On Doctoral Student Development: Exploring Faculty Mentoring in the Shaping of African American Doctoral Student Success

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This study examines the influence of faculty mentorship in the shaping of African American doctoral student success. A case analysis framework is used to investigate the belief systems that doctoral students held about their doctoral experience. Data collection involved a one-phase semi-structured interview protocol used to gather information about these experiences from a post-degree perspective. African American doctoral degree completion is addressed as a critical function of student success within an elite educational context. Results of the study demonstrate that the African American doctoral degree completion is complicated by students' perceptions of faculty advising, faculty behavior and the lack of diverse faculty leadership. Key Words: Doctoral Education, Student Success, African Americans, Doctoral Student Persistence, and Doctoral Degree

Introduction

For many African American doctoral students progress towards degree completion is a journey wrought with obstacles. Previous research about African American degree attainment has deemed low degree completion rates at preceding educational levels and an under-representation of minority faculty as two primary causes for the slow progression of African American doctoral degree completion rates in the United States (; Gasman, Hirschfield, & Vultaggio, 2008; Thompson 2006; Willie, Grady, & Hope, 1991). This is especially the case within elite institutions where there is a lack of minority faculty leadership coupled with historical legacies of exclusion that cultivate alienating educational environments. In these educational environments the stakes for increasing social capital becomes higher with smaller numbers of African Americans being socialized in the nation's most prestigious and well-resourced institutions (Gasman et al., 2008).

Doctoral student development, the transformation whereby graduate students evolve into emerging scholars, is a process where faculty members can have tremendous influence to enhance the likelihood of success (Gasman et al., 2008; Walker, Golde, Jones, Bueschel, & Hutchings, 2008). African Americans who press towards doctoral degree attainment may find it difficult to find the right faculty adviser; one who can mentor their professional development and shape their disciplinary identities during their graduate student socialization experiences (Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001; Gasman et al., 2008; Thompson, 2006). Professional identity development at the doctoral level entails the creation of a research agenda and the cultivation of collegial relationships that

are important to continued success after degree attainment (Gardner & Barnes, 2007; Lovitts, 2001).

To further explore the impact of faculty advising and mentorship on graduate student socialization previous research has called for further exploration of these functions from a student's cultural perspective (Gasman et al., 2008; Nettles & Millett, 2006). Additionally, this perspective relates to Padilla's Expertise Model (1991) that explores the experiences of successful students of color who attain both theoretical and heuristic knowledge to overcome barriers to success. Padilla's model highlights the value of student experience as an informative resource for learning about student progress as well as the effects of institutional climates and interactions between students and faculty. In this vein the goal of this paper is to explore the African American doctoral student experience to illustrate how factory mentorship facilitates degree completion.

Many studies on the faculty-student relationship have tended to focus on the experiences of students while they were engaged in the doctoral study (Baird, 1990; Gasman, Gerstl-Pepin, Aderson-Thompkins, Rasheed, & Hathaway, 2004; Girves & Wemmerus, 1988; Golde, 1998; Nettles & Millett, 2006; Taylor & Antony, 2000). While these studies have been helpful in exploring how faculty can support doctoral student development, the scope of these findings about student experience is limited to doctoral student success being in the state of progression towards degree completion. Qualitative studies of doctoral students who are engaged in study may not fully address factors that contribute to the marginalization experience for African Americans as these doctoral students are under pressure to be politically sensitive to the organizational dynamics of their programs (Taylor & Antony; Thompson, 2006). The position of this paper is to set degree completion as the central focus of student success. Thus, student success is viewed from a post-degree perspective and emphasizes the faculty-student relationship as a key element of degree attainment.

According to Padilla (1991), students who are successful offer solid examples of academic achievement. In light of this, the results of this work serve to address a gap in the literature by presenting interview results from African Americans who have achieved degree attainment. Specifically, the work presented here focuses on the aspects of the student-faculty relationship which has been discussed in the literature as having the most profound effects on student socialization (Gasman et al., 2008). Reflections of African American doctoral degree completers illustrate aspects of the faculty-student relationship that speak to faculty advising strategies, perceptions of faculty behavior, and the influence of faculty diversity.

These reflections are examined to address three key questions: What are the essential elements of a positive faculty-student relationship that promote success for African American doctoral students? What are the mentoring practices that hinder doctoral student success for African Americans? And, how did faculty members assist African American doctoral students in addressing barriers to degree completion?

Theoretical Framework

Student experience is a valuable resource from which we can learn about the significance of the student-faculty relationship on doctoral degree attainment. The present research draws on socialization theory as lens to explore the student-faculty experiences

of African American doctoral students by way of tuning into their belief systems about them. Previously, socialization theory has been used as a framework to explore the assimilation and adjustment issues for doctoral students of color (Taylor & Antony, 2000, p. 186). Socialization has been identified as "the process by which newcomers learn the encoded system of behavior specific to their area of expertise and the system of meanings and values attached to these behaviors" (Taylor & Antony, p. 186). Subsequently, they attune themselves behaviorally to these systems during the doctoral student process in an effort to negotiate barriers towards degree completion.

Additionally, this work acknowledges the research of Vincent Tinto (1993) and his characterization of the doctoral process that includes three stages of progress: transition, adjustment, attainment of candidacy, and completion of the dissertation. The first stage of Tinto's model is Transition and Adjustment, which characterizes student experience during the first year of doctoral studies. In this stage, students evaluate the investment of joining an academic community. They establish membership in the social and academic community of where they are studying and begin to build relationships with faculty.

The second stage, Attainment of Candidacy, takes place after the first year and continues until certification exams are passed and candidacy has been achieved. In this stage, students are involved in the acquisition of knowledge that will prepare them to for their doctoral research and less concerned with community membership. The third stage is the Completion of the Dissertation, where students experience the culmination of their abilities and relationships with faculty, mentors, and advisers. During this stage, the faculty-mentor relationship is most likely to shape completion.

Research on doctoral education has included these stages of progression towards the doctorate and they have been identified as stages where students are likely to drop out (Girves & Wemmerus, 1988; Nettles & Millett, 2006; Walker et al., 2008). Again, the key objective of this work is to understand how the student-faculty relationship serves to support this negotiation and how students were able to progress towards degree completion. To this end, socialization theory is used to analyze the commitment levels of African Americans who attained the doctorate.

Case study analysis serves as the primary method to collect and explore reflections about the student-faculty relationship. Case study analysis serves to capture doctoral student socialization on a localized level. For instance, the sample participants are part of a "bounded system," as they attained doctoral degrees from the same large private graduate school of education (Creswell, 1998, p. 37). The systemic context of this study lends a unique factor to the overall exploration of the African American doctoral experience as the majority of doctoral degrees conferred to African Americans are in the field of education (Hoffer, Welch, Webber, Williams, Lisek, Hess, et al., 2006). Moreover, the bounded system explored is a predominately White institution where there are increased instances of student marginalization that serve to complicate degree completion and a low representation of minority faculty leadership (Willie et al., 1991; Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001; Gasman et al., 2004; Gasman et al., 2008; Thompson, 2006). Case study analysis is useful as it facilitates "in-depth" exploration of the situational pressures students experience in fulfilling their academic commitments (Creswell, 1988; Taylor & Antony, 2000).

Literature Review

For the African American doctoral experience mentorship has been a common topic when discussing the faculty-student relationship (Davidson & Johnson, 2001; Gasman et al., 2004; Taylor & Antony, 2000; Willie et al., 1991). Faculty mentoring has been characterized as: "activities and interactions that may be related to work, skill acquisition, and social or emotional aspects of the mentor or the protégé" (Davidson & Johnson, 2001, p. 551). This relationship has been addressed as a critical function in the doctoral experience and can be viewed as one of the few formal mechanisms in this process (Nettles & Millett, 2006). The nature of faculty mentorship is considered one of the strongest determining factors of African American doctoral degree completion (Willie et al.).

Results of a survey of more than 9,000 doctoral students conducted by Nettles and Millett (2006) identified mentoring as a key aspect of positive academic interactions among doctoral students and faculty. In their survey questionnaire a mentor is defined as "someone on the faculty to whom students turned to for advice, to review a paper, or for general support and encouragement" (Nettles & Millett, p. 98). According to these findings, acquiring supportive mentorship is associated with achieving post-doctoral achievement and success. This includes securing faculty and professional research appointments in one's discipline. They further suggest how attaining knowledge about this relationship could highlight strategies faculty members employ to promote doctoral student success particularly for those who are not developing positive faculty-student relationships. Nettles and Millett assert:

> Knowing how mentors in various fields go about expanding the horizons of their protégés would be illuminating for all prospective doctoral students but especially for the 30 percent whom our survey identified as prospects for failing to secure such relationships. (p. 224)

Moreover, the lack of minority mentorship has been a concern addressed by many scholars who assert that increasing the levels of minority participation within graduate education is directly related to the development of an emerging cadre of diverse scholars who are prepared to progress into faculty roles (Gasman et al., 2004; Moses 1994; ; Thompson, 2006). These researchers have found that increased levels of both student and faculty diversification positively affect faculty-student relationships and the socialization experiences of minority doctoral students. However, Gasman et al. (2008) assert that given the make-up of the professoriate it's impossible for African American faculty to be solely responsible for mentoring the number African American doctoral students that exist within the academy (p. 128).

The implication here is that a faculty member who is genuinely interested in a doctoral student's research agenda, professional development and degree completion can be important to an African American's degree completion regardless of race.

Depending on a student's experience with a faculty member embracing the idea of doctoral study alone can be challenging in itself. The adjustment to graduate school can be difficult. In fact, Bowen and Rudenstine (1992) concluded that attrition during the first year of graduate school accounts for nearly one-third of all doctoral student attrition. The

first year of doctoral study presents many challenges and is considered one of the greatest barriers to completion. Mentoring by an adviser can also affect how a doctoral student is socially adjusted to the doctoral process. Previous research suggests the influence of a mentor may affect how students adjust to the doctoral process (Ostroff & Kozowolski, 1993). Ostroff and Kozlowski offer an interesting organizational perspective about adjustment experiences in their examination of mentored newcomers and non-mentored newcomers. They found that the information gathering processes during one's adaptation in organizational socialization is critical to the learning process. In discussing mentoring as an important aspect of the faculty-student relationship they assert, "the most significant difference between mentored and non-mentored newcomers emerged … those with mentors were able to learn more about organizational issues and practices compared to non-mentored newcomers" (Ostroff & Kozlowski, p. 170). Hence, one could conclude that if mentoring is part of the faculty-student relationship there is a greater likelihood for a student to attain knowledge critical for degree completion by way of participating in this relationship.

Many of the African Americans in this study are first-generation doctoral degree recipients who suggest that there were no cognitive maps guiding their adjustment experiences and degree completion (Lovitts, 2001). As the results of this study demonstrate, they had to attain knowledge that could be used to positively support their adjustment process (Lovitts). This supports Padilla, Trevino, Gonzalez, and Trevino's (1997) findings about the attainment of heuristic knowledge (or information that is not acquired theoretically) as a key factor in minority student adjustment. Also, this is consistent with Hawley's (1993) findings that suggest that there are "unwritten rules" students must take into account as one travels through the doctoral process. An important question to consider is how do African American doctoral students interpret these rules and address them to progress towards degree completion?

Perhaps the answer to this question can be gleaned from the social adjustment of these students. Researchers have addressed social adjustment as it relates to doctoral retention and attrition within a socialization theory framework (Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1993; Romero & Margolis, 1998; Thompson, 2006). Socialization within the academic community is critical during the doctoral process. The socialization process, significant in the transition and adjustment stage of doctoral student persistence, is one in which a newcomer is made a member of a community (Tinto, 1993). In the case of doctoral students, the community of an academic department in a particular discipline within a graduate school can be critical to shaping their development (Golde, 1998). In fact, Lovitts (2001) found that the intellectual structure of one's disciplinary identity shapes opportunities for academic and social integration across departments within that discipline by structuring the nature of academic tasks and the frequency of academic interactions as well as social relationships that develop out of task-related interactions.

However, what becomes the nature of this structuring process when there is a low frequency of academic interactions for African American doctoral students? Turner and Thompson (1993) suggest that this type of academic and social integration is difficult for this population of students. For example, they conducted research on the socialization experiences of minority female doctoral students at a Mid-western university and found that minority women reported less help from faculty with publishing, mentoring, and career guidance. If these findings are juxtaposed with Nettles and Millet's (2006)

findings about the activities critical to doctoral student development, a low frequency of positive mentorship can jeopardize a scholar's degree completion, career longevity, and overall success.

Findings suggest that these interactions are critically important to minority students in predominately white settings. If the first year of graduate study generates the greatest stress, the absence of adequate support services could affect the willingness of African American students to persevere through upper division and graduate study, which is academically more demanding (Willie et al., 1991). For example, in Girves and Wemmerus' (1988) assessment of the student-faculty relationship and doctoral degree progress they state:

> The role of the adviser is critical at the doctoral level. Being treated as a junior colleague by the adviser accounts for much of the variability in degree progress. He or she serves as a role model and becomes the primary socializing agent in the department. Typically, the adviser establishes standard of performance and the behavior norms for his or her advisee. (p. 185)

While students may have interest in developing participating in these interactions, faculty perceptions of student performance have been found to have an influence on the development of faculty-student relationships. For instance, Gasman et al., (2004) found that faculty perception is critical in building faculty-student relationships and to the overall development of African American doctoral student success. They outline several suggestions for mentoring students of color. First, they assert that faculty members should take advantage of informal and impromptu opportunities to talk about their research and the motivations behind it. Oftentimes, students are less inclined to ask specific questions in the classroom and these informal interactions can get at the core of student concerns and fears.

Second, they state that students of color benefit when faculty members deconstruct the mysteries of the academy. They found that research demonstrates that many students of color do not have mentors and thus, are often left out of conversations pertaining to the inner workings of higher education – including conversations related to the tenure process and what is valued in the area of scholarship.

Furthermore, they assert that faculty members should communicate their passion for research to their students, relating the intangible benefits of choosing a career in the academy. Too often students of color are told "tales of failure" instead of success stories and as a result they avoid an academic career. In an informal way, faculty members should encourage students of color to develop their own research point of view – avoiding the urge to create protégés that mimic research interests and methods.

Additionally, Gasman et al. (2004) suggest that faculty members and students of color benefit from open conversations about research that are reciprocal in nature. Students begin to understand the value of their perspective and faculty members benefit from a more collaborative, and less adversarial process that, long term, will change the racial and ethnic landscape of the academy. Doctoral degree completers have benefited from this process and have gained from the student-faculty relationship in a tangible way.

Learning more about their perspectives on how faculty can support or retards this process is integral to understanding persistence for these students.

Method

Qualitative analysis lends to a unique interpretation of the African American doctoral experience and complements previous statistical portraits of doctoral degree completion by illustrating the actual experiences of these students (Nettles & Millett, 2006). A case study framework binds the analysis of these experiences to one educational system that has an historical legacy of exclusion where many African American doctoral students reported feeling marginalized in developing positive student-faculty interactions.

The focal institution for this study is a large urban private research Ivy League campus located in the northeastern corridor of the United States (in some student responses it is referred to as Ivy University). The institution has a progressive research agenda and is home to more than 25 research centers and institutes. There are approximately 10,000 undergraduate students, 3,000 graduate students, and 1,000 faculty members. There are 12 graduate schools including its Graduate School of Education from which the participants for this study were selected.

For this study the data pool consists of African American graduates who received doctoral degrees between 1994 and 2005. African American students are those individuals who identified themselves as native-born Americans and self-selected this cultural group on institutional application materials.

Sample selection

Factors that influenced the belief systems of scholars' interactions with faculty were collected via a one-phase semi-structured interview. Initially, the data collection steps I sought were complicated by confidentiality concerns. Consequently, I was denied access to alumni data. As a result I engaged in snowball sampling to develop a homogeneous data pool. Creswell (2002) describes homogeneous sampling as certain individuals who possess a similar trait or characteristic. Research conduct associated with this study was in compliance with the ethical standards and guidelines set forth by the institution. A letter invited members of the graduating class to participate in the study. Furthermore, the letter directs the graduates to contact the researcher for more information about the study.

Additionally, interview participants were asked if they could recommend other individuals to interview who might want to share their experiences (Creswell, 2002). Miles and Huberman (1994) recommend snowball sampling in theory-building analysis and define it as it: "identifies cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases are information rich" (p. 28). Eleven participants were interviewed. Also, graduates of the school of education were selected to avoid potential concerns about the impact of being politically insensitive to members of a student's program. While all of the participants had completed their programs many of them still acknowledged that they wanted to be cautious in their discussions about their program involvement. This acknowledgement appears to be relevant to the impact of the student-faculty relationship on a student's success and career development after degree completion.

Data collection procedures

Graduates who were self-selected or recruited from snowball sampling were given an overview of the study. After the overview, anyone who was willing to participate in the study was scheduled for an in-depth individual interview. Individual interviews were scheduled at a mutually agreeable location and were typically an hour in length. Interviews were facilitated by an African American doctoral student at the same institution who was familiar with the participants' experience and whose field notes and observations were addressed during the interview to encourage the development of discussion in these interviews. These field notes included information about program structure, program activities, the hiring of new faculty, and the accessibility of facilities. Rubin and Rubin (1995) found that interviewees are more willing to talk in-depth if they find that the researcher is familiar or sympathetic to their experiences. Interviews were transcribed verbatim.

Data analysis

Interview responses were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's (1994) Traditional Data Analysis Sequence. Codes were affixed to field notes that addressed the participants belief systems about student-faculty interactions. The researcher's reflections about these codes were written in the margins to aid in further categorization of these interactions. Miles and Huberman suggest that the researcher sort and sift through the notes to identify similar phrases and relationships between patterns, theme, distinct differences between subgroups and common sequences. This was helpful in isolating common belief systems about student-faculty interactions. As a result, small sets of generalizations were uncovered that could be formalized (p. 36) with a theoretical socialization construct.

Procedures for optimizing research quality

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that issues of reliability, internal validity, and external validity in traditional empirical research were similar to the trustworthiness issues in naturalistic inquiry. Trustworthiness issues include credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

Credibility refers to the prolonged engagement-the investment of sufficient time to achieve learning the culture and testing for misinformation. Eleven participants were interviewed over five months and the analytic process took an additional three months to complete. Codes relevant to the student-faculty relationship were consistently evaluated to determine if they were relevant to a student's progress towards degree completion. Again, these codes are part of the "encoded system of behavior specific to their area of expertise and the system of meanings and values attached to these behaviors" (Taylor & Antony, 2000, p. 186). For example, correlations were made between codes relevant to reflections about a faculty member's behavior and the belief system or perception ascribed to that behavior. Triangulation was achieved through member checking that included follow-up phone calls and meetings to discuss the codes and the researcher's interpretation of them. This provided an opportunity to test data, analytic categories, and

conclusions with the degree completers from whom the data were originally collected (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Transferability refers to the usefulness of the findings and interpretations if they are placed within another context. Findings from these interviews of African American degree completers who graduated from an elite institution serve to be useful for understanding doctoral student persistence from a holistic perspective. Again, most of the studies on African American student success focus on students who are progressing towards degree completion. The transferability of findings regarding African American doctoral degree completion is useful when applied to a context of exploration particularly of students who are engaged in doctoral study. Based on the outcomes of the triangulation process the belief systems are dependable and reliable in terms of understanding why the student-faculty relationship is a critical factor towards African American doctoral degree completion.

Case Analysis

This analysis involves situating the case study in a single elite graduate school of education in the northeast corridor of the United States (Creswell, 2002, p. 61). This contextual aspect of the study addresses the unique quality of African American doctoral degree production being represented in the field of education. Socialization theory is used here to highlight encoded systems of behavior specific to doctoral study in the field of education and the belief systems students held about faculty behavior by way mentoring, advising, leadership, and diversity. Tinto's (1993) model lends a process paradigm to this socialization as belief systems address their progress towards degree completion.

All of the interviewees suggest that faculty mentoring and support are critical to promoting their socialization, scholarship, and research, and career development post degree-completion which is consistent with previous research (Gasman et al., 2004; Gasman et al., 2008; Taylor & Antony, 2000; Thompson, 2006; Willie et al., 1991). However, their responses also support previous research that asserts African Americans are faced with challenges in maintaining relationships with faculty in predominately White institutions (Gasman et al., 2008; Taylor & Antony). Six cite that faculty advising and support were crucial to their persistence. Three participants describe their perceptions of faculty behavior as having a significant impact on their development. And, five discuss how their involvement with faculty directly affected their academic progress. Their responses highlight the dynamics associated with interacting with faculty and are included below in the following categories: faculty advising and support, perceptions of faculty behavior, and faculty diversity.

Faculty advising/support

The following responses speak to belief systems that characterize the participants' relationships with faculty members who advised or supported their doctoral student development. These responses suggest that making frequent connections with faculty is meaningful and valuable in the student/faculty relationship-building phase. This relationship development is relevant to the first stage of Tinto's (1993) model of doctoral student persistence; Transition and Adjustment. During this stage, students evaluate the

investment of joining an academic community. They establish membership in the social and academic community where they are studying and begin to affiliate with other students and faculty. One can infer from these quotes that accessibility of faculty members is significant in developing affiliations with faculty; particularly as this relates for Black faculty. These quotes illustrate belief systems regarding the value of talking about one's research interest and the involvement in research collaboration initiated by a faculty member. Significant to making these connections was the accessibility of faculty members. Two respondents provide different views about the accessibility of faculty advisement:

> For the most part all of the Black faculty I encountered have been very supportive and this was even prior to my incident … So I felt at home or that I could talk to someone about my research. Even it was a quick talk and all of them were real busy and sometimes were inaccessible. In terms of the white faculty … I think there were maybe one or two that I made a strong connection with. The type of support I did receive from my advisor when he would try to involve me in various research projects. He tried to connect me people who had similar research interests.

> You know it varied from faculty member to faculty member … it was I think for the most part for me it was just more…it was like being in a swamp … trying to find the dry spots; the dry spots being the supportive faculty. I didn't find the faculty … with the exception of one or two, I did not find the faculty incredible supportive.

In addition, one participant describes faculty advising from the perspective of degree selection. The response indicates there is a perception of pressure experienced by African Americans who were involved in decision-making about degree program selection. This perception is suggestive of a "stereotype threat" that "is the social and psychological sense of peril that negative social stereotypes induce which results in a climate of intimidation that can hamper academic achievement" (Taylor & Antony, 2000, p. 187). The implication here is that academic achievement is shaped by the type of doctoral degree attained (Ph.D. or Ed.D). While it's not explicit in the quotes included in this study, decisions regarding degree selection could be relevant to assertions made in previous research about the Ph.D. being the preferred degree in the academy[1] (Courtenay, 1988). If this is the case, belief systems about the type of doctoral degree sought could potentially escalate into concerns about the development of research agendas and student-faculty relationships that would shape career viability post-degree completion. Additionally, departmental expectations and degree requirements could be different for each degree which in turn can shape a student's level of commitment to degree completion.

According to this respondent, she perceived that the advising about the type of doctoral degree one attains is unclear and directly affected the experiences of African Americans within her department. Also, she perceived that a tension existed in the department regarding the degree options available to students. This reflection illustrates a sensitivity regarding the political dynamics in the department and the agendas of faculty

members. Given the political nature of doctoral programs one should consider whether students who are engaged in doctoral study would feel comfortable in sharing these types of reflections without concerns about repercussions. Consider her reflections:

> But I think in terms of their advising, they should be clear with students about the different degree options. There was some tension in our department about the difference between the Ed.D. and the Ph.D. One time a student who tried to go over from the Ed.D. to the Ph.D. program who was African American was not successfully able to do that for a variety of reasons. I think there was an undercurrent in our department among African American students about that issue. You sometimes have to make tough decisions to ultimately decide on what's best for you because sometimes faculty members have their own agendas and they try to steer students a certain way. You have to assert yourself to a certain degree.

And finally, two participants explain the importance of managing the support and advising received from faculty. The second response specifically speaks to obtaining support outside of the university. These belief systems are critical to the behavior that supports managing stages two and three of Tinto's (1993) model. First, Stage II - Attainment of Candidacy involves the acquisition of knowledge that will prepare students for their doctoral research. Students in this phase of development are less concerned with community membership. As such the quotes illustrate a sense of personal agency about one's work that includes setting deadlines, developing expectations about one's research abilities, and creating relationships beyond to institution's doctoral program's community. Students in Stage III - Completion of the Dissertation experience the culmination of their abilities and relationships with faculty, mentors, and advisers. During this stage, the faculty-mentor relationship is most likely to shape completion. Therefore students who are highly committed to degree completion will engage in the attainment of heuristic knowledge (Padilla, 1991) where support is sought after even if it is outside of the university. During these last two stages of the doctoral process students begin to socialize towards their disciplinary behaviors specific to their field of expertise. Given the multi-disciplinary nature of education gathering multiple perspectives about one's work appears to be a manifestation of academic rigor associated with the field. Consider the following student perspectives:

> Stay on top of your stuff, don't rely on your advisor to do it. You need to do that, you need to be aware of what is required along the way, make sure all your stuff is in order. For instance for your proposal, you need to have an idea, start research the idea. Go talk to people about what their proposals look like. Ask them what the timeline was and follow that. Don't wait for your advisor to tell you what the steps are because that is their time and they will get to it on their time not your time and then you wonder why years later you are not proposing. You need to get on that. If the idea doesn't work, then they will tell you that and then you change it. But I feel that you need to self-focus and do groups with other people who

are proposing. Toss ideas around and set deadlines for yourself that's very good. I just think that in terms of who you work with that they are stretched and their time is really pressured so they are not going to be as much as you might think.

… reach out to people outside of the school and outside of this university. The networks are very tight across the country for black scholars in the field of education in particular. It is so important to find them as early as possible and to let them nurture you. And, to let them help shape your work. My dissertation committee had two people from Ivy University and two people who weren't.

Perceptions of faculty behavior

The next series of comments describe the degree completers' perceptions of faculty behavior while they were engaged in doctoral study. These responses illustrate belief systems regarding the faculty's acknowledgement of students inside and outside of the classroom. Gasman et al. (2004) found that interacting with students inside and outside of the classroom enhances the student-faculty relationship and student satisfaction with their programs. Additionally, Gasman et al. (2008) suggest that increasing the frequency and quality of meetings with African American students can enhance doctoral student success. Hence, the quotes below address how the degree completer's perceived faculty support of their research agenda, and their level of consistency in providing that support. These responses are highly relevant to Tinto's (1993) second and third stages of doctoral student persistence:

You go to classes you pay the tuition and your physically in the space of the institution; But on another level no one knows your name. Faculty members speak when they feel like it. Even though you say hello they just sort of look at you. Or, you get 'Oh, I didn't know that was you.' Or, we walk over from this class to this class together. How could you not know my name? I know yours. There were only eight of us. Or, being called the name of other Black students.

I think a whole lot of faculty didn't take my work very seriously or even knew what I was doing. I had one faculty member pull me aside and sort of whispered to me in her office, 'I just want you to know that hip hop is not going to be around forever, so you better make sure you do something other than hip hop' as if all I did all day was like write down rap lyrics you know what I mean. As if my work was devoid of any sort of intellectual merit or rigor. She was actually trying to look out for me.

… the relationships that I've had with faculty could most aptly be described as schizophrenic. That sounds very dramatic but it's true. I have had interactions with faculty with the same faculty that have ranged from wildly supportive to just completely disrespectful and I think those

relationships speak to the state of mind and state of being of the faculty… Just very, very strange behavior … ranging from … like I said from wildly supportive, very encouraging, to resentful and disconnected. And, I think that has to do a lot with their personalities, their experiences … a part of what I've learned … I don't know if this is useful for your study…but a part of what I learned is there is a cycle to this machine and in order to stay in it and be successful at it some people have assumed a sort of split personality and I don't mean that in a clinical sense I just mean it in terms of sort of climbing up the social ladder or you know gaining tenure … gaining respect … whatever.

Faculty diversity

Research regarding minority student persistence has advocated the importance of a diverse faculty to guide the academic and social development of African American students especially in predominately white institutions (Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001; Taylor & Antony, 2000). Below are comments that speak to issues of faculty diversity from the perspectives of the interview participants. In these responses we see perceptions about the need for more diversity among the faculty and the sense that students learn about the role and responsibility of being a faculty member of color.

As far as the professors go, basically in our department there is one professor of color … She does a lot to help students academically but as far as representation, the faculty could be a little more diverse.

All of them were supportive. But the reality is that black professors, and I see this more up close with … they are just stretched too thin so I think for me I'm very self-directed. I do my research … touch base occasionally. I probably could benefit more from someone whose more hands on at the same time it's my style to be like let me just do this. But saying that, it worked well for me because I can do that. But if I was someone who needed more direction and needed someone to lay out the pathway for me, I don't know that they would be the best people to work with.

Because it's a certain reality to being a black professor, you mentor, you have to do your research, you have to do it well because of other people watching you and you do so many different things and your time is stretched. There was not a lot of hand holding or you know… it's not like I want it but sometimes you want a little more time a little more in depth.

Several respondents described how diversity was addressed by faculty members within the classroom. These responses address how socialization is influenced by the way classroom discussions are facilitated by faculty. The interview participants emphasize how the lack of familiarity with issues of diversity serves to minimize the potential for critical exploration on topics regarding inequities in education. In fact, according to one respondent, students often bear the responsibility of facilitating this exploration in class

in lieu of the professor. Of course this facilitation is constantly calibrated with the political dynamics of the class. In paraphrasing one the responses below, should an African American student take on the responsibility of facilitating that discussion they must be considerate of how their perspectives will affect others. Again, this belief system is consistent with Taylor and Antony's (2000) use of stereotype threat in describing the pressure associated with decision-making about class participation.   Consider the following responses:

> As far as the classes and the reading, I think that the discussions in the class and the reading in most of my classes did address issues of diversity. Issues related to inequity and some of critical types of topics. There was probably, in some classes I think certain professors were better able to facilitate discussions among students from different backgrounds, based on different topics. So I think I was in classes where I don't think professors were as comfortable when certain students were more passionate about particular topics than others. But sometimes when you are talking about issues of diversity or inequities it will impact students who have come from those environments in ways that other students who are just objective talking about it.

> Maintaining your sanity as far as when you are asked to be the poster child for the minority perspective. Some people take offense a like why you always ask me for the black stuff. But taking that as a teachable moment for other people and having a balance of let's say of challenging the mainstream ideology.

> It also meant that there were going to be times where you have to pick and choose your battles as far as with your professors. Because if you are going to talk about giving the student of color perspective in the research paper, not all of them want to hear that. There were some professors that like to scrape the surface when it came to race and culture and power and things like that. When you cut too deep, they kind of let you know that. They kind of let you know we don't have time for that right now, but that is a very interesting point. Depending on being the only person of color in the class sometimes, you were the one that waved the banner and made people get rid of those negative stereotypes and call them on it. Let them know where they are making generalizations and that not all black kids are like that, especially urban kids.

These responses indicate that faculty mentoring is critical to shaping African American doctoral student success. Student involvement with faculty in the form of a mentoring relationship, the perception of faculty commitment and behavior, and the presence of faculty diversity can serve as motivating factors in negotiating major barriers to degree completion. This is consistent with previous research that found that positive relationships with faculty enhance the doctoral experience for African Americans (Gasman et al., 2008).

Previous research on African American doctoral student socialization discusses school success in the context of students responding to stereotype threat by way of their domain identification (Taylor & Antony, 2000). The responses here suggest that these interviewees maintained strong commitments to their field of interests and were confident in their skills and abilities to achieve (Taylor & Antony). Their perspectives about their student-faculty interactions indicated that if the mentoring they received was unconstructive they were able to navigate towards degree completion despite the consequences of this negative interaction. In fact, some responses suggest that this situational pressure experienced by the interviewees facilitated thinking about the belief systems held by unsupportive faculty. Respondents were mindful of the divisive nature of these interactions and continued to look for mechanisms that would support their degree completion. For the most part, positive student-faculty interactions were found in responses that spoke to the development of research collaborations and informal connections with faculty where students were able to informally discuss their academic and social experiences. These positive interactions appeared to have the most profound affect on shaping doctoral student success and are highly relevant to Tinto's (1993) third stage of doctoral student persistence, Completion of the Dissertation.

Discussion

Generally, the belief systems represented here indicate that the mentoring received by student did serve to facilitate their socialization. For example, this is clearly apparent in the previously mentioned quote from a participant who mentioned that his advisor introduced him to with people who had similar research interests. Successful students who make it through to degree completion positively respond to mentorship that supports their research focus.

An interesting concept that emerged from this study was the issue of advising students towards a particular type of doctoral degree; Ed.D. or Ph.D. Faculty mentoring practices that hindered success included formalities about the advising process. For example, one participant perceived that policies about a student's research agenda and type of degree (Ed.D. vs. Ph.D.) sought after were unclear to many African American students. In fact, there was a perceived underlying assumption in the department that many African American students felt persuaded towards the Ed.D. This certainly speaks to how faculty mentoring practices might be promulgated as part of the institution's organizational culture. And, this point raises some interesting questions: Do African Americans tend to seek what's considered to be the less prestigious degree? And, is a student's degree selection largely a function of personal choice or are there political dynamics that pressure students into choosing to seek the Ed.D? While the findings of this study are not explicit about how students are mentored in this regard, it is an issue worth considering for future study. Given the interviewee's belief system about a lack of departmental clarity on degree type for students a follow up study on the types of doctorates African Americans receive could shed light on this concern.

Previous studies on the African American doctoral experience aggregate both the Ed.D. and Ph.D. degree attainment (Gasman et al., 2008; Thompson, 2006). However, given the preeminence of the Ph.D. future studies that explore this nuance of the African

American doctoral experience have implications for success and career development post degree attainment.

In discussing faculty behavior most of the responses spoke to the students' perception of actions that served to marginalize them. For example, faculty members not acknowledging students outside of the classroom (these are faculty who might have the same students in class), and faculty members who may be "wildly supportive" and/or "disrespectful." These perceptions of behavior characterize an encoded system of behavior that underscores a historical legacy of exclusion that affects the development positive student-faculty relationships and serves to continually marginalize African American students and other students of color. This inconsistency speaks to the larger issue of faculty being generally disconnected from the student experience. The responses included herein suggest that successful African American doctoral students can interpret encoded systems of behavior that facilitate that disconnection in an effort to identify aspects of the process that will facilitate degree completion.

While financial rewards may serve to motivate faculty towards minimizing this inconsistent behavior (Gasman et al., 2008), institutional transformation that includes the valuing different student belief systems as an academic priority could serve to revitalize encoded systems that inhibit an appreciation for student experience and cultural difference (Harper & Hurtado, 2007).

Faculty diversity appeared to be an important socialization factor to the African American doctoral student. While these faculty members may be in small number at this institution their presence and limited accessibility appeared to be comforting to students on some level. However, the perceptions suggest that faculty support is welcomed and appreciated regardless of the faculty member's race.

Additionally, the findings of this study are consistent with research that indicates that successful mentoring practices often serve to "demystify" of "deconstruct" the myths associated with the academy (Gasman et al., 2004). Faculty members who employed mentoring practices that promoted success for African American doctoral students were accessible. It appears that faculty members who shared brief, sincere encounters with students were viewed as considerate and helpful. This was especially important when students wanted to discuss ideas about research. This supports the Gasman et al.'s (2004) notion that faculty members should take advantage of informal and impromptu opportunities to talk about their motivations for research when mentoring students of color.

Second, faculty members who were willing to share ideas about their research often fostered collaboration with the student or identified other collaborative opportunities. Where previous research has indicated that African American students tend to feel isolated and marginalized at predominately white institutions (Gasman, et al., 2004)), faculty members who work to combat these issues can serve to transcend barriers to success.

Implicit in the statements about faculty mentoring is the fact that collaboration is essential to developing a professional and scholarly network thus shaping one's disciplinary identity. As a new scholar emerges from the ranks of doctoral candidacy to the role of becoming an expert in a field of study, connections with other scholars with similar interests is integral to the development of a professional and disciplinary identity (Romero & Margolis, 1998). This speaks to a student's transition from Stage II

(Attainment of Candidacy) of Tinto's (1993) model to Stage III (Completion of the Dissertation). This is transition is critical to the dissemination of one's work in the larger educational arenas.

Limitations

This study is institution and culture specific. While the reflections provide critical data about the influence of persistence of African American doctoral degree completers, it should not be generalized to other institutions or populations.   However, this assessment of African American doctoral success may offer insights helpful in developing strategies and in furthering research in this area. While the participants were part of a single-site case, their degree representation spans several different fields of study within education.

Conclusion

While this study focuses on the role of the faculty member in the mentoring process, students who were proactive and sought mentoring found that their role in the mentoring process was critical to their success as well. Faculty members were often entrenched in their own research agendas so students who could relate to these agendas were often more self-directed and proactive about their student success and degree completion. The findings of this study did offer some evidence of the importance of same-race mentoring. However, most students were satisfied with mentoring from faculty members who were supportive of their research experience and progress towards degree completion despite their race.

The exploration of the student-faculty relationship at the doctoral level is a process that will continue to develop and evolve. The understanding of this relationship can assist faculty, administrators and students in highlighting the nuances of cultural and institutional specific experiences and the mentoring practices that are most effective. Further examination of this relationship can also serve to illuminate best practice strategies in the preparation of future and junior faculty members who hopefully will mentors future doctoral students.

The concept of mentoring is a consistently mentioned in research regarding minority doctoral persistence. For example, Nettles (1990) asserts: "Mentoring may be such a vital and essential part of doctoral education that all persisting students, regardless of their demographic and educational backgrounds, have similar experiences" (p. 10). Similarly, Willie et al. (1991) state: "Their [mentors] presence is essential in helping African Americans and other minority scholars through periods of doubt and indecision" (p. 67). More research is needed regarding the role of mentoring and its impact on the African American doctoral degree completion. The perceptions herein are unique as they are retrospective in nature and rest on a certainty of knowledge regarding African American degree completion and the positive and negative aspects of mentoring that shape success. Given what little information exists regarding African American doctoral student persistence understanding this student experience should not be left to chance and should be fully explored within the context of degree completion.

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There has been a long running debate in higher education about the distinction between the Ph.D. in education (Doctor of Philosophy) and the ED.D. (Doctor of Education) degrees. The Ph.D. was developed first and therefore is often considered the preeminent degree. Over time some researchers have found that there is no substantive difference between them. However, the debate continues.

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