizen and earned a doctoral degree from a U. S. University.** To illuminate the voices of African American women doctoral achievers in the United States, the participant sample was limited to U. S. citizens who had earned a doctoral degree from a U. S. university.

### **Purposeful sampling**

Purposeful sampling is "based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam, 2009, p. 77). Stratified purposeful sampling is a

method in which a sample is stratified based on specific selection criterion (Merriam, 2009). Stratified purposeful sampling by age cohort was employed for this research to encourage information rich responses relative to the research purpose. This research sought to explore how socialization messages differ across ages. As such, participants from each of the following age cohorts: (1) 25-34; (2) 35-44; (3) 45-54; (4) 55-64; and (5) 65 and older, were selected to participate in focus interviews.

## **Recruitment**

### **Online survey**

The sample for the online survey was recruited through social media (i.e., Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, etc.), my personal and professional network of peers, church members, mentors, and colleagues. Responses to the research solicitation were swift and yielded a 74 % completion rate, with 20 out of 27 respondents completing the online survey. In securing participants, a letter of invitation (i.e., an attached link to the study) was emailed soliciting the participation of African American women who had earned a doctoral degree (see Appendix A) for this study. Participants in the study opened a link attached in the letter of invitation, read the IRB Informed Consent (see Appendix B), and clicked “Next” to affirm their consent to participate. Participants electing to participate were redirected to the Qualtrics online survey. Data were collected over a six-month period.

## **Interviews**

Twenty-seven participants accessed the survey; however, only 20 (see Table 1) participants completed the survey in its entirety. Among the 20 participants completing the survey, 15 agreed to participate in focus interviews. Individuals agreeing to participate in focused interviews were contacted over a six-month period to schedule those interviews. Individuals were selected based on the number of participants agreeing to participate in the interviews within each age cohort. As such, focus interviews were completed with 11 participants from the following age cohorts: (1) 25-34; (2) 35-44; (3) 45-54; (4) 55-64; and (5) 65 and older.

### **Data collection**

Data for this study were collected from two sources: Qualtrics web-based data collection platform, and individual focused interviews. African American women doctoral achievers invited to participate in this study were asked to complete an online survey hosted by Qualtrics. Qualtrics is a web-based data collection platform that allows participants to easily access and complete surveys at a time and location that is convenient for them. Participants ( $n=20$ ) electing to participate in this research provided demographic data (see Appendix D), which consisted of items addressing participants' educational background, age, marital status, sibling constellation, familial educational background, current occupation, and familial income status. The interview protocol for this research was originally developed by Usher et al. (2015) to explore the sources of self-efficacy among engineering students; as such, those questions were amended (See Appendix E) to reflect the participant population of this research, African American women

doctoral achievers. Questions for this research were salient to the sources of self- efficacy and the intersectionality of race, class, and gender. The interview protocol for this research included the following questions:

As an African American woman...

- 1) What events affected your confidence in pursuing your doctorate?
- 2) Can you think of a specific event that made you feel more confident in your capabilities in pursuing your doctorate? Please describe.
- 3) Why do you think so few African American women pursue doctoral degrees? What could be or should be done to alter that?
- 4) Considering your academic and career history, if you could have done anything differently, what would that be? Why?

Participants ( $n=20$ ) provided narrative responses through the online questionnaire, with the last question inviting participants to participate in one-on-one focus interview. Fifteen participants provided their contact information for scheduling individual focus interviews. Contact information consisted of the participant's name, email address, and phone number (see Appendix C). Participants ( $n=15$ ) agreeing to participate in focused interviews were contacted to schedule a date, time, and location that was convenient for them to participate. Focus interview participants encompassed a multitude of employment backgrounds, including: ministry, research science, health science, research firm CEO, and educational administration.

### **Focused Interviews**

In addition to the data collected from the online questionnaire,

focused interviews served as another source of data collection for this research. Focused interviews provided the researcher and research participants an opportunity to corroborate, expound upon, and address any discrepancies from initial online responses (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009). In preparing for focus interviews, I read each transcript and noted questions to be asked in the focused interviews. In line with Glesne's (2016) recommendation, focus interviews were arranged based on the participants' preference. Most participants lived in various cities throughout the United States, as such, many ( $n=9$ ) preferred the focus interview to be conducted over the phone, while local participants ( $n=2$ ) elected to meet at locations that were convenient for them, such as Starbucks. Utilizing stratified purposeful sampling, I selected participants from each of the following age cohorts: (1) 25-34-two participants; (2) 35-44-five participants; (3) 45-54-one participant; (4) 55-64-three participants; and (5) 65 and older-one participant, to participate in focused interviews. Stratified purposeful sampling is a sampling technique in which I selected participants within the sample based on a particular characteristic (i.e., age) (Patton, 2015). This sampling technique was employed in this research to achieve contrast within the sample and increase the credibility of findings (Patton, 2015).

Prior to beginning the focus interview, I summarized the purpose of the research, research procedures, and gave the participants an opportunity to ask questions. Focus interviews were audio-recorded and lasted between 30-60 minutes. Participants were aware that the

focus interviews were being audio-recorded. The focus interview was semi-structured, with the researcher posing questions based on the participants' initial responses to the online questionnaire. I initially asked questions relative to what was noted in the online interview. Initial questions included clarification of persons identified in participant responses, as well as expounding upon a discussion of the messages they identified as central to their doctoral attainment beliefs. I listened analytically and probed participants to expand upon their responses, which provided for information-rich participant responses (Merriam, 2009). For example, one participant discussed how colleagues would make jokes about her pursuing her doctorate. Upon being probed about these encounters, the participant contrasted her experiences as compared to a White woman colleague who was pursuing her doctorate and illuminated the distinctions between their colleagues' reactions to their doctoral pursuits. Dr. Oliver's response was information-rich; however, it was only through probing that she explicated her response and conveyed in its entirety the messages she received as an African American woman pursuing her doctorate.

Throughout the research process, I kept analytic memos in which I noted pertinent thoughts and information that were significant to this research (Saldaña, 2009). Saldaña (2009) asserts: "The purpose of analytic memo writing is to document and reflect on: your coding process and code choices; how the process of inquiry is taking shape; and the emergent patterns, categories and subcategories, themes, and concepts in your data." (p.34). I also engaged in member checking (Merriam, 2009).

Member checking entails providing participants with a copy of the research analysis and soliciting their feedback relative to the validity of the researcher's interpretation. Participants ( $n=15$ ) were sent an invitation (See Appendix G) to participate in member checks. I conferred with participants ( $n=6$ ) to confirm that I had properly conveyed their thoughts and addressed any questions stemming from participant responses. Participants did not request any additions or omissions to their responses.

### **Data analysis**

Upon the completion of data collection, data from the questionnaire responses and audio-recorded focus interview transcriptions were compiled and paired (Saldaña, 2009). I initially reviewed the dataset for assigning pseudonyms. During the compiling stage, I created a database and data were organized. Initially, the data corpus consisted of survey questionnaire responses and audio-recorded focus interviews. Data from the online survey and audio recorded focus interviews were de-identified to ensure participants' anonymity. Focus interviews were then transcribed verbatim and compared with the audio recordings to ensure the accuracy of the transcribed data items. During this stage, I read the transcriptions of the audio-recorded data and listened to audio recordings to ensure accurate data pairing.

I engaged in a case-centered (Riessmann, 2008) approach in which I collected and analyzed data from each participant (i.e., within-case analysis), five stratified age-cohorts (cross-case analysis), and all participants across cases (i.e., cross-case analysis) (Creswell, 2007). Riessman (2008) asserted "the 'cases' that form the basis for analysis

can be individuals, identity groups, communities” (p. 10). Thus, the African American women participating in this study served as the cases for this study. Merriam (2009) noted, “the more cases included in a study, and the greater the variation across the cases, the more compelling an interpretation is likely to be” (p. 49). As such, responses were collected from 20 African American women participating in this research, with 11 participating in focus interviews thereafter.

Qualitative data for this study were analyzed in five stages: 1) compiling, 2) disassembling, 3) reassembling, 4) interpreting, and 5) concluding (Yin, 2011). Consistent with Saldaña’s (2009) guidelines for coding in qualitative research, each case was coded in three cycles: (1) first-cycle coding, (2) second-cycle coding, and 3) post- coding. The following section outlines the coding processes applied in this research.

### **First-cycle coding**

Participants’ responses for this research were compiled from Qualtrics and imported into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and NVivo Qualitative software program for the purposes of cataloguing, locating, and assisting in the analysis of data. During first- cycle coding, I disassembled the data, organized it by age, and reassembled it by age cohorts (Yin, 2011). Upon reassembling the data, I repeatedly read survey questionnaire responses and previously transcribed focus interviews to familiarize myself with the data before developing initial codes. During my initial coding, I employed structural coding (Saldaña, 2009) methods in which I assigned a phrase representing the



participants' responses for the purposes of interpreting and assigning meaning to participant responses. Data from each cohort were then assigned to the structural codes delineated by the four sources of self-efficacy. For example, question one sought to identify mastery experiences; therefore, all question one responses were initially assigned to mastery experiences. However, there was variation within question one mastery experiences response. For example, participant responses to mastery experiences described failing and passing of exams as influencing their doctoral attainment beliefs. As such, the variation in such statements necessitated second-cycle coding.

### **Second-cycle coding**

During second-cycle coding, I organized participant responses and focused coded for similarity between responses. Through focus coding, I interpreted participant responses relative to the meaning of each source of self-efficacy. Participants' responses were then merged, purged, or reassigned. Responses were merged relative to similarities in shared meaning. Purged responses were those that lacked saliency within the assigned category and were reassigned to another category or categorized as miscellaneous (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Next, I assigned codes to the merged data. After assigning codes to merged data, I proceeded to post-cycle coding.

### **Post-cycle coding**

During post-cycle coding, I employed deductive coding in that I categorized the codes relative to the sources of self-efficacy. After categorizing the codes, I calculated the frequency of responses based

on the number of times the selected response was described by participants. Frequency was calculated to illuminate recurrences across the five stratified subgroups and across the entire sample of participant responses. Codes identified during this cycle were used to assist in the interpretation of data. During this cycle, I cross-checked data with a member of my research team to discuss and review coding selections in determining code meanings and assignments. To reduce researcher bias, the researchers compared and contrasted codes until consensus was achieved. Twenty-two codes were created during this cycle and will be discussed in the next chapter.

### **Thematic analysis**

After coding the data and assigning the codes to the sources of self-efficacy, I then sought to conduct a deductive thematic analysis. Deductive thematic analysis is a methodology in which a framework or predetermined theory is selected, and themes are identified, analyzed, and reported within the context of that predetermined theory or framework (Braun & Clark, 2006; Creswell, 2013). In addition to the sources of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), Critical Race Theory served as the predetermined framework for this deductive thematic analysis. McCoy and Rodricks (2015) identified seven tenets of critical race theory in higher education:

1. The permanence of racism.
2. Experiential knowledge (and counter-storytelling).
3. Interest convergence theory.
4. Intersectionality.
5. Whiteness as property.
6. Critique of liberalism.
7. Commitment to social justice

This study initially identified the second tenet, experiential knowledge in the form of counter-narratives, and the fourth tenet, intersectionality for exploring the intersectionality of race, class, and gender within the sources of self-efficacy influencing African American women's doctoral attainment and associated beliefs. However, participant responses necessitated an inductive thematic analysis, resulting in the inclusion of one additional CRT tenet: commitment to social justice. Thus, *a priori* codes underlying the three tenets of CRT served as overarching themes. The following section discusses the application of deductive thematic analysis for research.

**Application of deductive thematic analysis.** I revisited and analyzed participant responses associated with each code identified among the sources of self-efficacy. I repeatedly read responses and analyzed for repeated patterns before naming and assigning themes. After I compiled my initial response assignments, I identified some themes that overlapped. As such, I re-read all participant responses that reflected the overlapping theme and decided relative to its assignment. This resulted in some themes being reassigned to sub-themes. Finally, themes were ordered to illuminate the stories behind the statistics. Three themes were identified and will be discussed in the following chapter.

### **Synopsis of data**

Data interpretation for this study occurred in three ways: 1) within-case analysis of each case; 2) cross-case analysis of the five stratified subgroups; and 3) cross-case analysis of the entire sample. I

constantly compared the data in identifying commonality and distinctions, ensuring the reasoning for selection was apparent, explored themes for negative instances that may challenge or serve as outliers, and engaged in rival thinking which considers alternative premises for the identified themes (Yin, 2011). To this end, participant responses ( $n=20$ ) were summarized and the sources of self-efficacy and tenets of critical race theory illuminated by participants as salient to their doctoral journey were identified. This chapter will conclude with a discussion of limitations to this study and positionality.

### **Limitations**

This research sought to illuminate the intersectionality of race, class, and gender within the doctoral attainment beliefs of African American women participating in this study. There is scant literature directly exploring the sources of self-efficacy and their bearing on the doctoral attainment beliefs of African American women doctoral achievers; as such, this presents a limitation for this research as there is limited opportunity to couch or explicate any findings within a larger research literature on this population. The sample size ( $n=20$ ) of this study limits the generalizability of findings. Additionally, among the 20 participants participating in the study, only 11 participated in follow-up interviews, as such some participant responses were analyzed in the absence of member-checks. Finally, the absence of follow-up interviews also impeded the researcher's ability to expound upon and provide additional supporting data from participants' online

responses. Thus, information-rich responses from those participants (n=9) who did not participate in follow-up interviews was limited.

### **Researcher positionality**

I am a Christian African American woman, wife, mother, daughter, sister, and first-generation doctoral candidate. My intersectional identity is multi-faceted and as a result my experiences are multi-faceted. I have been in my doctoral program for over a decade and experienced most of my major life-events as a doctoral student. I entered the doctoral program as a newly-wed and first-generation doctoral student. The newness of both identities presented challenges, as I had never been married or a student in a doctoral program. Striking a balance between being married and pursuing a doctorate was initially challenging. I had two new identities that I was equally enthusiastic about, but I would often have to devote my time to one over the other. This was very stressful. At times, I questioned if I, as a newly married woman, belonged in a doctoral program because I came from a home in which my mother devoted all of her time and energies to her family. Being a doctoral student is a lifestyle, not a job, and as such many of my days and nights were spent studying, rather than enjoying quality time with my husband. My spouse was supportive and encouraged me throughout my studies, but I still questioned if I was making the right decision. Conversely, my parents and siblings took pride in knowing I was pursuing my doctorate. I wanted to make all of them proud.

I entered the doctoral program extremely confident because my research throughout my master's program had been well-received, however; as time went on, my confidence waned because the research agenda that I had taken pride in up until that point, was no longer acceptable for the Ph.D I was pursuing. My beliefs in achieving faltered. As I sought to find my footing and embrace a new research agenda, I prepared myself for another identity, mother. My husband and I welcomed both of our children into the world with me as a doctoral student. Our children were a gift from God because I have a chronic health condition that my doctors warned would make it difficult for me to conceive. I counted my blessings, recognizing "if God brought me to it, he would see me through it." My added identity presented additional challenges, I was to balance being an African American woman, wife, mother, daughter, sister and first-generation doctoral student. How would I do it? Still filled with doubt, I reflected on my journey and God's blessings. I reminded myself "I didn't get here by chance." God directed my journey and I relied on him to direct my path. My faith would see me through.

My beliefs and the beliefs of others who had committed to my success encouraged me to keep going. It was hard, I believed that I could be successful, but I didn't always feel successful. I sought doctoral attainment for a collective, not individual gain. So, if I fail, my failure won't be mine alone. I believed that I could make a difference. I pursued doctoral attainment because it would allow me to help others and impact change in a greater capacity. My research

agenda has always been committed to addressing issues within the African American community, as I have a vested interest in my brothers and sisters. As such, I aimed to pursue a research agenda that would positively affect the outcomes of my community. I considered my passions and how that passion could translate to my research agenda. I, again, reflected on my story and experiences.

Finally, I made the decision to explore self-efficacy beliefs among African American women doctoral students. Self-efficacy research was popular within my department, so I was knowledgeable of the literature. However, what I found most striking about the literature was the absence of studies reflecting Students of Color, such as myself. The literature emphasized the need for culturally inclusive studies but lacked praxis. Recognizing the significance of self-efficacy beliefs, I initially sought to explore how self-efficacy functions among African American doctoral students. However, I wanted to contribute to a roadmap for doctoral success with the final destination being doctoral degree attainment. As such, I sought to explore how the sources of self-efficacy influenced African American women's doctoral attainment beliefs. While this was an acceptable research topic, I was challenged by my dissertation advisor to explore even further and incorporate Critical Race theory (CRT) into my research agenda. Up until that point, I was unfamiliar with CRT. Reading the CRT literature, coupled with my knowledge of self-efficacy, was eye-opening and sparked a flame that was just beginning to burn again. The literature resonated with me and spoke

to many of the experiences that I had defined but couldn't name. As such, I pursued my research agenda with a new-found fervor. Story-telling, intersectionality, commitment to social justice these tenets encompassed my experiences and the experiences of my family and friends alike. My self-beliefs were shaped by these experiences and they have influenced me to pursue and persist towards doctoral attainment.

My identity, as a Christian African American woman, wife, mother, daughter, sister, and first-generation doctoral candidate not only influenced my research agenda but is the reason for my research pursuit. Merriam (2009) asserts: "Investigators need to explain their biases, dispositions, and assumptions regarding the research to be undertaken. . . such a clarification allows the reader to better understand how the individual researcher might have arrived at the particular interpretation of the data" (p.219). My initial assumption regarding my findings were: 1) responses from African American women participants would indicate they pursued doctoral attainment out of reverence for racial uplift, particularly among those that were 55 and older, 2) participants were most influenced by social persuasions, and 3) findings from my research would extend current self-efficacy literature to include African American women doctoral achievers.

Throughout this process my faith has reminded me that if God brought me to it, he will see me through it.



## CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

This chapter begins with descriptive statistics from the participant sample, a description of emergent themes, and results from participants' online survey and focus interview responses pertaining to the experiences of African American women doctoral achievers. It will conclude with an illumination of how the intersectionality of participants' identities shaped the sources of self-efficacy for African American women's doctoral achievement.

### **Descriptive statistics**

Twenty African American female/woman doctoral achievers participated in this research (see Table 1). Among participants ( $n=9$ ), most were in the 35-44-year-old-age cohort. Most participants ( $n=15$ ) earned a Ph.D., while fewer ( $n=5$ ) earned an Ed.D. Participants identified their primary occupations as professional ( $n=10$ ) and professor ( $n=10$ ), with most ( $n=9$ ) having been employed in their current occupation for 10 years or more. Participants ( $n=12$ ) reported that their current occupation requires a Ph.D. or Ed.D. Most participants ( $n=14$ ) earned their doctoral degree after 2009. Thirteen participants reported being raised in two-parent households. Most participants ( $n=9$ ) were the first- born child and had an average of three siblings. Participants ( $n=14$ ) reported growing up in households with average incomes. The majority of participants ( $n=10$ ) reported their parents had received some college education or graduated from college. Eleven participants who completed the online survey also participated in focus interviews. The following section describes

emergent themes identified in this research.

**Table 1. Participants**

Pseudonym	Age	Degree	Occupation	First-Generation Ph.D. Student
Dr. Tiffany	25-34	Ph.D.	Tenure-Track Asst. Professor	Yes
Dr. Tosh	25-34	Ph.D.	Adjunct	Yes
Dr. Anna	35-44	Ph.D.	Teacher	Yes
Dr. Ashley	35-44	Ph.D.	CEO Research Firm	Yes
Dr. Beverly	35-44	Ph.D.	Assistant Professor	Yes
Dr. Freida	35-44	Ph.D.	College Professor	Yes
Dr. Kim	35-44	Ed.D.	Faculty	Yes
Dr. Jill	35-44	Ph.D.	Clinical Assistant Professor	Yes
Dr. Mary	35-44	Ph.D.	Research Scientist	Yes
Dr. Rebecca	35-44	Ph.D.	Tenure-Track Asst. Professor	Yes
Dr. Taylor	35-44	Ph.D.	Assistant Professor	No
Dr. Love	45-54	Ph.D.	Minister and Instructor	Yes
Dr. Maud	45-54	Ph.D.	School District Administrator	Yes
Dr. Nancy	45-54	Ed.D.	Postsecondary Education	Yes
Dr. Quebec	55-64	Ed.D.	Retired Professor	Yes
Dr. Reid	55-64	Ed.D.	Licensed Professional Counselor	Yes
Dr. Oliver	55-64	Ed.D.	School Counselor/ Adjunct professor	Yes
Dr. Paula	55-64	Ph.D.	Administrator	Yes
Dr. Alaina	65 & Older	Ph.D.	Professor	Yes
Dr. Thomas	65 & Older	Ph.D.	Retired Professor	Yes

**Emergent themes**

Participants’ narratives resulted in the emergence of three themes:

1) a voice at the table; 2) faith; and 3) experiential knowledge and support. These themes were created from within and cross-case analysis of participants’ responses. Each theme is discussed below.

## **Theme 1: A Voice at the Table**

### **(Doctoral attainment as a commitment to social justice)**

This theme developed from participants' expressed desires to address unmet needs in their communities through doctoral attainment. Participants' intersecting identities as African American women doctoral students and the implications attached to their identity were salient across sources of self-efficacy. Out of a commitment to their communities, African American women in this study were encouraged to achieve doctoral attainment to gain "a voice at the table." Experiences illuminating several tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT) influenced their desire to have "a voice at the table". Listed below are excerpts reflecting how participants attributed their doctoral attainment to this theme.

**Interest Convergence.** Interest convergence was described in participants' experiences relative to their desire to gain a "voice at the table". Dr. Ashley described coming to the realization that her White female graduate advisor recruited her to a research study exploring health disparities among Women of Color for the purpose of recruiting African American women because she was an African American woman. Dr. Ashley, 35- 44-year-old research firm CEO, shared:

The study she (White female faculty who recruited Dr. Ashley to the doctoral program and served as her graduate advisor) got was a study that was across three sites. They were looking at three populations. White women, Native American women, and Black women. Her part of the study was to recruit Black women and then also Native American women. I think now that she recruited, her whole team was Black. I think she recruited us to go out and get Black participants. At the time I didn't realize that. We would have to go to people's homes and collect data, survey data. We would

go to their houses and collect survey data, and then they would come in, in the morning for like a blood draw and a fitness test. I didn't realize, she didn't think anything of just sending us out by ourselves to peoples' houses, places she wouldn't go. I was comfortable because, it was lower income people, but these are people that looked like my family. I realize now, the reason that she hired us is because she wasn't comfortable going into those communities, and she needed somebody to collect the data.

Through this experience Dr. Ashley desired to help her community and sought to discuss with her graduate advisor the interventions that could be applied to improve participants' health outcomes. It was through this discussion that the interest convergence of Dr. Ashley's recruitment to the doctoral program became more apparent and her desire for a "voice at the table" solidified. Dr. Ashley, shared:

What I was seeing in the data, I'm seeing people on oxygen machines; I'm seeing people who are overweight; I'm seeing people who have high blood pressure. I'm studying in class, you're supposed to do these interventions . . . we weren't doing anything about that. When I said, "So, is the next study going to be an intervention? Are we going to give the people the information back? What are we going to do?" [My White female graduate advisor] said, "My study is just to look at the relationship between physical activity and health outcomes, and how to measure physical activity. That's outside the scope of what we're doing. If you want to do something about it, you could do it yourself if you want to do it in your free time. That's not my grant. That's not what I got paid to do." I started to see more and more examples. You would see all these people who didn't look like the community going after the money because that's where the money was, not because they cared about the community . . . She wouldn't see these people. I would see these people in the store. I would see these people at church. I would see the participants. I'm like, "Okay. I just came to your house. I know you're ill, and I'm not going to do anything about it." I can't do that. You look like people in my family. You could be people in my family."

Participants' desires to address the health disparities within their

communities resulted in their pursuit of doctoral attainment as a commitment to social justice. Participants sought to address social ills such as research agendas pursued for the purpose of monetary gains and publications, in the absence of interventions targeted at addressing health disparities identified within the Communities of Color for which the research was being conducted. Participants sought to address these social ills by pursuing and attaining a doctoral degree. Dr. Tosh, 25-34-years-old, described her rationale for doctoral pursuit, saying that “If I want to be at the top of the decision- making food chain, then I need to get this PhD. And that would just elevate me to a different position in whatever organization I was in.” Participants such as Dr. Tosh sought to have a “voice at the table” and decision-making power relative to the research agendas and targeted interventions pursued within the Communities of Color, they conducted research, co-op, and internship experiences.

### **Disconfirming negative intersectional stereotypes**

Dr. Tosh, 25-34-year-old-adjunct professor shared:

I think it's more of a mismatch between what Black culture might emphasize and how that doesn't fit with the environment, the American environment that we're in and I think that leads to the diseases that we experience, because that's certainly, in my perspective, very much shaped by our environment. I would say the observation of that mismatch is the negative experience that drove me here, but I will say. . . I really did not want to be a statistic. If I'm going to be a Black woman in this American society, I'm going to show out and the one way I know how to do that is to use my intelligence, and so the PhD is also a reflection of my ability to achieve, despite what others may think I can and can't do.

## **Theme 2: Faith**

“I am on the trajectory the Lord has for me.”

This theme developed from participants' ( $n=5$ ) elucidations of faith as influencing doctoral attainment beliefs and serving as a means of coping with challenges resultant from participants' identities as African American women pursuing doctoral attainment. Dr. Quebec, 55-64-year-old, in discussing how her faith helped her overcome adversity, stated,

Even though I had some things that were not successful, but I do believe that all things work together . . . God knows the plans he has for me even if I don't know what they are. They're plans for my good.

Dr. Jill, 35-44-year-old, asserted, “I wouldn't change a thing. I am on the trajectory the Lord has for me!” Dr. Beverly, 25-34-year-old, reflecting on her doctoral pursuit said, “I would say the positive of [my doctoral experience] was that I learned for me faith increased. So, my spiritual life became like on 100 while getting my last degree. So, I would say that was definitely a positive.” Dr. Love, 45-54-year-old, shared: “What affected my [doctoral] confidence most was my faith and seeing and being mentored by African American female pastors, who had earned a terminal degree.”

## **Theme 3: Experiential Knowledge and Support (Family, Faculty, & Peers)**

This theme developed as result of participants' ( $n=12$ ) stories in which they described how the absence of emotional support and understanding, and later formation of informal support groups, influenced their doctoral pursuits and attainment. Critical race theory

tenets, permanence of racism and Whiteness as a property, illuminated how absence of support and White hegemony of the academy shaped their experiences.

**The Permanence of Racism.** The permanence of racism influenced participants' desires to address unmet needs in the African American community and have a voice at the table. Dr. Ashley described the significance of doctoral attainment:

I actually find my presence necessary to carry those messages of cultural sensitivity and just cultural tenets being able to translate those to non- Black colleagues, or colleagues who do not work with similar populations. I find my presence is necessary to bridge that communication gap, and to bring awareness to disparities among minorities that I do not think would always get the attention it needs, if there's not either somebody of that race group in that PhD position, or somebody who, even if they're not of the same race group, very embedded in the championing of that race group and research on that race group in that institution.

**Whiteness as a Property.** Participants described the exclusionary practices and unwelcoming climate they encountered as African American women pursuing doctoral attainment. Participants contrasted the lack of support and resources provided to them as African American women doctoral students with the support and resources afforded to their White peers. Dr. Tiffany, 25-34-year-old, shared:

The politics of the academy are so toxic for Women of Color, especially Black women. The academy was built and designed for White men. So, there is a long legacy of exclusion that has to be confronted and combatted. Efforts to encourage talented and gifted Black women to pursue PhDs must become even more intentional. . .

Dr. Alaina, 65-and-older, observed: "The system itself is not geared

toward non- White students. Information is not always shared equally among students each faculty member has their favorites and desired picks for advance degrees.” Dr. Quebec, 55-64- year-old added:

It doesn't change. That racism is always there, that tension, that this is the way an institution will just let you come. You don't really belong here. You don't really fit here. For me, that was something I thrived on. It's like, "You don't want me here. Works for me." Been doing this all my life. So, it was nothing.

Dr. Ashley, a 35-44-year-old, shared:

The process is long and difficult, and we are often the only ones who look like us in the classrooms. I was often told during my doctoral program that I did not require much support because Black people with doctoral degrees could write their own tickets after graduation. I was the first person in my family to pursue a doctorate, and I had to struggle to figure a lot of things out on my own. That made the process very difficult, and I almost did not finish. Had it not been for a few other Students of Color who formed a support group, I do not think I would have made it. I cannot imagine what would have happened if I had been at an institution where there were not other Students of Color to support me.

The next section describes participants’ online survey and focus interview responses relating to each source of self-efficacy (mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasions, and physiological state. Additionally, emergent themes (faith and experiential knowledge and support and a sub-theme (doctoral attainment as a commitment to social justice were assigned to sources of self-efficacy to illuminate their influence on participants’ doctoral attainment beliefs. For example, the theme, doctoral attainment as a conduit to social justice, was assigned to mastery and vicarious experiences because it was presented within the context of each experience and reflected in these sources of self-efficacy.

### **Sources of self-efficacy beliefs**

Mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion,



and physiological state comprise the four sources of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) and each had centrality to the doctoral degree attainment beliefs of the African American women participating ( $n=20$ ) in this study. Mastery experiences, defined by an individual's experiences of failure and success in achieving a goal, have been shown to be a significant source of self-efficacy, as repeated successes serve to increase one's appraisal of efficacy, while repeated experiences of failure serve to lower it (Noble, 2011; Zeldin, Britner, & Pajares, 2008; Bandura, 1997). For the African American women participating in this research, mastery experiences in various forms influenced their doctoral attainment beliefs.

Participants were asked two questions relative to experiences affecting their confidence in pursuing their doctoral degree; their responses to these questions included events affecting performance confidence such as performance accomplishments, performance failures, co-ops, and internship opportunities. Survey responses (See Table 2) items are detailed next, followed by participants' focus interview responses.

Table 2. Mastery Experience Online Survey Response Items

1) What events affected your confidence in pursuing your doctoral degree? and 2) Can you think of a specific event that made you feel more confident in your capabilities to pursue your Ph.D.?

	Coding Frequency Q1					Coding Frequency Q2				
	25-34 n=2	35-44 n=9	45-54 n=3	55-64 n=4	65 & older n=2	25-34 n=2	35-44 n=9	45-54 n=3	55-64 n=4	65 & older n=2
<b>Mastery Experiences</b>	1	4	0	1	0	0	2	1	0	0
Performance Accomplishments	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0
Performance Failures		2	0	0	0	0		0	0	0
Research Experiences	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Internships	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Co-op	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Vicarious Experiences</b>	2	4	2	1	1	1	1	2	0	1
Faculty	2	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	1
Pastor	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Mentor	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Faith	0	3	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Social Persuasions</b>	2	10	4	5	1	2	6	2	1	1
Faculty	2	1	1	1	0	2	4	0	0	1
Parents/Family	0	4	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Peers/Friends	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pastor	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Church Congregation	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mentors	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	0
Employment	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	0
AA Community	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Physiological</b>	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Physical/emotional	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0

### Mastery experience

**Performance accomplishments.** Performance accomplishments were described in the form of grades earned and exams passed. African American women in this study described performance accomplishments in terms of affirming their capabilities as doctoral students and their ability to succeed in the academy. Dr. Quebec, a 55-64-year-old retired principal, recalled:

In my first semester as a graduate student, not having sufficient advising, I registered for five classes. When I realized the work load I had taken on, it was too late to drop any classes. I persevered and completed the work with A's and B's. I felt like I could conquer anything after that!

Dr. Nancy, a 45-54-year-old a post-secondary educator, identified passing her first statistics course as making her feel more confident in her abilities, adding: “It had been decades since I had any type of quantitative reasoning course.”

Participants within the 25-34-year old age cohort, such as Dr. Tosh, an adjunct professor, described performance accomplishments in terms of doctoral program recruitment and acceptance. Dr. Tosh attributed her confidence in pursuing doctoral attainment to “receiving and reading the acceptance letter into my #1 choice.”

**Performance failure.** Among 35-44-year-old participants, performance failures were described in terms of professional and program performance shortfalls. Participants viewed performance failures as opportunities for self-evaluation and new endeavors. Dr. Ashley, 35-44-year-old research firm CEO, reflected on her doctoral program performance failure and the moment her confidence waned, causing her to reevaluate her decision to pursue doctoral attainment. I asked her to explain why she almost didn’t finish. She shared:

Every day, I would see people supporting the Confederate flag right outside my school. I could look out the window and see these people. I would see Confederate flags everywhere. I just hated [the state] with a passion. I was tired.  
. . . I made it all the way through fine, and I got to the Doctoral program and all of a sudden, you have to know how to study. I didn’t. I struggled, and I didn't know who to ask. I didn't know anybody else that had ever been through a Doctoral program. I was the person in my family that had gone the farthest in education with a master’s degree. I didn't know what to do . . . . I didn't like the program, and I just wanted to be done. I think I failed my comprehensive exam because I was like, “I don't know if this is what I want to do, and I don't know if I care.”

In terms of mastery experiences, Dr. Ashley experienced a performance failure in that she failed her comprehensive exams; however, she persevered, because she had experienced previous academic successes such as achieving bachelor and master’s degrees.

When asked, “What events affected your confidence in pursuing your doctoral degree?”, Dr. Ashley asserted that she “didn’t know not to be confident.” She later explained: “I was always fairly smart, and never really had to study.” Thus, despite experiencing failure, her previous experiences of success enabled her to persevere and succeed in attaining her doctoral degree. Thereafter, Dr. Ashley came to the realization that she needed to earn her doctoral degree in order to combat those who sought to take advantage of the African American community for monetary and publication gains. In addition, Dr. Ashley connected with other African American students whose social persuasions supported and sustained her through doctoral attainment.

Dr. Ashley described how she was supported. She said:

There were about four or five Black students and when we'd get together and encourage each other and just, "Okay, you've got this. You can do it." I feel like a lot of my friends have similar stories in Doctoral programs. You don't want to be the only one. You're just tired. And if not for family and friends supporting you, you wouldn't have made it.

Dr. Jill, a 35-44-year-old clinical assistant professor, describing her professional performance failure as the impetus for her doctoral pursuit, explained:

I wasn't over-passionate or capable of teaching middle school students with exceptional zeal. The job was draining and my fire was dying. But I had a gift of teaching and inspiring other teachers around me. So, I determined that I would explore that [doctoral attainment] option.

Similar to Dr. Ashley, Dr. Jill had experienced previous successes. She shared:

I felt like I was a good role model. I never felt like I was a good teacher. I don't recall my students' grades increasing significantly. I do recall them learning things about character and about responsibility and being accountable. . . I wanted to work on my PhD and become a professor, because I think that

my strength lies in communicating and teaching adults versus children, because I had taught GED courses at the community college.

Dr. Jill's positive self-beliefs, relative to her previous successes, influenced her to still pursue teaching in a different capacity as a university professor.

**Co-op and internship experiences. (Doctoral attainment as a conduit to social justice).** In addition to mastery experiences in the classroom; repeated research experiences, co-op, and internships in underserved communities were identified as influencing participants' doctoral attainment beliefs. African American women in this study felt a sense of responsibility to the marginalized communities they served, with many connecting their experience to family members and members of their communities. Participants, particularly those from the 35-44-year-old-age-cohort, recognized the marginalization experienced within Communities of Color and sought "a voice at the table."

Dr. Ashley, 35-44-year-old research firm CEO, shared:

I was working with a White doctoral advisor who was doing research in Black communities. We learned that there were links between participant behaviors and poor health outcomes, which was the purpose of the study (a correlation study). When I asked what the next steps were or what we were going to do to help the participants, I was told that our study was not focused on that and that people needed to help themselves. That was when I realized that I needed to complete my doctorate and go into research, so I could help my community . . .

Dr. Rebecca, 35-44-year-old university professor, described working as a clinician with an African American geriatric HIV positive patient:

As a clinician, I had an older client who was HIV positive. I was in grad school at the time, and when I was leaving her house after a home visit, I gave her a hug; she paused and told me that people did not touch her anymore. I was already a gerontological social worker, and that experience solidified my interest with the intersection of aging and HIV infection, risk behaviors, health outcomes, etc.

After, I spoke with my mentor, and from there stemmed our conversations about doctoral study, and how it would provide isolated time to pursue my research questions.

Dr. Freida, 35-44-year-old college professor, describing how her research influenced her doctoral pursuit, shared:

I do research in obesity-related issues in African-American women because one day, while pursuing my MS degree, I discovered the great obesity disparity in this population compared to other women (and even men). I've been hooked on the topic ever since.

Similarly, Dr. Tosh, 25-34-year-old adjunct college professor, cited her decision to address obesity-related issues within the African American community as the impetus for her doctoral pursuit:

As an undergraduate, after switching majors to the one that ultimately influenced my direction, nutrition, I was more engaged with learning because I thought back to people in my community that were impacted by improper nutrition. The topic that I focused on was how to prevent, treat type 2 diabetes. As I learned more, I discovered that obesity was a cause of many preventable diseases in the Black community. Therefore, I set out to determine how I can reduce the impact of obesity, particularly in Black women. From there, I pursued my master's in nutrition, became a registered dietitian, and have earned my doctorate, which focuses now on health behaviors and reducing obesity disparities in Black women.

Participants within the 35-44-year-old age cohort repeatedly cited their co-op, internship, and research experiences as influencing their doctoral pursuits. Participants pursued research agendas and doctoral attainment for advancing the underrepresented communities they served. For these women, doctoral attainment provided them a voice at the table and the ability to positively effect change within

their communities by engaging in a research agenda that addressed the health disparities within the African American communities they served. As doctoral students, participants' research revealed the health disparities that existed within the Communities of Color where they were conducting co-op and internships. Given the social injustices of conducting research on Communities of Color in the absence of intent to provide intervention, participants sought to attain doctoral degrees as a means to address, through research and intervention, the social inequities they witnessed as doctoral students.

### **Vicarious experiences**

In addition to mastery experiences, participants shared vicarious experiences that influenced their beliefs in achieving. As such, vicarious experiences were salient to participants' doctoral pursuits and attainment beliefs. The second source of self-efficacy, vicarious experience, is provided through observation and interactions with social models deemed similar to one's self (Bandura, 1997). African American women participants frequently cited vicarious experiences as influencing their doctoral attainment beliefs. Participants were asked questions relating to their vicarious experiences. Most participants ( $n=14$ ) were exposed to others with a Ph.D. and were most influenced by their friends ( $n=4$ ) and colleagues with a Ph.D. ( $n=4$ ). Below are the results from participants' online survey responses (see Table 3).

Table 3. Vicarious Experiences Online Survey Response Items

Which ways were you exposed to others who had earned a Ph.D. in your life? (Check all that apply)						Of the ways, you have been exposed to someone with a Ph.D. in your life, which one has been most influential to you?				
	25-34 n=2	35-44 n=9	45-54 n=3	55-64 n=4	65 & older n=2		35-44 n=9	45-54 n=3	55-64 n=4	65 & older n=2
Watched someone that earned a Ph.D. on T.V.	0	2	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Read about someone that earned a Ph.D.	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
*Family member has a Ph.D.	1	3	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0
Friend has a Ph.D.	0	1	2	2	1	0	0	1	2	1
Worked with someone who had a Ph.D.	0	2	3	1	0	0	1	1	1	1
Parent has a Ph.D.	0	1	0	0	0	0		0	0	0
Shadowed someone with a Ph.D.	0	2	2	0	0	1	0	1	0	0
No exposure to someone with a Ph.D. prior to college, cooperative education...	1	5	0	1	1	0	5	0	1	0

Participant focus interview responses are discussed below.

**Friend has a Ph.D.** Participants’ friends who had earned a Ph.D. served as role models and sources of knowledge. Participants discussed how they watched their friends’ journeys to doctoral attainment and how those journeys served as a guide for their eventual doctoral pursuit. Dr. Tosh, 25-34-year-old, discussed how she watched a family friend earn his Ph.D.:

I watched him grow and develop his family, but certainly he's seen me through. [S]o he is actually a Ph.D. and now superintendent of a school district in New York and so that's who I was saying watched me grow up, but certainly I watched his progress from Ph.D. student to finally finish to now being solidified in his career . . . [H]e's an educator so



he's certainly was always like, "Education, that is your ticket. We're in a credentialed society so a Ph.D. is a valuable thing, it's just of course like any other degree, how you use it."

**Parent has a Ph.D.** Dr. Taylor, 35-44-year-old assistant professor, in describing how her mother having a Ph.D. influenced her doctoral degree beliefs, said:

My mom was a teacher before she got her Ph.D. Education was heavily stressed. I was originally pre-med. I decided that was not the path I wanted to take. I was a bit lost and decided to get a master's in education. I knew I wanted to pursue higher education, and that I would eventually get a Ph.D. I was not sure what the content area would be. But I felt, even as a young 20-something, that I would get a doctorate.

**Worked with someone who had a Ph.D. (Doctoral attainment as a commitment to social justice).** Dr. Mary, a 35-44-year-old research scientist, described her experiences as a co-op student working with others who had Ph.D.'s.

I was an undergraduate student working at a nuclear power plant and working in the chemistry department out there. Loved my coworkers. They really made me feel like I was part of their team. They were very supportive of me. But it became very clear that the people who looked like me were in the admin positions. And the people who did not look like me, who were mostly White, male, and over 50, were all in the scientific and the leadership positions. I was very close with a Black female/woman who was the secretary to our department chair, like our department director . . . She'd say, 'I want students like you to go on and get your degree so that you can have an opportunity to be in the position to make decisions and not be decided upon.' And that moment has always stuck with me because it became really clear of the disparities that existed.

**No exposure to someone with a Ph.D. (Faith).** Dr. Anna, 35-44-year-old teacher, reflected on how her faith inspired her to persevere despite growing up in the absence of role models and being surrounded by violence:

I had friends that were shot and killed and I've been held at gunpoint . . . I was inspired through my experiences . . . through my faith and belief in God . . . all of my challenges and difficulties I had, they are a result of growing up in an underrepresented neighborhood and in growing up in neighborhoods like that, there's not a lot of people to look forward in inspiring you. I found . . . years back and so I just used, leaned more on my understanding of that and my faith to get me through those challenging times.

**Peers. (Faith).** Vicarious experiences through interactions with peers, while not identified in the online survey responses, emerged in focus interviews as a factor influencing participants' confidence in doctoral attainment. Dr. Beverly, 35-44-year-old assistant professor, discussing how the negative interactions with her peers caused her doctoral attainment beliefs to falter and how she relied on her faith to cope, shared:

A month into the program, I had a moment where I broke down and I was just like why am I here? When dealing with trying to go to class and people acting like what you have to say isn't valued, it's like, well, why am I even here? And very clearly just like you said God, everything happens for a reason. I very clearly heard the Lord say this is not about you. And so it helped me get myself together and I thought okay, well, if it's not about me then I need to just get through. It didn't make it easier, but that's what I held onto when I was like I can't do this. I cannot do this . . . As I got further into the program and had moments of low confidence, I pulled on my faith and remembered why I was in the program and that me getting the degree was for a bigger purpose and plan.

Participants persisted toward doctoral attainment despite discouraging circumstances. Negative experiences positively influenced participants' pursuit of doctoral attainment. Participants, through their reliance on their faith, remained steadfast in their doctoral pursuits because their doctoral attainment was for "a bigger purpose and plan" that included access and opportunity.

Social persuasions, defined as the social expression of beliefs in a person’s capabilities (Bandura, 1997), also influenced participants’ doctoral attainment beliefs. All participants (n=20) indicated someone had encouraged or inspired them to pursue a Ph.D. Below are participants’ responses from the Qualtrics online survey (See Table 4). Thereafter, participant responses elucidating online survey responses are provided.

Table 4. Social Persuasions Online Survey Response Items

Has anyone encouraged or inspired you to pursue a Ph.D? If so, who? How?					
	25-34 n=2	35-44 n=9	45-54 n=3	55-64 n=4	65 & older n=2
Family	0	4	1	2	1
Faculty	2	5	1	1	1
Mentor	0	1	1	1	0
None	0	0	0	0	0

Social persuasions from esteemed family and faculty members were most salient among participants. Dr. Oliver, 55-64-year-old, shared, “My father, he used to tell us, ‘Get as much education as you possibly can.’ I got all the education I possibly could, simply, it cannot be taken away.” Dr. Tiffany, 25-34-year old, discussed how her African American female/woman undergraduate advisor influenced her doctoral pursuit, stating that:

My undergraduate advisor was a Black woman PhD. When I told her that I was thinking about switching my major from biochemistry and molecular biology to history, I asked her if she thought I could be successful in earning a graduate degree in the field. Her response was "Absolutely." She noted that I had all the tools and skills necessary to be successful. All I need to do was to continue to work hard at my craft. And then she went on to something else. Her unwavering belief in my abilities and potential success stands out the most.

**Parents.** Parents conveyed the value of education to their children at an early age. These values served as the foundation for participants' educational beliefs and were resonant to their doctoral pursuit. Dr. Thomas, a 65-and-older retired educator, recalled:

one main advice my mother always said, 'Don't let anybody ever tell you what you can't do. You can do anything you want to do, you just gotta put your mind to it.' Every one of us she told that. She just drilled it, and drilled it, and drilled it.

Dr. Quebec, 55-64-year-old, talked about the importance of education conveyed to her as a child:

My parents were first-generation college students who reinforced in their children the necessity and privilege of education. College graduation was an expectation "from birth" with the belief that there were no limits to what hard-working people with initiative could achieve.

Dr. Thomas, 65 and older, discussed how her mother's social persuasion influenced her initial degree path, stating that:

My goal was to be a social worker and my mother said, "You need to rethink that because you'll never make any money." And she said, "But whatever you do make sure you're happy at it." And, at that time, that's what I thought I wanted to do. But I didn't pursue that.

Dr. Jill, 35-44-year-old, also took her mother's advice and changed her degree path as well, sharing:

My mom always said that I would become a teacher because everyone else in my family had become a teacher. But I had determined that that's not what I wanted to do. I knew that I wanted to do something very different. And so, I intentionally majored in something that I thought I would like. And my mother was not pleased, because she knew that I would eventually change my major... So, I ended up changing my major to . . . not to education, because I graduated with a psychology degree. But I did end up going back to get the PhD in education.

**Extended family.** Extended family members also conveyed the significance of being educated. Participants connected their pursuit of doctoral attainment to the messages conveyed by their extended family, particularly grandparents. For example, Dr. Rebecca, a 35-44-year-old assistant professor, mentioned the messages instilled by her great-grandmother: "My great-grandmother... stressed how important education was, and once you earned it, it was yours forever. She always encouraged me to go all the way. She was one of 12 children and received her GED in her fifties." Similarly, Dr. Anna's, a 35-44-year-old, grandparents instilled in her a reverence for education; she said, "I was always brought up with the fact that knowledge is the key, so if you advance yourself in education, then you should have more opportunities . . . My grandparents were really big on education."

**Faculty.** Some participants were encouraged to pursue doctoral attainment because of the negative experiences they had with faculty. Participants expressed their desire to disconfirm negative expectations conveyed to them by way of pursuing and attaining a doctorate degree. Not wanting to be a statistic, Dr. Tosh,

25-34-year-old, recalled a conversation with a high school counselor that influenced her degree pursuit, explaining:

My high school advisor, a White male, who overall seemed very supportive, said, "your SAT grades are not going to get you into an Ivy League institution." So . . . to prove him wrong, to not be a statistic, I applied to said Ivy League institution. While I was rejected from two of the three, I did get into one [Ivy League institution].

Similarly, Dr. Quebec, 55-64-year-old, recounted an experience that caused her to go into "I'll show you" mode and ultimately led to her doctoral pursuit:

With an advisor (White male) who was not committed to my success, I almost did not graduate. A chance meeting with the only African American assistant professor in the department . . . led to my knowledge and completion of a required internship "just in time." Further fact-finding efforts revealed the intention to keep me from meeting [the African American male assistant professor]. The knowledge of this (perceived racism) ignited a fire that threw me into "I'll show you" mode. I was determined to pursue the next degree and, two years later, began my doctoral program in Educational Leadership. . . that was part of my motivation for going back to get this, get the doctorate, It's like, so you tried to trip me up? Let's let you watch. Let's let you watch. So, I go into what I call "Show Me Mode." Let me show you.

Interestingly, negative and positive social persuasions served to encourage participants' doctoral pursuits. Usher and Pajares (2008) suggested that the positive messages received from those close to them and whom they hold in reverence counter the negative messages received by inconsequential others. As such, the positive messages and encouragement Dr. Tosh and Dr. Quebec received from their parents and those whom they revered served as a barrier to the dissuading messages conveyed by others.

### **Mentors. (Experiential knowledge and support).**

Participants discussed the saliency of mentorship to their doctoral pursuits and how their mentors bolstered their confidence and served as a source of encouragement. Dr. Paula, 55-64-year-old-administrator, shared her interactions with her mentor:

I would meet with her by telephone, or exchange emails with her or, you know, she would, when we would talk about some of the things that I was finding, she was very encouraging. She just, still, just very encouraging. And then, along the way, she connected me with some of her other students she was mentoring, not because she was part of anybody's faculty, but because it's just something in her heart that she wanted to see more Black women pursue their Ph.D. and stick with it. Just hearing her talk about some of her experiences as an undergraduate, or some of the other women who were also going through the same things that I was going through, was very encouraging.

Dr. Mary, 35-44-year-old research scientist, shared how her African American male mentor influenced her doctoral path:

So he stayed with me throughout my undergrad. And I was there five years 'cause I did a co-op. So he stayed with me throughout that. And then when I was thinking about what to do next and did I want to get out and work, did I want to go to graduate school or whatever, he connected me with our department chair and was like, "She doesn't need to go to a job. She needs to go to graduate school." And they knew and reached out to him because they had worked with him in the past back when they were young scientists and graduate students, and said, "We've got a student. And we need to send her to you for graduate school." And that's how I ended up in graduate school. He was like, "What do you want to do?" I was like, "I want to do research." He was like, "You don't need to waste time with a

a Master's. You need to get your PhD."

**Pastor. (Faith).** Dr. Love, 45-54-year-old minister and instructor, shared how her African American pastor, exposure to an African American woman pastor with a terminal degree, and her faith influenced her beliefs in doctoral attainment:

What affected my confidence most was my faith and seeing and being mentored by African American female/woman pastors, who had earned a terminal degree. I would have to say hearing the women preach, instruct and facilitate workshops who had completed their doctoral studies. Just watching [African American female/woman pastor/professor] work with confidence and preach with authority, merging academic learning with biblical studies.

Dr. Quebec, 55-64-year-old-retired principal, shared how her faith community encouraged her: "At church, people would encourage you, so the community surrounded us, and we were able to go the next day and put up with foolishness, and come home and be brave, be encouraged at the church."

**Absence of mentorship.** While not identified in initial online responses, during focus interviews, participants discussed the difficulty they had experienced as a result of not having mentorship and support. Dr. Ashley, a 35-44-year-old research firm CEO, shared the response she received when she sought mentorship from her faculty advisor:

She said to me, 'You are a Black woman with a Ph.D. You are going to be able to write your own ticket, and so I don't need to mentor you as much as I have to mentor the White students. They're going to have it harder because there are more of them and it's going to be more competitive.' Once I got into the program and they broke it down. You know you'll get hired, but if you don't have the appropriate training, you're not going to survive and you're going to get fired because you're not going to be able to keep up. They're going to say, 'See, we told you.' Then I was mad because I was like, 'Dang, now I've



got to play catch up. There're all these things that were supposed to have happened, and I haven't been getting any of it.' I felt like I had to go into overdrive. Now what am I going to do because this White girl has all these papers and I haven't been put out anything. Now I've got to fight for everything.

The absence of mentorship often resulted in participants forming informal networks of support. Dr. Tosh, 25-34-year-old, described the informal network formed at her institution:

There is no handbook to get through a Ph.D. Knowing early how important it is to get connected to students ahead of you, departmental leadership, and form a support network is key. My institution had a . . . network for weekly accountability. This was an informal group, not on paper with the institution in any way, but led by one Black female/woman research professor for years. Once a Ph.D. student reaches a certain point, usually around a dissertation preparation phase and then throughout that phase, they're invited to come be a part of the group, because that's when you really need the accountability. This is after the traditional coursework is over and you're transitioning into the dissertation phase. That's what we have here. It's an informal network.

Through these informal networks, participants received the support that their doctoral programs failed to provide and were able to cope with their experiences as African American women doctoral students in the academy.

### **Physiological state**

The final source of self-efficacy, physiological and affective state, is defined as “somatic information conveyed by physiological and emotional states” (Bandura, 1997, p.106). For the purposes of exploring this source of self-efficacy, participants were asked: How would you describe your feelings and beliefs about education as you were pursuing it? Describe one memorable story that would help me

to understand how you came to do what you do. Among online survey participants, only one, Dr. Beverly, a 35- 44-year-old, described how her doctoral pursuit affected her physical and emotional well- being. She shared:

I was sitting in class and like I could feel my heart racing and I'm like I know my pressure's high. And like I knew that wasn't healthy for me . . . I had a moment with my mentor. She is Puerto Rican. In her office, when I told her I'm not going to be able to finish this program, that I wasn't cut out for this, I started crying and she was crying. She told me her experience and let me know that I wasn't the first to go through this and that I would get through this, and so I decided to stay in the program and see things through . . . And I remember her telling me very clearly, she said, "honey we all go through that." She said, "if you didn't cry, you didn't earn it."

Dr. Beverly shared her physical and emotional responses to her doctoral experiences and how she persevered and remained faithful to the Lord's purpose for her life. Despite the obstacles and challenges participants encountered throughout their doctoral journey as African American women pursuing doctoral attainment, they remained committed to their pursuit and faith. The next section illuminates how participants' intersectional identities shaped the sources of self-efficacy influencing their doctoral attainment beliefs.

### **Intersectional Identities**

This research sought to explore how the sources of self-efficacy underlying African American women's doctoral attainment beliefs were shaped by the intersectional identities. Intersectionality is defined as "the theoretical concept that race intersects with other subordinated identities (such as gender, class, religion, ability/ disability, and sexual orientation) and forms of oppression (sexism, homophobia, ableism) to influence People of Color's lived

experiences” (McCoy & Rodrick, 2015, p. 93). Results reveal that intersectionality shaped the doctoral experiences of the African American women participants. Intersectionality stories for this section are organized by the following sources of self-efficacy: a) Intersectional mastery experiences and b) Intersectional social persuasions. Each section below discusses and expands upon the intersecting identities of African American women doctoral achievers.

### **Intersectional Mastery Experiences**

Through mastery experiences, African American women’s self-efficacy regarding the pursuit of a doctoral degree was strengthened. Among participant’s 35-44-years of age, mastery experiences were particularly salient to their doctoral beliefs and attainment, with many citing those experiences as solidifying their desire for doctoral attainment. Relevant to participants’ mastery experiences was the connection they felt throughout their matriculation and how it was shaped by their intersectional identities (race and gender). As African American women, they felt a responsibility to engage in research and research practices that benefitted their communities. Participants such as Dr. Ashley, 35-44-years-old, described how their mastery experiences in the form of co-op, internships, and research led to their doctoral pursuits. Dr. Ashley shared: “that was when I realized that I needed to complete my doctorate and go into research, so I could help my community...

The African American women doctoral achievers were resolute, despite experiences of success and failure, because the value of education had been instilled in them from an early age, with “College graduation being an expectation from birth” (Dr. Quebec, 55-64-year-old). Among the 45-54 and 55-64-year-old participants, mastery experiences in the form of performance accomplishments affirmed their beliefs in their capabilities as doctoral students. African American women’s experiences of repeated successes (i.e., bachelor’s and master’s degree attainment) conveyed the message that they were capable. For example, when Dr. Kim dropped out of the Psy.D. program that she hated, she immediately enrolled in another program. Although her confidence was shaken while in the Psy.D. program, it returned the following semester when she enrolled in a new program that was a better fit. Interestingly, participants who cited academic and professional failures had previously shared stories of their early successes. Recalling Dr. Ashley, 35-44-years-old, she reflected on the moment her confidence waned, sharing that: “I made it all the way through fine, and I got to the Doctoral program and all of a sudden, you have to know how to study. I didn't.”

For African American women such as Dr. Ashley, mastery experiences fall within the intersectionality of their multi-faceted identities. While Dr. Ashley ultimately completed her doctoral degree (i.e., achieved mastery), it was not without challenges resultant from her multi-faceted identity as an African American woman pursuing

doctoral attainment. Dr. Ashley reflected on her initial performance failure and highlighted the toll operating within a racist context had on her as an African American doctoral student attending a Predominantly White Institution (PWI). As mentioned, she shared: “Every day, I would see people supporting the Confederate flag right outside my school. I could look out the window and see these people. I would see Confederate flags everywhere. I just hated [the state] with a passion. I was tired.”

Mastery experiences have been found to be the most influential in the development of self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997); as such, participants’ early academic successes served to sustain their self-beliefs despite experiences of failures. However, these experiences can be tempered by the social persuasion messages individuals receive from important social others (Usher & Pajares, 2008). For African American women, such as Dr. Ashley, their intersectional identities are shaped by mastery experiences and social persuasions from their peers and significant social others (e.g., the group of African American students Dr. Ashley sought out for support in her racially charged academic environment). The messages Dr. Ashley received from her peers influenced her beliefs regarding her own doctoral attainment and ultimately, cemented beliefs of her own achievement capabilities (McCallum, 2016; McCoy, 2014).

### **Social Persuasions Shaped by Intersectional Identities**

Dr. Paula, a 55-64-year-old, contrasted the social persuasions she

received as an African American student attending a Predominantly White University (PWI) as compared to her experiences while attending a Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU). She shared:

My experience at a public university with no Black faculty and a handful of African Americans was discouraging. I did not feel the same support or village I had at an HBCU. [At my HBCU], they were very clear about, okay, you are here because we know you can go out and do great things. Not everybody can do it; you are here because we know you can . . . that was something I heard all the time from professors, expecting the best out of us and saying: “You have a responsibility to go back and pay it forward.” At my [PWI], I never got any of that. I never, ever, not even one time, heard anything like that.

Dr. Quebec, 55-64-year-old, described the social persuasion she received from her advisor/mentor that influenced her to persevere, despite the racism she experienced as an African American doctoral student:

[My mentor], an African American male] challenged me to “go for it”, with his promised guidance, support and encouragement. Near the end when I was weary of writing my dissertation and wanted to quit, [he] drove 20 minutes to . . . where I was the disheartened, discouraged, fatigued elementary principal, grad student, wife and mother of two daughters, eight and nine years old. He would. . . “rally the troops” with his “your success defeats their racist agenda” pep talk. He was the best!

Dr. Tosh, 25-34-year-old, discussed a message she received as an African American young woman in middle school that resonated with her. She shared:

Eighth grade graduation from my private Catholic school where I graduated with 36 other individuals. I was, of course, the sole Black girl and somebody said to me, "You know what, this is probably the best you're going to do. You're going to go to high school and you're going to get pregnant." . . . that was a negative experience that showed me what people really think of Black women. . .

Bandura (1997) observed that early challenges facilitate an

individual's refining of capabilities to exercise improved agency in overcoming obstacles. As such the challenges encountered prior to and during participants' doctoral pursuit and attainment influenced and shaped their beliefs in their ability to succeed. One participant noted, "When I left that program, I became confident in who I am as a person, who I am in my field, who I am as a researcher because of what I had to go through."

## CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

This qualitative study sought to identify socialization messages influencing African American women's doctoral attainment beliefs and how these messages were shaped by the intersectionality of race, class, and gender. The goal of this study was to give voice to the lived experiences of African American women doctoral achievers and elucidate their stories. Yosso et al. (2004) emphasized that "to fully understand the ways in which race and racism shape educational institutions and maintain various forms of discrimination we must look to the lived experiences of Students of Color . . . as valid, appropriate and necessary forms of data" (p. 15).

Understanding the lived experiences of African American women and how their intersecting identities shape the sources of self-efficacy regarding their doctoral degree attainment is important as such has not been a central feature of the research/conceptual literature for this population. Through a Critical Race Theory framework, the self-efficacy beliefs shaping African American women's doctoral attainment were explored through the tenet of intersectionality. Two research questions were addressed in this research:

1. What experiences and factors have shaped the pursuit and attainment of the doctoral degree by African American women?
2. How does the intersection of race, class, and gender shape the sources of self-efficacy for African American women's



doctoral achievers?

Relative to these questions, three themes emerged as shaping African American women's doctoral attainment beliefs: 1) Doctoral attainment as a commitment to social justice; 2) faith; and 3) experiential knowledge and support. In this final chapter, findings and literature, relative to the research questions and themes identified in this study, will be discussed. This chapter will conclude with an illumination of implications and directions for future research. Answers to these research questions were explored within the four sources underlying self-efficacy beliefs, mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion, and physiological state.

### **Discussion of Research Questions**

#### **What experiences and factors have shaped the pursuit and attainment of the doctoral degree by African American women?**

Through counter-narratives, African American female/woman doctoral achievers shared the socialization messages influencing their doctoral degree pursuit and attainment. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) described counter-narratives as “a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege” (p. 32). The narratives shared by the participants counter the majoritarian narratives in the current literature by illuminating how African American women's intersectional identities shape the sources of self-efficacy influencing their doctoral pursuit and attainment beliefs. The following section will discuss each source of self-efficacy and its implications for

African American women's doctoral attainment. Subsections are organized by the sources of self-efficacy.

**Sources of self-efficacy and African American women's doctoral attainment** **Mastery experiences.** Results from the exploration of mastery experiences among the study participants showed doctoral attainment as a commitment to improving social conditions in the African American community. Participants' responses illuminated the connection between their identities, as African American female/woman doctoral students, and mastery experiences throughout their doctoral studies. For many of the participants, doctoral attainment was sought to address the inequalities they had experienced during their co-op, internship, and research experiences within African American communities. Similar to other studies (Charleston & Leon, 2016; Fry Brown et al., 2014; McCallum, 2017) that have explored African American students' higher education pursuits, participants' predilection to affect change through educational attainment was salient.

The impetus for participants' doctoral pursuit was stymied by their lived experiences as African American women. As African American women pursuing higher education, they were initially exposed to inequitable health behaviors that negatively affect African American women and their communities. As newcomers to the academy, participants delved into research seeking to redress the inequities of their communities. Dr. Frieda, a 35-44-year-old college professor, described how her research on obesity-related issues in

African American women influenced her pursuit and attainment of a doctoral degree. Further, Dr. Tosh, a 25-34-year-old adjunct college professor, discussed how she was influenced to pursue and achieve doctoral attainment as a result of her graduate school research exploring the impact of obesity among African American women. Given participants' status as female/woman African American undergraduate and graduate students, their ability to help their communities was limited; thus, doctoral achievement allowed them to effect change relative to the research and interventions taking place in their communities. Such sentiment is reflected in the educational psychology literature, particularly with Bandura (1997) who asserted that "[empowerment] is gained through development of personal efficacy that enables people to take advantage of opportunities and to remove environmental constraints guarded by those whose interest are served by them" (p. 477).

Participants initially relied on their program faculty and advisors (i.e., purveyors of knowledge) to assist them in creating solutions. However, some African American women described interest convergence experiences in terms of being recruited into doctoral programs for the purpose of addressing the needs of the program rather than the program addressing the needs of the African American women within the program. While some African American women's desires to affect change in their communities was positively received, others encountered faculty and advisors who deemed their pursuits "as outside of the scope of their grant." Dr. Ashley, a 35-44-

year-old research firm CEO, described how working with a White doctoral advisor who was doing health-related research, in the absence of interventions, within Black communities influenced her belief in achieving her doctoral degree. As such, participants realized that they would have to resist the notion of “people needing to help themselves,” and “show out in the only way they knew how” by pursuing doctoral attainment as a commitment to social justice.

In all, participants’ mastery experiences throughout their internship and research endeavors solidified their doctoral degree attainment, which for most, was evidence of a commitment to social justice. A commitment to social justice in higher education represents a commitment to resist the subordination of marginalized individuals and communities and advocate, through scholarship and praxis, for the empowerment of subordinated groups (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). The determination of participants to utilize their doctoral attainment for the purpose of affecting social change is reflective of the racial uplift (Perkins, 1980, 1993) in which African American women have engaged for centuries. Historically, African American women have assumed the responsibility of acquiring and utilizing education as the catalyst for propelling the African American race (Giddings, 1984). This legacy is still resonant and shapes African American women’s pursuit of doctoral attainment today. McCallum (2017) asserted that African Americans’ pursuing doctorates have a collectivist orientation, whereas their doctoral attainment “contributes to the cultural wealth of the African American community” (p.148).

Collectivism has been defined as a cultural orientation where in the needs of the group take precedent over the needs of the individual. African American women's collectivist orientation is rooted in their African heritage (Carson, 2009; Triandis, 1995). As such, the mastery experiences shaping participants' doctoral attainment beliefs are reflective of this collectivist orientation and are evidence of a commitment to social justice. Dr. Paula, 55-64-years old, recalled the collectivist expectation shared by her HBCU: "You're the best and we're expecting wonderful things out of you, and you're here because we know that you have, you feel a responsibility beyond the degree to pay it forward." Dr. Quebec, 55-64-year-old, shared her collectivist belief relative to her doctoral attainment:

It's always fallen to us to be the first to do this, or to be the resource in the community. So how are you going to guide and help people if you don't go as far as you can go? And you're not, for me, you're not as well-equipped as you might be. People are watching. You want people to watch. People are watching, how did you fail? It's like, "No, don't do that.

The mastery experiences of African American women that successfully pursued doctoral degrees can also be described in terms of resistance capital (Yosso, 2005). Resistance capital refers to the acquiring of knowledge and skills for the purpose of challenging inequalities (Yosso, 2005). Participants' sources of resistance capital include parents, extended family members, communities, and a "legacy of resistance to inequality" (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). As such, African American participants' doctoral degree attainment prepared them to address the unmet needs of their communities and have a voice at the table to challenge the inequities within African American communities. For many participants, the needs of

For many participants, the needs of their communities were common explanatory factors for their demonstrated perseverance and achievement in the academic spaces they occupied. With such in mind, efforts to increase doctoral degree conferment among African American women must begin to explore and utilize the psychological, emotional, and socio-historical bond between this population and the needs of the communities they emerge from.

**Vicarious experiences.** Regarding vicarious experiences, many of the African American women participants reported the benefits of role models in the form of experiential knowledge and support gleaned and being discouraged by the limited numbers of African American faculty they had encountered throughout their post-secondary education. Dr. Anna, a 35-44-year-old teacher, described the absence of role models and how she coped, explaining: “there's not a lot of people to look forward in inspiring you . . . so I just used, leaned more on my understanding of that and my faith to get me through those challenging times.”

Participants felt the need to persist and exercise agency in gaining the support they needed to overcome obstacles resulting from the lack of role models. Bandura (1997) suggested these obstacles provide participants with an opportunity to demonstrate resiliency and hone their capabilities in exercising agency in their doctoral success. Participants exercised agency, in that they sought and formed networks and informal support groups with African American students who were in various stages of their doctoral pursuit, and

faculty to obtain the support they needed. As mentioned, Dr. Tosh, a 25-34-year-old adjunct professor, shared:

My institution had a . . . network for weekly accountability. This was an informal group, not on paper with the institution in any way, but led by one Black female/woman research professor for years. Once a Ph.D. student reaches a certain point, usually around a dissertation preparation phase and then throughout that phase, they're invited to come be a part of the group, because that's when you really need the accountability.

Many participants acknowledged that they would not have made it through their doctoral programs if not for the support received from the groups and networks they formed with other Students of Color. Dr. Ashley, a 35-44-year-old research firm CEO shared:

Had it not been for a few other Students of Color who formed a support group, I do not think I would have made it. I cannot imagine what would have happened if I had been at an institution where there were not other Students of Color to support me.

Through these informal networks of support, participants held a collective efficacy that, together, they could attain doctoral degrees. Bandura (1997) defined collective efficacy as “a group’s shared belief in its conjoint capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given levels of attainments (p. 477). The experiential knowledge and support received from these groups influenced participants’ self- and collective efficacy. Included in this experiential knowledge is what Yosso (2005) refers to as social and navigational capital. Yosso (2005) described social capital “as networks of people and community resources. . . [providing] both

instrumental and emotional support to navigate through society's institutions" (p. 79). Conversely, navigational capital refers to skills used to navigate through institutions of higher learning as Students of Color. Throughout their matriculation, most of the study participants leveraged their social and navigational capital toward a common goal of doctoral attainment (Yosso, 2005). By employing elements of their cultural identity (collectivism), the participants vicariously experienced the fortification of their own beliefs regarding doctoral attainment. Specifically, it was through vicarious experiences with role models and members from their respective doctoral cohorts that the participants fortified their beliefs in the ability to earn doctorates.

These findings are consistent with the literature. For example, Patton and Harper (2003) asserted that mentoring relationships between African American faculty and graduate students are important and central to the vitality of African American women in the academy. For African American women pursuing doctoral attainment, the numbers of African American women faculty available to serve as mentors is limited. As Patton and Harper (2003) noted, mentors of other races can also serve as mentors; however, they must be willing to address pre-existing or arising biases resulting from the mentee's intersecting identities.

For one participant, her admission to the doctoral program was not reflective of a doctoral program striving for equity. Equity requires that substantive structures are in place that foster growth and



reflect institutional efforts toward comprehensive change that will retain and sustain Students of Color to doctoral attainment. Although the participant had an equal opportunity for mentorship, her university was devoid of institutional structures that were inclusive and assistive in facilitating her success. However, the inception of the Kellogg mentoring program provided equity in the mentorship of African American students and provided the participant with what she had yearned for, a willing mentor that knew how to mentor African American doctoral students. This experience illuminated a critique of liberalism in that the participant's university sought to strive for equity and engage in mentoring programs that addressed the needs of African American students, she explained:

It wasn't until my last year of my doctoral program, they had this thing called the African American Professors Program. It was the first year they had it. It was funded by Kellogg, and the purpose of it was to try to retain African Americans in Doctoral programs. They provided us some money to help with tuition, and they did a mentoring program. That's the first time I had any formal mentoring. They did a program for us, and then they did training for our mentors because, it was 10 Black students across the University who were in Doctoral programs. None of us had a Black mentor. All of our mentors got training on, "here's how you mentor Black students. Here's what you need to consider. Here's what's likely going on with your students. Here's how you are likely not mentoring your students even when you think you are." And that's what completely changed my experiences with mentoring.

I later asked Dr. Ashley, "Did you see a change in [your advisor's] mentoring style once she completed the Kellogg program with you? She said:

Oh yeah. Absolutely. But I also saw a change in my mentee style because they trained us on how to be mentees. I knew how to ask for mentoring and how to ask for what I wanted,

and I knew what to expect. Years later, she apologized, but just some of her notions about what Black Doctoral students needed were just so off.

**Social persuasion.** Social persuasion messages conveyed expectations for participants' educational achievements. Messages from parents and family members communicated the value of education and the significance of pursuing higher education. Dr. Jill, a 35-44-year-old clinical assistant professor, shared how her grandmother encouraged her doctoral pursuit:

Whether she knew it or not, she encouraged me to pursue my PhD because she emphasized my being the best. She would ask, "Why would you work as the nurse's aide when you can become a nurse?" She didn't tell me to pursue my PhD but she encouraged me to explore what the "top" had to offer.

Participants, such as Dr. Paula, a 55-64-year old administrator, discussed how faculty members influenced their doctoral attainment beliefs. She shared:

I had a great mentor, another African American woman, who kept me encouraged. She's a mentor, she ended up sitting on my dissertation committee, and I'm still connected to her today. If it had not been for her, there were times I think I would have, I don't know what I would have done. She's definitely someone who said: "Keep going, and these experiences that you are having are not unique to you. keep going."

Participants also described pursuing education out of reverence for their families and communities. Dr. Jill, 35-44-year-old, a clinical assistant professor, described growing up in a family with high educational expectations:

My grandmother and aunts always encouraged and believed in me. They affirmed that I have the intelligence and opportunity to do whatever I choose. My mother was hard. She allowed no

excuses and expected the best. She allowed no room for error. So out of reverence, I always tried my best academically. I also spent time around friends who wanted everything the world had to offer. It's hard being mediocre around great people.

Familial capital, a component of cultural capital (Yosso, 2005), informed participants' doctoral attainment pursuits and beliefs. Familial capital refers to "cultural knowledges nurtured among familial (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition. . . [this] form of cultural wealth engages a commitment to community well-being (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). Through familial capital, as Yosso (2005) asserted, empathy and community commitment among Students of Color are shaped and informed through an "emotional, moral, educational and occupational consciousness [that] can be fostered within and between families, as well as through sports, school, religious gatherings and other social community settings" (p. 79).

As such, participants' doctoral attainment beliefs reflected the social persuasions instilled by individuals whom participants revered. These individuals included family members, faculty, African American and faith community members. The messages conveyed by these significant others influenced participants' persistence and resilience when challenged with obstacles to their doctoral attainment.

**Physiological state.** Physiological and affective state was the minimally represented source of self-efficacy throughout the doctoral matriculation of African American women in the current

study. One participant, Dr. Beverly, described how the intersectionality of her race, age, and gender affected her doctoral beliefs. She recalled:

So when I started my doctorate, I was 25. And so I was the youngest in my cohort, because we were the first cohort, but there were other people in my program there were some who were closer to my mother's age. There were people who had kids my age. And so when it got to class, we would have discussion about stuff and you know, asking for input. Like, I would give my input and it just kind of seemed like people just bypassed what I said as though my comments weren't valid? Because of my age or you know, oh well what I said, oh that's great but moving on. And so I just kind of felt like I wasn't validated or valued in the program. And then because I was always the one who was outspoken, I felt like for a lot of stuff they would try to make me the scapegoat. And so the first year of my program of sitting in classes and feeling like you know, my pressure is getting high because of people's comments or feeling like I couldn't say anything, I got to the second year and I didn't say anything. I came to class and that's what I did. I would come in, and then when class was over, I would leave. I didn't really speak to anybody. Because I was like, this is what I need to do to get through this program because your mindset isn't going to change. So what's the point of me getting myself overly worked up trying to get my way and trying to sway people a different kind of way or trying to get them to see my viewpoint if it's not going to do anything. Because I think we feel like everybody thinks we're the angry Black woman if we are always saying something. Or if we're very firm with that. And so I think sometimes we may feel like, okay, well, let me be a little passive or let me not do that because I don't want people thinking one way about me.

In her recalled experience, Dr. Beverly illustrates how the intersecting identities of African American women shape their experiences within the academy. Dr. Beverly described her experience of being “othered” by her peers and her institution. This experience and its sharing with her then mentor enabled Dr. Beverly to develop the necessary emotional courage to make the decision to endure the doctoral

endure the doctoral process, despite the propensity of her host institution to alienate students of color. In describing her experience as being 'othered', Collins (2000) described the construction of "other" in binary terms, with Dr. Beverly's experiences as an African American woman pursuing a doctorate, are countered to those within the majority population. Dr. Beverly's experiences illustrate how the intersectionality of African American women's multiple identities shape their experiences within the academy. Those in the academy sought to disempower and silence her voice and, although, Dr. Beverly's voice was momentarily silenced, it was never lost. I later asked Dr. Beverly if her voice returned over the course of the program, she answered:

No. if I could do it over, I wouldn't have let that happen. But at that time, I did what I felt was best for me because I was sitting in class and like I could feel my heart racing and I'm like I know my pressure's high. And like I knew that wasn't healthy for me so, I did what I felt was the healthiest for me. But if I could go back and I was the person I am now then, I wouldn't have done that. But again, I was 25 or 26. I was just trying to get through.

Although Dr. Beverly's voice was momentarily silenced; she reclaimed her voice and power by way of persevering and coming out on the other side (i.e. doctoral attainment).

**How does the intersectionality of race, class, and gender shape the sources of self-efficacy underlying the socialization messages influencing African American women's doctoral attainment beliefs?**

The intersectionality of race, class, and gender shapes the

sources of self-efficacy influencing African American women's doctoral attainment beliefs by contextualizing these sources within an individual's lived experience. For example, social persuasions, defined in simple terms, are the social expressions of beliefs in a person's capabilities (Bandura, 1997). However, social persuasions do not occur in the absence context. For example, the receipt of a social persuasion message in which a White advisor tells an African American female/woman doctoral student,

You are a Black woman with a Ph.D. You are going to be able to write your own ticket, and so I don't need to mentor you as much as I have to mentor the White students. They're going to have it harder because there are more of them and it's going to be more competitive.

will influence the African American female/woman's doctoral beliefs differently than it would a White female/woman doctoral student because the social persuasion message is received in the context of each woman's intersectional identity.

Participants shared stories of their experiences as African American women pursuing doctoral attainment, with most focusing on the intersectionality of race, gender, and doctoral student status. Participants such as Dr. Tosh and Dr. Frieda pursued the doctorate in order to initiate research agendas and praxis that would positively impact their community, particularly among African American women with significant health issues. As African American doctoral students, participants exhibited a collectivist orientation (Triandis, 1995) toward pursuing doctoral education as a commitment to social justice. Recall

Dr. Ashley:

I would see these people in the store. I would see these people at church. I would see the participants. I'm like, "Okay. I just came to your house. I know you're ill, and I'm not going to do anything about it." I can't do that. You look like people in my family. You could be people in my family.

Participants also shared how their doctoral attainment beliefs were shaped through vicarious experiences with African American female/women faculty in the academy. In addition, participants discussed the challenges associated with attending a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) as African American women pursuing doctoral education. For example, Dr. Tosh, 25-34, shared the significance of African American women with PhD's:

I was used to Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) before my PhD (also a PWI), but I still needed and thrived knowing that at least one other Black person most often happened to be a woman, was in my cohort, program, or a part of the faculty. It would be even more important for a Black woman to be in leadership in her department. It sends a signal that the department is serious about diversity. Given, the "I see you. I got your back" automatic acknowledgement that often occurs between Black individuals. A Black faculty member may indicate that lines of communication are open.

Participants also described how, through social persuasions and vicarious experiences, their intersectional identities as African American female/women doctoral students shaped their doctoral attainment beliefs. Dr. Love, 45-54, described how social persuasion messages can dissuade African American women's doctoral attainment beliefs. She shared:

I think it's very, very prevalent among African American women. And I think for us, a lot of it has to do with, historically, things that have happened, and institutional barriers and all of that. And so I think those things certainly have a

major impact on that as well. But I also look at the landscape and see that a lot of African American women will take on the role of caregiver for families, for their family members, for their parents, or either feel like because they are parents that it's not something that they can pursue. . . You know, 'I just can't do that because I have to care for my family' r, 'I have to work, and so I don't believe that I can do both'."

Dr. Oliver, 55-64, also shared the negative social persuasion and difficulties shaping African American female/women's doctoral attainment beliefs as a result of their intersecting identities. She said:

I got so much negative feedback when I started working toward my degree. I have talked to other women that I know, Black women that I know, that have their degrees. We have like a little, and I don't want to say it's a club, but we meet once a month, the African-American women who have doctorate degrees. . . We were talking about how we think it's harder. We've come to the conclusion that life can be harder for Black women than Black men because we share our stories, and we've found that they're so similar to what we have to go through and just some of the things. . . One of the ladies that graduated when I did last year she is now the director of human resources for our district. I still hear things. I hear people say things about her and, I mean, they're African-American, too, that say things. Just things like, "I don't know why they hired her. Probably just because she has a doctorate degree." Her degree is in human resources, so I don't know. I just feel like that, as African-American women, we have to prove ourselves far and beyond sometimes more so than the African-American male. Once we are successful or we reach a certain plateau, then it's not always easy.

African American women participating in this research reported receiving both positive and dissuading messages that influenced their doctoral attainment beliefs. These messages were experienced through the intersectionality of participants' identities as African American women pursuing doctoral education. The Igbo and Yoruba Nigerian proverb "It takes a village to raise a child" was resonant in participants' stories. The foundation for participants' doctoral attainment beliefs were first shaped by their parents and



extended family members, who set high educational expectations. The social persuasion messages and vicarious experiences conveyed by African American church and community members were also particularly salient and contributed to their collectivist (Triandis, 1995) orientation towards addressing the social ills affecting their communities.

### **Implications**

This research exploring African American women's doctoral attainment beliefs is important for several reasons. First, qualitative exploration of African American women doctors is limited in the current literature; therefore, there is not a referent for understanding how the intersectionality of race, class, and gender shape the sources of self-efficacy that influence African American women's doctoral attainment beliefs. This research advanced their perspectives. Through the application of counter-narratives, participants were given an opportunity to share their experiences as African American female/woman doctoral students in the academy. Participants were driven by the saliency of their faith, the benefit they can offer to their respective communities, and the significance of supporting and guiding future doctoral achievers with similar desires and experiences. Based on these findings, recommendations could be made to increase the retention and doctoral achievement of African American women through an intentional recruitment emphasis on how a doctorate can facilitate development of ideas that mitigate persistent social and physical ailments among African Americans. Additional

recommendations should emphasize an intentional retention strategy that systematizes multiple layers of mentoring and coaching for African American women pursuing doctoral degrees. Prior to graduate study, such efforts could identify and foster early consideration of doctoral degree pursuit, particularly with university-sponsored bridge programming for underrepresented groups such as African American women in the professoriate. Additionally, academic units within colleges and universities could introduce African American girls and young women to co-op, internship, and research experiences at younger ages, thereby cultivating attitudes towards higher education—and thus establishing early sources of self-efficacy—among K-12 African American girls and young women. Given the significance of participants' faith, individual academic units within post-secondary education could begin to forge relationships with the African American faith community. Such action may serve as a springboard towards the intentional pursuit of doctoral education among African American young women. These efforts could positively influence the retention and doctoral achievement of African American women through exposure to opportunities that convey the saliency of doctoral attainment as a conduit for affecting social change.

Additionally, social support in the form of mentoring would benefit African American women in the academy. Given the limited numbers of African American mentors available, incorporating mentoring programs that contextualize the experiences of Students of Color and train mentors from other ethnic backgrounds (e.g., White,

Asian, Latino) would enable colleges and universities to meet the needs of African American women pursuing doctoral attainment and establish proper expectations for these relationships without the overreliance on African American faculty for these significant practices. One participant expressed her displeasure with consistently being assigned to African American faculty to meet her mentoring needs. She indicated that she preferred to work with someone who shared her research interests, not just her skin tone. Conversely, research supports culturally similar mentor and mentee relationships because these relationships provide “nurturing, mothering, and culturally relevant counsel—roles that could best be played by another African American woman” (Patton & Harper, 2003, p.72). Patton and Harper (2003) asserted: “Unarguably, a large responsibility must be shouldered by African American women to foster mentoring relationships with graduate and professional students” (p.75). However, Patton and Harper (2003) also acknowledged the “extreme shortage” of African American women faculty and staff available to serve in this capacity. As such, she (Patton & Harper, 2003) suggested that mentors of other races must be inviting and willing to address pre-existing or arising biases resulting from the mentee’s intersecting identities. Thus, incorporating a mentoring program in which faculty and staff are trained to meet the needs of Students of Color would serve to diversify mentoring relationships and ensure that mentors understand and can meet these needs.

The voices of the African American women who abandoned

their doctoral pursuits are absent from this literature. As such, unanswered questions relative to their self-efficaciousness and how their experiences shaped their pursuit and abating of doctoral attainment remains unanswered. Thus, research exploring how the intersectionality of race, class, and gender shape the sources of self-efficacy that influence African American women's doctoral attainment beliefs should be conducted with African American female/women who pursued and renounced doctoral attainment.

Participants also contrasted and emphasized the distinctions between attending a PWI and a HBCU. Participants discussed the challenges African American women pursuing doctoral attainment encounter as students at PWIs and the decreased and/or absent opportunities for vicarious experiences and social persuasions. Conversely, participants who attended HBCUs described them as being a welcoming, collectivist- oriented environment, with faculty who conveyed high expectations, expressed beliefs in students' capabilities, and implored students to give back to their communities. Future research should be conducted with African American female/women doctoral achievers who earned their degree from an HBCU to explore how the intersectionality of race, class, and gender shapes sources of self-efficacy and experiences influencing their doctoral attainment beliefs.

### **Study limitations**

There were several limitations to this study. The number of participants who completed follow-up interviews limited the

interpretation of findings. There were 20 participants who completed the online survey. Participants were recruited through social media (i.e., Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, etc.), my personal and professional network of peers, church members, mentors, and colleagues. Participant recruitment could have been expanded to include post-secondary institutions and alumni associations which may have yielded additional participants.

An additional limitation of this study was the format of the online interview protocol. Participants were not allowed to preview the online interview protocol in its entirety. Rather, participants had to answer questions one at a time, not being allowed to proceed to a question on the following page until the question on the current page was answered. Prospective participants may have been deterred from participating and/or completing the online interview protocol based on this format.

Finally, the information-rich responses gleaned from this survey came primarily from follow-up interviews that allowed participants to freely communicate their answers without the added responsibility of typing their responses. This research may have benefitted from allowing participants to voice record, rather than type, their online responses or by conducting individual face-to-face interviews in lieu of preliminary online data collection. This may have resulted in participants being more inclined to share and expand upon their narratives, thereby increasing the number of participant information rich responses.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this research was to explore the intersectionality of race, class, and gender among African American female/doctoral achievers to an attempt to determine the experiences and factors that influenced their efficacy regarding doctoral degree pursuit and matriculation.

This research contributes to the literature relative to African American women's doctoral attainment and adds to the literature exploring self-efficacy beliefs among graduate students by identifying an underrepresented group of doctoral students and exploring their experiences and thoughts on the process they endured. This research can be used by faculty and administrators to enhance their understanding of African American women's intersectional identities and how their intersectionality shapes their beliefs in themselves regarding their ability to complete a doctoral program.

Finally, this research can also serve as referent to African American women considering and/or pursuing doctoral attainment. Several participants reflected on the need for African American women doctoral achievers to share their stories, with one participant asserting: "I think we need to have Black women with doctorates share their stories and be open and honest so other Black women know the struggle, reward, an elevation that happens when you pursue your doctorate." "I think because we don't share our stories enough, people get beat down and they get out before they can get in front of the students. So we're losing people in droves." It is my hope that the stories shared by the African American women in this research inspires

African American women considering and/or pursuing doctoral attainment to know that it is possible and that they are not alone in their journey.

APPENDIX A: NETWORK/LIST SERVE REQUEST/ LETTER OF  
INVITATION

Dear XXXX,

I am collecting data for my research study which focuses on messages received by African American women that influenced their Doctoral degree attainment beliefs. My research is being sponsored by Dr. Kenneth Tyler. I am in the process of collecting data for my research, which has received IRB approval. Please forward the request below to your list serve, as I am seeking participants who: (1) are Female, (2) self-identify as African American/Black, (3) are citizens of the United States, and (4) have earned a doctoral degree from a university within the United States. Thank you for your time and support in this research project.

Best,

ReShanta Hazelbaker, MS,

Doctoral Candidate

Educational Psychology

University of Kentucky



## Letter of Invitation-Solicitation

Dear XXXX,

My name is ReShanta Hazelbaker, and I am a Doctoral Candidate in the Educational Psychology program at the University of Kentucky. Under the supervision of Dr.

Kenneth Tyler, I am in the process of collecting data for my research study, which seeks to identify and explore messages received by African American women that influenced their Doctoral degree attainment beliefs. \

All participants who are: (1) are Female, (2) self-identify as African American/Black, (3) are citizens of the United States, and (4) have earned a doctoral degree from a university within the United States are invited to participate in this online survey questionnaire and follow-up focus interview. Participation is voluntary and responses are anonymous.

To participate in the survey, click the link below. You will be redirected to a confidential online survey. Should you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to email me at [reshanta.beatty-hazelabker@uky.edu](mailto:reshanta.beatty-hazelabker@uky.edu) or Dr. Kenneth Tyler ([Kenneth.Tyler@uky.edu](mailto:Kenneth.Tyler@uky.edu)). Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

ReShanta Hazelbaker, MS,  
Doctoral Candidate  
Educational Psychology  
University of Kentucky

## APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT

Title of Study: Believing in Achieving: Messages Influencing African American Women's Doctoral Degree Attainment Beliefs

### WHY ARE YOU BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH?

You are being invited to take part in a research study about messages influencing African American Women's doctoral degree attainment beliefs. You are being invited to take part in this research study because you: (1) are Female, (2) self-identify as African American/Black, (3) are a citizen of the United States; and (4) have earned a doctoral degree from a university within the United States.

### WHO IS DOING THE STUDY?

The person in charge of this study is ReShanta Hazelbaker (Principal Investigator), a Doctoral Candidate in the Educational Psychology program in the Department of Educational, School, and Counseling Psychology at the University of Kentucky. She is being guided in this research by Dr. Kenneth Tyler (Sponsoring Faculty).

### WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

By doing this study, we hope to learn what messages influence African American women's doctoral degree attainment beliefs.

### ARE THERE REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

You must be: (1) female, (2) self-identify as African American/Black (3) a citizen of the United States, and (4) have

earned a doctoral degree from a university within the United States. If you do not meet the aforementioned criteria, you should not take part in this study.

#### WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

The research will be conducted through this online survey tool. You can complete the survey via campus or your own personal computer. If you agree to participate, the online survey questionnaire will take approximately forty-five minutes to complete. Follow-up interviews will occur at a later date and last 60 to 90 minutes.

#### WHAT WILL YOU BE ASKED TO DO?

Participation in this research study is completely voluntary. If you agree to take part in this study, your participation will consist of you answering several questions. After completing the questionnaire, you will be contacted to participate in a follow-up interview that will occur at a later date and take approximately 60 to 90 minutes to complete. No personally identifying information will be given out about you.

#### WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?

To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing will have no more risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life. You may find some questions we ask you to be upsetting or stressful. If these feelings become problematic, please seek counseling services.

## WILL YOU BENEFIT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

There is no guarantee that you will get any benefit from taking part in this study however; you may benefit society as a whole. The societal benefit of this research lies in its identification of messages that have the potential to reduce attrition and increase the pursuit and attainment of the Doctoral degrees by African American students. The anticipated outcomes emergent from this research are: (1) identification of messages influencing African American females' Doctoral attainment beliefs, (2) potential increase in the frequency of messages positively influencing African American women's Doctoral attainment beliefs, and (3) potential decrease in the frequency of messages negatively influencing African American women's Doctoral attainment.

## DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?

Participation in this research study is voluntary and participants are free to discontinue participation in this study at any time.

## IF YOU DON'T WANT TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY, ARE THERE OTHER CHOICES?

If you do not want to be in the study, there are no other choices except not to take part in the study.

## WHAT WILL IT COST YOU TO PARTICIPATE?

There are no costs associated with participating in this study.

WILL YOU RECEIVE ANY REWARDS FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

Payment/Rewards are not being offered in exchange for participation in this study.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT YOU GIVE?

Please be aware, while we make every effort to safeguard your data once received from the online survey/data gathering company, given the nature of online surveys, as with anything involving the Internet, we can never guarantee the confidentiality of the data while still on the survey/data gathering company's servers, or while en route to either them or us. It is also possible the raw data collected for research purposes may be used for marketing or reporting purposes by the survey/data gathering company after the research is concluded, depending on the company's Terms of Service and Privacy policies.

The principal investigator and the research team members will have access to the data and the data will be stored on the principal investigator's computer with password protected computer files. For those who provide additional information to us for the follow up interview, we will keep private all research records that identify you to the extent allowed by law. However, we may be required to show information which identifies you to people who need to be sure we have done the research correctly; these would be people from such organizations as the University of Kentucky. Identifiable information will be destroyed after data collection is completed.

## CAN YOUR TAKING PART IN THE STUDY END EARLY?

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time by clicking the exit button. If you decide not to take part in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

## WHAT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS, SUGGESTIONS, CONCERNS, OR COMPLAINTS?

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints about the study, you can contact the investigator, ReShanta Hazelbaker, M.S. at [reshanta.beatty-hazelbaker@uky.edu](mailto:reshanta.beatty-hazelbaker@uky.edu) or Dr. Kenneth Tyler ([Kenneth.Tyler@uky.edu](mailto:Kenneth.Tyler@uky.edu)).

If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the staff in the Office of Research Integrity at the University of Kentucky at 859-257- 9428 or toll free at 1-866-400-9428.

Clicking on the “NEXT” button below will bring you to the survey and indicate that you have read the information contained in this form and agree to participate in this study

## APPENDIX C: CONTACT INFORMATION

Thank you for agreeing to participate in a follow-up interview for this study.

Please provide your contact information below so that we may schedule a time and date for the interview.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

#### APPENDIX D: DEMOGRAPHIC ITEMS

1. Please select your highest level of educational degree attainment?
2. Are you the first member of your family to earn a PhD?
3. What is your age?
4. What is your marital status?
5. How many children do you have?
6. How many siblings do you have?
7. What is the highest level of education completed by your FATHER?
8. What is the highest level of education completed by your MOTHER?
9. What was your household composition growing up (i.e., two parent, single parent, foster- parent)?
10. What is your current occupation?
11. How many years have you been employed in your current occupation?
12. What is your current salary?
13. What level of education is required for your occupation?
14. In what year did you earn your doctoral degree



## APPENDIX E: QUALTRICS QUESTIONNAIRE

As an African American woman.....

1. What events affected your confidence in pursuing your doctoral degree?
2. Can you think of a specific event that made you feel more confident in your capabilities to pursue your Ph.D.? Please describe.
3. Which ways were you exposed to others who had earned a Ph.D. in your life? (Check all that apply.)  
Watched someone that earned a Ph.D, on TV  
Read about someone that earned a Ph.D.  
Family member has a Ph.D.  
Friend has a Ph.D.  
Worked with someone who had a Ph.D.  
Parent has a Ph.D.  
Shadowed someone with a Ph.D.  
No exposure to someone with a Ph.D. prior to college, cooperative education, other....
4. Of the ways you have been exposed to someone with a Ph.D. in your life, which one has been most influential to you? How were they influential to you?
5. Has anyone encouraged or inspired you to pursue a Ph.D.? If so, who? How did they encourage or inspire you?
6. Please describe how you feel as someone who has earned a Ph.D.
7. How would you describe your feelings and beliefs about education as you were pursuing it? Describe one memorable story that would help me to understand how you came to do what you do?
8. Why do you think so few African American women pursue doctoral degrees? What could be or should be done to alter that?
9. Considering your academic and career history, if you could have done anything differently, what would that be? Why?

## APPENDIX F: INVITATION TO REVIEW RESULTS

Greetings,

Researchers at the University of Kentucky are inviting you to take part in reviewing the results from the research study you participated in: Believing in achieving: Messages influencing African American women's doctoral attainment beliefs. You are being invited to participate in reviewing the results from the research study because you provided responses in the previous study exploring messages influencing African American women's doctoral attainment beliefs. The purpose of you reviewing the data is to provide you with an opportunity to agree or disagree with the researcher's interpretation of your responses and make any recommendations for changes.

Although you may not get personal benefit from taking part in this research study your responses may help us understand more about the messages influencing African American women's doctoral attainment beliefs. Some from knowing they have contributed to research that may possibly benefit others in the future.

The reviewing of results will take about 30-60 minutes to complete.

There are no known risks to participating in this study.

Your response to the survey will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law. When we write about the study you will not be identified.

Identifiable information such as your name, clinical record number, or date of birth may be removed from the information collected in this study. After removal, the information may be used for future research or shared with other researchers without your additional informed consent.

We hope to receive completed reviews from about 20 people, so your answers are important to us. Of course, you have a choice about whether or not to complete the review, but if you do participate, you are free to skip any questions or discontinue at any time.

If you have questions about the study, please feel free to ask; my contact information is given below. If you have complaints, suggestions, or questions about your rights as a research volunteer, contact the staff in the University of Kentucky Office of Research Integrity at 859-257-9428 or toll-free at 1-866-400-9428.

Thank you in advance for your assistance with this important project. To ensure your responses/opinions will be included, please email, phone, or text ReShanta Hazelbaker to request a copy of the research results. Research results will be emailed or mailed to you by 10/03/18. Responses must be returned no later than 10/10/18.

Sincerely,

ReShanta Hazelbaker  
*Educational, School, & Counseling Psychology,*  
University of Kentucky PHONE: 859-509-1463  
E-MAIL: rcbeat0@g.uky.edu

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### **EDUCATION**

- 2006**            **M.S. - Family Studies**, University of Kentucky (UK)
- 2003**            **B.S. - Family & Consumer Sciences**, University of Kentucky  
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### **PROFESSIONAL POSITIONS**

- 2011- 2014**    **Adjunct Lecturer**, Bluegrass Community & Technical Colleg
- 2009**            **Community Development Specialist**, Community Action Council
- 2008-2012**    **Instructor**, University of Kentucky (UK)
- 2007-2008**    **Research Assistant**, University of Kentucky (UK)
- 2005-2007**    **Director**, Family Resource Center, Southern Elementary School

### **PROFESSIONAL SERVICE**

- 2013**            **Manuscript Reviewer**. Field-Based Learning in Family Life Education:  
Facilitating High-Impact Experiences in Undergraduate Family Science  
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- 2009-2010**    **Conference Proposal Reviewer**. National Council on Family Relations
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## **PUBLICATIONS**

Tyler, K.M., Uqdah, A.L., Dillihunt, M.L., **Beatty-Hazelbaker, R.**, Conner, T., Gadson, N.C., Henchy, A.M., Hughes, T., Mulder, S., Owens, E., Roan-Belle, C., Smith, L., & Stevens, R. (2008). Cultural discontinuity: Towards the empirical inquiry of a major hypothesis in education. *Educational Researcher, 37*, 280-297.

**Beatty-Hazelbaker, R.** (2007). Educating African American Youths and Parents about HIV/AIDS: A Call for Action. Published in the June 2007 National Council on Family Relations Report magazine.

## **SCHOLASTIC AND PROFESSIONAL HONORS**

<b>2013-2014</b>	University of Kentucky Women's Club Fellowship
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<b>2004-2005</b>	National Dean's List Honorary Awards Recognition
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