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Examining Motivators That Influenced African American and Latinx Students to Degree Completion of a Doctoral Program

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March 31, 2022
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Acknowledgments

I would first like to give glory to God. By my faith in Him and the power of Jesus Christ, I have been able to complete my academic work. I am forever blessed because of the grace and favor God placed upon me during this journey. As my favorite quote states, “Aspire to Inspire before you Expire” -Unknown. It is my drive and passion that I can engage, inspire, and ignite other Black and LGBTQ+ students to pursue and complete a doctorate degree in any field.

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Abstract

Examining Motivators That Influenced African American and Latinx Students to Degree Completion of Doctorate Programs. Travis L. Stokes, 2022: Applied Dissertation, Nova Southeastern University, Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and School of Criminal Justice. Keywords: African American students, doctoral programs, educational discrimination, Latinx students, systemic racism

This applied dissertation was designed to provide an investigation of the motivators that influence African American and Latinx students to complete a doctoral program. There are numerous studies that show data on low enrollment and retention of this population. Further, there is ample evidence of attrition, but there is a need to hear their voices share the experiences of successful doctoral graduates from this population.

The researcher posited systemic racism in education caused low enrollment and graduation rates among African American and Latinx students. Then, an interview protocol was developed to elicit responses regarding what caused the persistence to complete the doctoral program.

An analysis of the narrative did not expose systemic racism in education, rather it revealed African American and Latinx students who were supported by academic mentors who encouraged them; friends, family, and colleagues who motivated them to enroll in higher education programs; their self-motivation to enroll; determination to complete the degree; and how they were able to overcome obstacles including isolation and loneliness, particularly during the dissertation stage to graduate with the doctorate degree. Participants suggested future doctorate students know what career they want before they start a program. They recommended that universities make the doctorate degree more affordable, provide better access to resources, hire more faculty and administrators of color, and offer mentorship programs to encourage this population to enroll and complete the doctorate degree.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Due to the cultural, economic, and societal conditions in 2020, a renewed awareness of systemic racism has caused a world-wide social movement of change. Issues including a global pandemic and civil unrest based on police brutality were exposed and pushed systemic racism to the forefront of society (Gravlee, 2020; Kaur, 2020). The ubiquity of hate and bigotry has permeated education, government, healthcare, and the police. One important concern is the disproportion of African American and Latinx students' doctoral programs completion when compared to White students (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2019a). Exposing this problem triggered a need for knowledge and understanding of how African American and Latinx doctoral students become conferred and attain success through the adversity of systemic racism (Education Trust, 2020).

The problem is that African American and Latinx students enroll and graduate from doctoral programs at a far lower rate than White students (NCES, 2019a). Findings from numerous studies revealed that African American and Latinx students, especially men, were critically underrepresented in doctoral programs (Brown, S., 2018; Callahan et al., 2018; Education Trust, 2020; Harris, 2019; National Science Foundation, 2019). This is a direct result of systemic racism, intersectionality, and white privilege (Aspen Institute, 2016).

The NCES (2019a) statistics for doctoral graduates based on race clearly presented the disparity among minorities who enroll and complete a program. A search on google scholar yielded well over 1,500,000 quantitative and qualitative articles on racism in education, the collateral damage it causes to students, and societal norms

regarding bigotry in education; over 130,000 quantitative studies on the statistics, reasons why, and future suggestions; over 1,000,000 qualitative analyses of the problems African Americans and Latinx students face; and almost 300,000 articles and papers on attrition and retention for Blacks in doctoral programs.

Gittings et al. (2018) indicated that between 40-60% of the students who enrolled in doctoral courses withdrew before degree completion. This number is devastating for groups who have much lower enrollment and graduation rates. Mentors, suitable chair and advisor relationships, and fellowships with instructors and professional staff of color are essential for successful doctoral degree completion for African American and Latinx students (Callahan et al., 2018; Gittings et al., 2018; Holley & Caldwell, 2012). Results of the study by Callahan et al. established that there were no significant differences in GPAs and GRE scores of African American, Latinx, and White students enrolled in psychology programs. Yet, students of color continue to have low enrollment and graduation rates. Callahan et al. found that there remained a lack of inclusivity and understanding for "the underlying systems that may promote discrimination or increase the likelihood of attrition" for diverse populations (p. 282). As long as the trend of systemic racism infiltrates higher education, increases in graduation rates for African American and Latinx doctoral students will not occur.

Table 1 presents the number of White, African American, and Latinx students conferred by race (NCES, 2019a). Although numbers have increased for diverse students over the last 7 years, they are remarkably low in comparison to White students. Next, Table 2 breaks down the statistics by percentages of White, African American, Latinx, and Non-White Other students who graduate from a doctoral program (NCES, 2019a). The numbers are very discouraging for African American and Latinx students.

Table 1

Doctorate Degrees Conferred by Race 2012-2018

Year	White	African American	Latinx
2012-13	110,759	12,085	10,108
2013-14	110,157	12,621	10,665
2014-15	108,914	13,272	11,263
2015-16	107,235	13,377	11,781
2016-17	107,444	14,070	12,493
2017-18	107,415	14,241	13,253

Table 2

Number of Doctoral Enrollments and Percentages of Degrees Conferred by Race 2012-2018

Year	Total Enrollments	Whites Conferred	African Americans Conferred	Latinx Conferred	Non-White Other Conferred
2012-13	175,026	74.6	6.2	6. 6	20.6
2013-14	177,587	70.4	8.1	7.8	21.5
2014-15	178,548	69.3	8.4	7.2	15.1
2015-16	178,134	68.5	8.5	7.5	15.4
2016-17	181,357	67.5	8.8	7.8	15.9
2017-18	184,074	66.8	8.9	8.2	16.1

Note. Non-White Other included Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, and persons of two or more races (NCES, 2019a).

Phenomenon of Interest

Interest for this phenomenon is the intersectionality of motivation and systemic racism; questioning systemic racism in education, what part it may play in this disparity,

and specifically what factors motivate African American and Latinx students to overcome this possible obstruction to their success. There is ample evidence that African American and Latinx students enroll and graduate in doctoral programs at a far lower rate than white students (NCES, 2019a). Yet, this population scores for the GRE are comparable and they have similar GPAs to their white counterparts (Callahan et al., 2018).

Since the global pandemic began, racial and gender inequalities have become more apparent. Workers essential to maintain everyday life sacrifice their well-being to serve the public at a shocking low wage. This population includes healthcare workers, grocery and retail clerks, mail carriers, delivery and transportation workers, garbage, and maintenance workers, and so on; many are the working poor people of color (Getachew et al., 2020). The public health response to the pandemic is mostly unchanged since the pandemic of 1918 (Roberts & Tehrani, 2020). According to the authors, "social ideologies from the darker side of humanity must also be acknowledged as an important component to determining who lives and who survives during the deadliest periods of disease pandemics" (para. 1).

Systemic racism begins for many African American and Latinx students in elementary school. Mason (2015) investigated preservice teacher's attitudes and understanding of racial identity in the classroom. The author found that some undergraduate preservice teachers were racist and remained so after instruction in multicultural education and well into their careers. The aim of the study was to "help [preservice teachers] build deeper understandings of the insidiousness of racism" (Mason, 2015, p. 1046). One must wonder if whiteness in education is driven by the social ideology of slavery in America (Fields, 2016). Bigotry is entrenched in American culture;

so, what resources can students of color rely on to successfully go from elementary school to doctoral studies.

Background and Justification

Researchers conducted a seven-year quantitative grant-funded study, the Ph.D. Completion Project (2004-2010), at 30 research universities in the US and Canada to address completion and attrition of doctorate programs, and evaluate intervention plans and projects (Council of Graduate Schools, 2020). According to the authors, the project "produced some of the most comprehensive and useful data on attrition from doctoral study and completion of Ph.D. programs" (para. 2). Data for the project was "provided by institutions selected in a national competition that invited graduate school to record their own history of completion and attrition, craft strategies to address issues, implement those strategies, and measure their impact in part by continued tracking of student completion" (Sowell et al., 2008, p. ix). The study examined 7- and 10-year cumulative attrition rates, various disciplines (humanities, life sciences, social sciences, STEM, and broad fields), and completion rates.

The aim of the Ph.D. Completion Project was to recognize strategies that increased graduation rates of African Americans, Latinx, and Native Americans; as well as women in STEM (Sowell et al., 2008). Results from the study indicated that the lack of completion happened in the in the beginning of the program, and not at the dissertation stage (Council of Graduate Schools, 2020; Gittings et al., 2018). Typically, doctoral students represent a group that is highly educated and have a strong foundation of completing multiple degrees (Gittings et al., 2018).

Academic achievement is realized through many factors including talent and motivation. Bigotry and systemic racism are negative factors that thwart educational

achievement. Most African American and Latinx students face racism in some form or another during grade school at great cost to their future (Dixson et al., 2016). American-born Spanish descendants experience devalued bilingualism and racism early on in education, and children of immigrants first classroom experiences often involve low expectations and negative interactions with teachers and peers (Adair, 2015).

The retention rates for doctoral students remain a challenge for American educators and even the future of graduate education. According to Gittings et al. (2018), the damage that this challenge created for students and institutions hindered the growth of doctoral programs. Students are confronted with great disappointment in the program and administrators with a concern for the future of many disciplines (Caruth, 2015). There is abundant substantiation of systemic racism in education; multitudes of articles, books, and quorums on the subject is justification that the problem exists. The fact that African American and Latinx doctoral enrollment and graduation rates are much lower than that of White students is justification for further research on that population's degree completion (NCES, 2019a). Studies that focus on the African American and Latinx students who successfully complete a doctoral program are necessary.

Deficiencies in the Evidence

There are not enough studies that scrutinize successful doctorate students of color. The aim of the study is to determine methods that can improve educational outcomes for African American and Latinx students to enroll and complete doctoral programs. Students of color with doctorate degrees who become professors, researchers, administrators, and business leaders are an essential tool to end systemic racism in education and elevate future generations (Mayes, 2016; Turner, et al., 1999; Twale et al., 2016; Weidman et al., 2001). To increase enrollment and conferral for African

Americans and Latinx students, there should be more studies of successful graduates from doctoral programs. There is abundant evidence of the problem, but solutions must be conveyed. What motivated them to stay in their programs and the factors that caused success should be examined. Furthermore, additional studies from successful African American and Latinx doctoral graduates could possibly shed light on the way to degree completion, academic achievement, and personal success for future generations.

There is an abundance of literature on racism and education in the United States. It is well-documented that discrimination in the classroom causes African American and Latinx students to not finish graduate degrees. There is sufficient data that presented low numbers of this population who enroll in doctoral programs, and fewer who graduate (NCES, 2019a). Stories of accomplishment from African American and Latinx with conferred doctorate degrees need to be shared. Contributing research regarding what it takes to succeed in the face of systemic racism can only serve as a model for future students.

Audience

There are so many groups that can benefit from the study of successful African American and Latinx doctorate graduates. First and foremost, all minorities students who aspire to someday enroll in graduate studies; findings from this study can provide a roadmap to conferral. Then, every Pre-K, Primary, and Secondary teacher, instructor, professor, and academic advisor can gain meaning regarding how systemic racism affects educational outcomes. Next, administrators across every educational program can learn how institutions can become more inclusive. Finally, for the successful African American and Latinx doctoral graduates to consider serving as mentors and to provide fellowship for future non-White graduate students. It is time for all of us to observe personal

prejudices, how it affects young people of color, and contemplate change.

Definition of Terms

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

An interpretive and theoretical examination of "the appearance of race and racism across dominant cultural modes of expression" (Purdue University, 2020, para. 1).

Intersectionality

The term was originally developed by civil rights activist and legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw to address subordination of black women from feminist and antiracist policies in 1989 (Crenshaw, 1989, as cited in Perlman, 2018; Carbado et al., 2013). According to the Oxford English Dictionary (2020), the term is defined as, "The interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage" (para.).

Latinx

The term refers to "American born Latinos/Latinas who want to be more inclusive and gender neutral" (Generating Engagement and New Initiatives for All Latinos [GENIAL], n. d., para. 7).

Motivators

An action or a set of actions that cause an individual's persistence of effort for the attainment of goals (Wanner Sweeney, 2016).

Racial Equity

The term means equality for all races. According to the Cambridge Dictionary (2020), the definition is "a situation in which people of all races are treated fairly and in the same way" (para.)

Systemic Racism

The term refers to "a dynamic system that produces and replicates racial ideologies, identities, and inequities" that generates racial privilege and oppression based on skin color (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2020, para. 14).

Whiteness

Discussions about race are very different for nonwhites in "this white dominant culture" (Smithsonian, n. d., para. 1). In America, White racial identity is 'normalized', and persons of color are perceived as subordinate or deviant. DiAngelo (2011) described whiteness as a social process of race privilege.

White Privilege

For this study, the term refers to "historical and contemporary advantages in access to quality education, decent jobs and livable wages, homeownership, retirement benefits" and much more (Aspen Institute, 2016, para. 6)

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the motivators that influenced African American and Latinx students to enroll and complete a doctoral program without academic assistance from a fellowship or mentorship program. The aim of the researcher was to understand what factors and motivations of African American and Latinx doctoral graduates and professionals caused determination to complete the degree. The numerous doctorate programs that offer academic assistance and financial assistance in the form of mentorships, fellowships, and grants are highly successful. What about the students that struggle through programs to complete the doctorate alone, without any perceived assistance? Their stories of success must be told to inspire others to complete their studies. The target population are African American

and Latinx graduates of a doctoral program who did not have support or fellowship from any program. The researcher posits that academic support, mentorship, and fellowship are an essential part of educational success in a doctoral program. This is particularly accurate for African American and Latinx students, as they may have experienced systemic racism throughout much of their education.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the motivators that influenced African American and Latinx students who successfully completed a doctoral program. Much of the current research comprised factors that caused African American and Latinx students to drop out of higher education, but not enough of their ideals for academic success. The aim of this study was to examine African American and Latinx students who enroll in higher education programs and complete their doctorate degrees without the assistance of mentorship or fellowship programs. The review will include (a) the theoretical framework for this study, (b) critical race theory and systemic racism, (c) scholarly studies related to doctoral students of color, (d) gaps and limitations in the literature, and (e) the research questions for this study.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was based on the interrelated concepts of Maslow's motivation theory (i.e., the hierarchy of needs model), and critical race theory. The five steps of the hierarchy of needs are; physiological, security, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization (Maslow, 1954, as cited in Huitt, 2007). Critical race theory is grounded in a system that favors White people culturally, economically, educationally, politically, and socially over people of color (Curry, 2006). Critical race theory is related to Maslow's motivation theory in that basic hierarchy needs are not met for many African American and Latinx students in the educational setting due to systemic racism. Whiteness permeates education and students of color are disregarded and considered inferior to their White counterparts. Systemic racism begins for African American and Latinx students as soon as they enter the halls of education (Dixson et al.,

2016; NCES, 2019). For this reason, it is important to consider the academic journey of successful African American and Latinx students starting in elementary education.

Motivation Theory

Maslow categorized needs into a hierarchy where certain needs must be met before others can be attained (Maslow, 1943, as cited in Burleson & Thoron, 2014). Physiological, safety and security, love and belonging, and esteem are deficiency needs and motivation decreases as these needs are met; self-actualization is a growth need (McLeod, 2020). According to McLeod, "Every person is capable and has the desire to move up the hierarchy toward a level of self-actualization" (para. 8). People are motivated by the desire to fulfill needs and accomplish goals (Burleson & Thoron, 2014; Huitt, 2007; Maslow, 1987; McLeod, 2020). The failure to meet deficiency needs can interrupt progress towards self-actualization and growth. According to the United Negro College Fund ([UNCF], 2021), systemic racism is a deterrent to self-actualization and growth for African American and Latinx students. A child whose needs are met at home but not at school, can become a difficult student in the classroom. The researcher hypothesizes that this is the reason for low enrollment of these students into doctorate programs.

Physiological Needs

The basic needs including breathing, food, water, warmth, and rest are necessary for healthy emotional and physical existence (Burleson & Thoron, 2014). People are motivated by their unfulfilled needs; as those needs are met, their motivation moves on to the next higher need (Maslow, 1987). Physiological needs are the most essential of needs, and lack of any one of them, "[can] be the biggest motivating factor for an individual" (Burleson & Thoron, 2014, p. 1). The authors indicated that if hunger is a student's

motivating factor, then learning can be disrupted by a behavior issue because the child is hungry; if the student falls asleep during class, it is probably due to lack of rest and proper sleep at home.

Educators are not responsible for students' basic needs, but lack of these do affect student learning and behavior in the classroom. Food programs that offer free and reduced meals help, but assuring students have sufficient healthy habits, clean clothes, and enough sleep are an issue (Burleson & Thoron, 2014). Children with behavioral issues are often labelled as such on academic records that may be written with bias and follow them throughout their K-12 education.

Security Needs

Safety and security needs are found at home, school, and the environment of the individual health, employment, property, and social stability (Burleson & Thoron, 2014). The authors indicated that if a child feels insecure because of troubles at home, problems in the neighborhood, bullies at school, or a sense of bigotry and dislike from the teacher, his/her focus will not be on learning. Whereas physiological needs are more tactile, and concrete, safety and security needs can often be intangible and abstract (Taormina & Gao, 2013). Safety and security in the classroom are a consistent and stable environment where the student feels protected (Maslow, 1987). Educators can provide a secure learning environment for students by establishing a routine in their learning setting (Burleson & Thoron, 2014). The authors suggested that teachers must provide an atmosphere of trust, so students feel "at ease to take risks – answering questions, asking questions, or sharing their thoughts without fear of ridicule" (p. 2).

Love and Belonging Needs

According to Maslow (1987), people need to be acknowledged by others,

everyone needs love. The need to belong is a social need and encompasses alliances, friendships, intimacy, relationships, and trust (McLeod, 2020). In the classroom it is expressed as a feeling of acceptance of the student by the teacher, and reciprocal acceptance of the teacher by the student. If the need of safety and security are not satisfied to some degree, then the student-teacher bond (love and belonging) will not occur (Maslow, 1987). Even the slightest observation of whiteness; a brief sigh of indignation, eye rolling, pursing of the lips, and curtly interrupting the student from speaking can disrupt growth between the student and teacher.

Esteem Needs

The fourth level of the hierarchy was classified into two categories: "(i) esteem for oneself (dignity, achievement, mastery, and independence); and (ii) the desire for reputation or respect from others (e.g., status, prestige)" (McLeod, 2020, para. 17). Self-esteem is also defined as approval and recognition, competence, confidence, respect of others, and the need to be a unique individual (Burleson & Thoron, 2014; Huitt, 2007). For self-esteem and love and belonging needs to be met in the classroom, a student must feel a sense of being cared about (Burleson & Thoron, 2014). If the teacher or administrator expressed any slight towards the student, he/she will not feel safe and will not have healthy self-esteem or sense of love and belonging in the classroom.

Self-Actualization Needs

The highest level of needs moves from deficiency needs to growth needs (McLeod, 2020). According to McLeod, self-actualization denoted human prospective, self-gratification, personal growth, and capabilities. Self-actualization is the growth when a person becomes more capable of compassion and deeper understanding of themselves and others (Maslow, 1987).

Critical Race Theory and Systemic Racism

Critical race theory (CRT) was developed in the 1970s through the 1980s as an examination of race and racism due to the "failure of traditional civil rights litigation to produce meaningful racial reform" (Taylor, 1999, p. 183). Taylor postulated that among the elements of CRT is that racism is a matter-of-fact daily occurrence and whiteness is so deeply ingrained within the culture that it could be unrealized. African American and Latinx students are subjected to systemic racism and are "affected by cultural perceptions of race and how they are able to represent themselves to counter prejudice" (Purdue Online Writing Lab, 2020, para. 1). Scholars of CRT sought to understand the everyday experiences of diverse individuals who are victimized by inequality due to the color of their skin.

CRT scholars asserted that "racism is normal, not aberrant, in American society" (Delgado, 1995, as cited in Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 11), it is "enmeshed" in American culture. According to Ladson-Billings, "experiential knowledge" or "storytelling" provided an unmatched ability to construe inferences from a shared history of systemic racism. Narratives "add[ed] necessary contextual contours to the seeming "objectivity" of positivist perspectives" (p. 11). Critical race theorists argued that there must be drastic changes, but Liberalism practices were based in legal battles for people of color to gain rights already afforded to Whites.

An autoethnographic study by Mayes (2016) elaborated on her "experiences as a Black educator working in a large, suburban, prestigious, predominantly white school" (p. v). For an integral part of the research, Mayes developed Black school spaces; imaginary, non-physical safe spaces where Blacks were re-humanized, counter-narratives were recognized, and racial trauma was considered. The author considered these Black

spaces as “organized acts of resistance against white supremacy” (p. v), and “liberation from racialized oppression” (p. 109). African American students, “continue to be viewed as inferior when compared to their white counterparts” in K-12 classrooms (Delpit, 2012, as cited in Mayes, 2016, p. 7). Systemic racism in education perpetuated white supremacy. The author indicated that students of color in the classroom are subjected to “the nuances of existing social hierarchies” (p. 7). Mayes (2016) focused on four specific tenets of CRT: racism, acknowledgement of experiences, the futility of liberalism, and interest convergence. According to the author,

> these tenets include (1) racism is a permanent fixture in American society; (2) the recognition of experiential knowledge [of people of color]; (3) liberalism is ineffective at addressing social inequity; and (4) interest convergence – the notion that the interest of Blacks have never been served unless they merged with the interest of whites. (p. 15)

Racism is so “normalized” in White culture and society that often, they fail to recognize it; yet persons of color affected by racism can easily recognize the occurrence (Mayes, 2016). For African Americans, Latinx, and other non-Whites; “those who are regularly impacted by racism are very aware of its debilitating effects because of their first-hand, personal experiences with it” (Taylor et al., 2009, as cited in Mayes, 2016, p. 15).

There is a resistance to the acknowledgement of systemic racism by numerous White educators. An article by DiAngelo (2011) addressed the expectation of race-based stress and what is the minimum amount a White person is willing to tolerate before it becomes intolerable. The author conducted the research when hired to facilitate a race dialogue group among a group of all white employees. DiAngelo suggested that American Whites social environment “protects and insulates them from race-based

stress" (p. 55). The author found that when educational training and professional development programs addressed racism and privilege, White educators presented anger and argumentative responses to it, often dismissing whiteness as untrue. Moreover, responses are often met with anger and "racially coded language [which] reproduces racist images and perspectives while it simultaneously reproduces the comfortable illusion that race and its problems," belong to people of color and not Whites (DiAngelo, 2011, p. 55). DiAngelo designated this reaction as White Fragility; "one aspect of whiteness and its effects" upon persons of color (pp. 56-57). According to DiAngelo, one or two multicultural education courses taught in college or a cultural competency training at the workplace may not be enough to address racism and white privilege.

CRT scholar Ladson-Billings (1995, 1998, 2014) originally labelled culturally relevant pedagogy as "practical ways to improve teacher education," and to give White teachers an appreciation of African American student culture and qualities (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p. 74). Based on her previous studies, Ladson-Billings (2014) classified culturally relevant pedagogy as the academic success of students, cultural competence of teachers and students in urban settings, and sociopolitical consciousness for educators to resolve global issues. The author defined academic success as the student's experience of "intellectual growth" while learning in the classroom; cultural competence as the "ability to help students appreciate and celebrate their cultures of origin," and learn respect of others' cultures; and sociopolitical consciousness as "learning beyond the confines of the classroom" (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p. 75).

Systemic Racism in Education

Mayes (2016) indicated that prior to desegregation of public schools, many Black school teachers sought to uplift Black children "out of poverty and racial oppression" (p.

4). According to Mayes, integration destroyed the opportunity to uplift Black children with specialized learning and "allowed the same racist attitudes that preferred segregated education for the purpose of maintaining white supremacy" (p. 3) to be taught to Black students. The author stated that once integration was in place, Black teachers were forced to teach and discipline these students through curriculum and rules set forth by White administrators. This alienated Black teachers from their students, the parents, and their community due to integration causing Black neighborhoods to lose autonomy, pride, and a sense of community (Mayes, 2016). Furthermore, many, many years after the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) Supreme Court decision, similar racial curriculum, segregated and discriminatory institutional practices, and distribution of educational benefits generally remained unchanged for educators and students of color (Mayes, 2016).

School Segregation and Institutionalized Racism

Long before the Brown decision, court cases arose with an attempt at ending segregation in education. Taylor (1999) noted that,

> historical/legal analysis of racially segregated education and the litigation that challenged it is critical to understanding systemic racism. An all-too-common tendency in discussions about race is to oversimplify complicated dynamics and to disregard the historical context in which a specific conflict developed. (p. 182)

The Supreme Court ruled that descendants of slaves who were imported to the United States were not American citizens, but property of slave owners in *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1857) (Oyez, n.d.-a). Although *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) was not a case specifically regarding education, it set a precedent for segregation with a "separate but equal" decision handed down from the court (Litolff, 2007; Oyez, n.d.-b). The Plessy decision was unchallenged until *Gon Lum v. Rice* (1927); even though Lum was an American

citizen; she was of Chinese descent, and therefore denied access to an all-white school in Mississippi (Litolff, 2007). The court upheld the Mississippi's institutionalized racist mandate and supported separate but equal access to education.

For *Missouri ex rel. Gaines v. Canada* (1938), the Supreme Court reversed a decision by the lower court to deny Gaines admission to University of Missouri Law School based on his race (Oyez, n.d.-c). The court ordered the University to admit Gaines, but he disappeared less than a year later and never surfaced again (The State Historical Society of Missouri, n.d.). For *Sweatt v. Painter* (1950), the Supreme Court reversed the lower court decision to deny Sweatt admission to University of Texas Law School (Oyez, n.d.-d). The university had created a new law school for blacks, but it "lacked the distinguished faculty, law review, alumni, and facilities that make for a great law school" (Litolff, 2007, p. 6). According to the author, pursuing "graduate school admission was proving to be successful and provided a precedent for continued legal challenges" (p. 7). Although Sweatt finally enrolled in law school, he dropped out during his second year; the case took a heavy toll on his health, caused marital problems for the family, and one must wonder what offenses he was subjected to in the classroom (Hsu, 2012). The author stated that the Sweatt decision eventually "led to the end of segregation at the university and paved the way for Brown" (para. 3). However, despite all the court battles throughout the years, systemic racism has remained in education.

Elementary, Middle, and High School

Systemic racism in education begins early on for children of color (Dixson et al., 2016). A very young student may not recognize a teachers' whiteness, but senses that something is not right; while an adult or teenage student may be aware of what is going on in that classroom. African American and Latinx students may never feel safe and

secure in the classroom due to systemic racism. The African American or Latinx student who may already be labelled with behavioral issues walks into the classroom of a teacher who could be biased against them from the start. Systemic racism appears in numerous forms in education; “Colorblindness, or the avoidance or denial of signifying students’ races in curriculum, classrooms, and schools ignores the causes and impact of enduring racial stratification” (Martin, 2008, as cited in Rubel & McCloskey, 2019, p. 114). According to Martin, colorblindness was an ideology that maintained systemic racism throughout education.

Latinx students who may be children of immigrants and are often bilingual, walk into the classroom and their primary language may be devalued by the teacher (Adair, 2015). Latinx students often face systemic racism in education including: (a) segregation, classrooms with little to no exposure to English speaking students; (b) limited high-quality resources and overcrowded classrooms; (c) low engagement with parents, and lack of community involvement by educators and staff; and (d) bilingual students are often classified as a special needs student who have a language disability (Adair, 2015). Students who go to a classroom where they are praised for bilingualism, often excel in their studies. Adair found that African American and Latinx students who are praised for their cultural, racial, and language differences can meet and even surpass expectations at school.

Expulsion, retention, and suspension are another form of systemic racism in education. African American students (especially males) are singled out by teachers, just as they are singled out by law enforcement, and barred from economic initiatives. According to the NCES (2019b), expulsion and retention are related to student behavior and are disciplinary actions; retention can be disciplinary or academic, and is related to

behavior, academic preparedness, or both. The NCES (2019b) conducted an indicator examination of academic years 2000-2016, *Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups*. Indicator 15 examined the retention, suspension, and expulsion rates for numerous K-12 students throughout America's public and private schools. For the academic years of 2000-2016, the percentage of Black students who were retained in K-12 was much higher than that of White students.

For kindergarten through eighth grade, 2.6 percent of Black students and 1.5 percent of White and Latinx students were retained, and for grades 9-12 there was not a measurable difference between races regarding retention (NCES, 2019b). During academic year 2013-14 approximately 5.3 percent or 2.6 million students were suspended from school and Blacks had the highest numbers. There were 13.7 percent of Black students, 4.5 percent of Latinx (percentage was combined with Pacific Islanders), and 3.4 percent of White students. Males of all racial/ethnic groups are suspended more often than females. Of all those suspensions, Black males had the overall highest percentage rate compared to all other racial and ethnic groups at 17.4 percent compared to Black females at 9.6 percent (NCES, 2019b).

Expulsions amounted to 0.2 percent of all students; Blacks and American Indian/Alaska Native students had the highest rate at 0.4 percent, Latinx and Pacific Islander students were at 0.1 percent, and White students at 0.2 percent (NCES, 2019b). The high school dropout rate was lower for Blacks than Latinx students (NCES, 2019c). In 2016, there were about 2.3 million, 16-20 years-old citizens who were not enrolled in high school or earned a diploma or equivalent. Of that amount, 5.2 percent were White, 8.6 percent were Latinx, and 6.2 were Black. According to the NCES (2019c), the dropout rate lowered for all races and ethnicities from 2000-2015.

A study conducted by Rubel and McCloskey (2019) assessed endeavors created to make mathematics education more inclusive to women and students of color. The authors examined the accomplishments and failures of "teaching and learning mathematics as critical mathematical inquiry (CMI)" (p. 113). Rubel and McCloskey posited that the field of mathematics is comprised of predominantly White males, so the aim of CMI was to make it more inclusive to people of color and women (everybody). Whiteness affirms superiority of White people, their behaviors, and experiences. Whiteness is partially based on a belief of meritocracy in a culture where people of color may not be acknowledged for their perseverance and hard work (Rubel & McCloskey, 2019). The authors identified an ideology that propagated white supremacy in education. Students who are subjected to discrimination because of their differences are often met with the "soft bigotry of low expectations" (p. 113). President Bush (43) coined the phrase "soft bigotry of low expectations" during a speech to the NAACP and acknowledged the reality of racial discrimination. However, the president failed to discuss the causes of systemic racism and its role in education achievement gaps among persons of color (Bush, 2000, as cited in Rubel & McCloskey, 2019).

Mathematics education has been geared toward understanding and promoting multidimension participation; linking mathematics content to students' experiences as one "aspect of culturally relevant pedagogy" and an opportunity to teach mathematics for social justice (Ladson-Billings, 1995, as cited in Rubel & McCloskey, 2019, p. 113). Unfortunately, the culturally relevant pedagogy promoted whiteness and scholars of CRT and CMI were met with resistance and even violence from opposition including White educators, policy makers, and administrations (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Rubel & McCloskey, 2019).

An acquaintance of the researcher discussed academic issues regarding her African American son who was labelled with behavioral problems early on in his education. His second-grade teacher called him “mouthy,” “has a bad attitude,” and “a smart-ass kid.” Right away, documentation of the encounter was placed on his academic record by the teacher and principal. This followed him until she had him placed in another school that mentored young men of color. In no time, he began to excel and was awarded a scholarship in a Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) program. Nonetheless, his college life was overwhelming. The only connections that he formed with teachers were male teachers of color during middle and high school. He struggled in the STEM program at college; there were no professors of color in the program. He felt that the instructors treated him “like [he] was inferior, or not as smart as the White students.” The acquaintance pointed out that even though her son had a successful high school experience, the psychological and social damage was already done early on in elementary school. (M. Hutton, personal communication, October 15, 2020). African American and Latinx students who struggled with systemic racism throughout the K-12 years and are now college bound face daunting possibilities for success. Throughout most of their academic life, motivation for achievement is met with cultural differences, whiteness, and an institutionalized bigotry that has created a wall of inferiority and low expectations.

Higher Education

A case study by Congleton (2017) examined the socialization of first-year doctoral students of color through a summer program, the Summer Doctoral Transition Initiative (SDTI), designed to help these students transition to doctoral studies. The study focused on the STDI design and initiatives to increase recruitment and retention of

students of color. Congleton documented the intersectionality of how "marginalized identities including class, gender, and sexuality mediate how students experience socialization and doctoral study" (p. 5). The author's research investigated (a) students' social and professional development support, (b) resources available and how students utilized them for learning, (c) cultural differences and a welcoming environment, and (d) how students interpreted the school's efforts at achieving socialization. The study assessed socialization theory and practices to help students form better connections to their perspective programs (Weidman et al., 2001, as cited in Congleton, 2017). According to Congleton, critics of socialization theory found that it required students to assimilate to White culture and practices, that ultimately marginalized African American and Latinx students and disregarded their self-image.

Weidman et al., (2001) investigated socialization theories about graduate students achieving success in their programs. The authors stated that "socialization in graduate school refers to the processes through which individuals gain the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for successful entry into a professional career requiring an advanced level of specialized knowledge and skills" (p. 5). Weidman et al. identified four stages for the socialization process including anticipatory, formal, informal, and personal. During the anticipatory stage, the student becomes aware of "the behavioral, attitudinal, and cognitive expectations" necessary for successful completion of a graduate or professional program (Weidman et al., 2001, p. 11). The next phase is "the information stage of role acquisition," where the new student learns they must assimilate for effective communication with faculty and peers (p. 14). For some students, cohorts emerge that may mimic community by providing emotional and social support. During the personal stage students develop their professional identity, become mature in the program, and

form their future identities (Weidman et al., 2001). Table 3 presents data for full-time faculty by race from 2015, 2017, and 2018 (NCES, 2020).

Table 3

White, African American, Latinx and Non-White Full-Time Faculty by Academic Rank

Year/ Academic Rank	Totals	White	African American	Latinx	Non-White Other
2015	807,109	575,752	44,106	35,811	151,440
Professors	182,388	147,095	6,731	5,957	22,605
Associate Professors	158082	116,754	9,090	6,978	25,260
Assistant Professors	173,409	115,226	10,874	7,634	39,675
Instructors	99,915	73,052	7,264	6,890	12,709
Lecturers	40,894	30,488	2,074	2,367	5,965
Other Faculty	154,421	93,137	8,078	5,985	45,226
2017	822,513	574,364	45,461	39,190	163,498
Professors	184,428	145,927	6,936	6,535	25,030
Associate Professors	157,975	115,065	9,157	7,253	26,500
Assistant Professors	179,051	115,830	11,507	8,571	43,143
Instructors	98,673	70,967	7,048	7,431	13,227
Lecturers	43,222	32,031	1,994	2,708	6,489
Other Faculty	159,164	94,544	8,819	6,692	49,109
2018	832,119	572,586	45,748	41,403	172,382
Professors	185,758	145,207	7,005	6,826	26,720
Associate Professors	159,135	114,804	9,196	7,684	27,451
Assistant Professors	181,239	115,381	11,628	8,913	45,317
Instructors	98,798	70,171	7,225	7,885	13,517
Lecturers	44,969	32,808	2,120	2,986	7,055
Other Faculty	162,220	94,215	8,574	7,109	52,332

Note. Non-White Other included Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, persons of two or more races, and Non-resident alien (NCES, 2020).

Twale et al. (2016) revisited the graduate student socialization model developed by Weidman et al. (2001), and modified the framework based on "contemporary finding with regard to diversity" (pp. 80-81). Twale et al. found that there was far less diverse

faculty while students of color populations increased on campus. Faculty and administrators of graduate programs remain mostly White. Furthermore, African American females outnumbered African American males in all faculty positions: in 2017 there were 19,432 African American male professors compared to 26,029 African American female professors; in 2018, there were 19,351 African American male professors compared to 26,397 African American female professors at degree-granting institutions of the United States (NCES, 2020). Conversely, statistics for Latinx males and females were closer in comparison: in 2017, there were 19,732 Latinx male professors, compared 19,458 Latinx female professors; and in 2018, there were 20,621 Latinx males compared to 20,782 Latinx female professors at degree-granting institutions of the United States (NCES, 2020).

Undergraduate students of color, especially women, have increased in numbers for the academic years since 2001 (Twale et al., 2016; NCES, 2019d). The NCES (2019d) revealed that African American and Latinx students enrolled in undergraduate degree programs doubled by the 2015-16 academic year and tripled for certificate programs. Conversely, almost 20 years later little has changed for doctorate degree programs regarding African American and Latinx students and professionals. Statistics for the 2017-18 academic year revealed that over 107,000 White students obtained a doctoral degree compared to 14,241 African American students and 13,253 Latinx students (Duffin, 2020).

Okahana et al. (2016) evaluated data from the National Science Foundation and the *CGS/GRE Survey of Graduate Enrollment and Degrees*, to determine how to improve attrition and completion for underrepresented minorities in STEM programs. Even though enrollment has increased for African American and Latinx students, “more needs

to be done to ensure that the U.S. STEM workforce, including the professoriate, reflect the diversity of the communities which they serve and the nation as a whole" (Okahana et al., 2016, p. 1). Data from the study indicated that African American and Latinx students generally took longer to complete the degree and had a higher 10-year completion rate than White students. The motivators that influenced these students to complete the degree were (a) motivation and determination, (b) non-financial family support, (c) mentors, (d) financial support, (e) social and peer support, and (f) professional and career guidance (p. 6).

Mayes (2016) examined Black teacher's educational process; pedagogy that supports liberation, critically conscious acts, and revitalized Black educators on how they could be effective as mentors and guides through Black educational imagination. According to the author Black educational imagination consisted of teaching children of color that they mattered, were equal to their White peers, and helped them to overcome the trauma caused by systemic racism. Mayes stated that the study sought to investigate

> existing opportunities and processes for engaging in Black educational imagination in a contemporary educational setting that struggles with the damaging effects of de facto segregation. [The] study suggests that Black educators imagine how their actions can resist white supremacy and create Black school space. (p. 9)

Mayes (2016) suggested that the intersectionality of CRT, Black radical imagination, and self-motivated success were the basis for Black educational imagination.

Scholarly Studies Related to Doctoral Students of Color

The Council of Graduate Schools reported that although doctoral applications overall were flat (-0.6 percent), there were some minor increases in minority enrollment

of graduate programs in 2019 (Okahana, et al., 2020). Doctorate enrollment for African Americans students were only 6.1 percent at "Doctoral Universities with Very High Research Activities," … "compared to 5.3 [percent] in Fall 2009" (p. 8). Okahana, et al. found that overall enrollment in graduate level and professional certificate programs for Black/African American were 12.1 percent, Latinx were 11.9 percent, meanwhile Whites were 59.4 percent.

African American and Latinx students are underrepresented in doctoral programs especially STEM due to ongoing systemic racism in higher education. Less than 15 percent of African American and less than 12 percent of Latinx students graduate with STEM doctorate degrees (Newsome, 2019). According to the author, these students have the odds stacked against them; "not for lack of qualifications or ambition," but rather their ethnicity (para. 3). Newsome followed the path of several students at Duke University's Meyerhoff Scholars and Summer Research Opportunity Program (SROP). These programs were created to increase the opportunities for gifted underrepresented students of color to enroll in Ivy League Ph.D. science programs. The Meyerhoff Scholars program and SROP offered help for students who could not "afford expensive graduate educations and have little help navigating the route to an advanced degree" (para. 3).

However, the SROP only choose nine students out of over 400 applicants in 2019. One student discussed his lifelong love of science. He said that he was "a self-described science geek who has dreamed of becoming a doctor as long as he can remember" Newsome, 2019, para. 1). His hopes of getting into graduate school were met with obstacles; "[it] is like a secret that is only given to certain people, … If you don't have guidance or mentorship or any example of people who've done it, there's no way" to

know how to gain admittance (para. 4). The author noted that there were very few doctoral programs designed to attract and retain African American and Latinx students. Additionally, there is a scarcity of professors and professionals of color. Public school does not prepare most learners for college, particularly African American and Latinx students. Mentorship by teachers and professionals who have completed a doctoral program, fellowship of other students, peers, administrators and staff, and community outreach programs are a necessity to close the achievement gap of African American and Latinx graduate students.

Miles et al. (2020) researched African American and Latinx doctoral students in STEM programs. There were 33 Black doctoral participants who were enrolled in an engineering program from 11 different universities in the United States. The authors collected data from open-ended interviews of African American doctoral students as well as "postdocs" from Predominantly White Institutions. The focus of the study was the interactions with their White peers. Miles et al. found that students of color face "racial microaggressions and identity nonverifications" that confront their identities and challenge their value as doctoral students (para. 1).

This group is not only underrepresented as doctoral students, but have only a few high-level professional positions, educational administration, or professor and assistant professor positions (Twale et al., 2016; Weidman et al., 2001). According to Miles et al., "Black students earn the lowest share of engineering doctoral degrees (4.2%) compared with all other groups," and this trend has not really changed in over 10 years. (Yoder, 2018, as cited in Miles et al., 2020, p. 3).

Scherr et al. (2020) investigated racial isolation of African American and Latinx doctoral students in a physics program that offered mentoring for underrepresented

populations. Students were interviewed who were part of American Physical Society's (APS) Bridge Program developed as part of "sustainable transition (bridge) programs and a network of doctoral granting institutions that provide substantial mentoring for students to successfully complete Ph.D. programs" (Scherr et al., 2020, p. 020132-1). The authors disclosed that between 2013 and 2017, there were less than three percent of African American and less than six percent of Latinx students who were awarded doctorate degrees in physics. African American and Latinx students acknowledged racism, interpersonal behaviors that intensify separation by ethnicity, and workplace "institutional structures and practices" that perpetrated stereotypes among the leading causes of underrepresentation in doctoral programs (Scherr et al., 2020, p. 020132-2). Sixteen students participated in the study; 12 male and four female, 11 were Latinx, and five were Black/African American.

Findings from the Scherr et al. (2020) study indicated that a number of Latinx students said they did not experience racial discrimination in the program, yet most Black/African American students experienced "implicit bias" from instructors and peers. Several Latinx students experienced microaggressions that had "cumulative negative effects impacting both academic performance and health outcomes" (p. 020132-6). African American and Latinx students in the APS Bridge Program bonded with others in the program, including students from other countries: "students expressed feeling supported by the community they formed with foreign students from Europe, Canada, and Asia, or Asian American students" (p. 020132-7).

Wyche (2020) investigated students experiences with stress and perceptions of racism and discrimination towards African American students in an online doctoral program. The author collected data from eight African American students (5 women and

3 men) who were in an online doctoral program. Findings from the study indicated that the students perceived acts of discrimination from faculty and staff at the university. Wyche postulated that discrimination based on ethnicity and stereotyping is sometimes intimidating for students of color. Many African American students identify "educational experiences in doctoral programs consist of not being noticed, disrespectfully treated, devalued, underrepresented, and discriminated against by" faculty and White students (Wyche, 2020, p. 4). Moreover, African American students did not receive the support of peers and notably there were "microaggressions withing their department of study" (p. 9). All doctoral students will have stress at some point in their program. For students of color, the stressors associated with being ethnically and culturally different from the student majority and mostly White faculty may add to the achievement gap of graduation rates for this demographic. Wyche suggested that African American students at predominantly White institutions were most concerned with the lack of faculty and mentors of color who could identify with their stressors and struggles.

According to Wyche (2020) African American students experienced the following behaviors: (a) discrimination from those in power (e.g., the chair and faculty), and issues associated with their dissertation topic; (b) assumptions based on ethnic name or class photo; and (c) discrimination by White as well as non-White colleagues and peers. Results from the study presented the need for more "diverse faculty members and administration," who could "possess the same power of authority and equal rights as their White peers;" inclusion of students of color in the policy decision-making process; "how to effectively evaluate diversity training for faculty members and whether the training is meeting stated objectives;" and (Wyche, 2020, p. 119).

A colleague who successfully completed a doctoral program in 2015 discussed

issues he faced while working in higher education and attaining his degrees. He got an afterschool job at a predominantly white university, where he filed documents, answered phones, and performed other "menial" jobs. According to the colleague, most of the low-level jobs at the university were held by Blacks and Hispanic workers. Once he graduated from high school, he was recognized for his tremendous work ethic and offered a full-time administrative assistant position. At his full-time position, he worked for a White woman who micromanaged and treated him like he was "a thug or something, she acted like she was afraid of me." Despite all this, he worked hard and attained his undergraduate and master's degree. When he applied for the doctoral program, he began to get microaggression behavior from White professors he worked with as well as White co-workers. Professors in the program were always "surprised" at how well he handled the coursework. When he got to the dissertation stage, his chair repeatedly sent his work back without specific feedback for over one year. At the same time, his White peers at the same or lower academic levels were getting promotions and pay raises that were not happening for him wrong (D. Buchanan, personal communication, November 20, 2020).

Motivation to prove them all wrong propelled him to complete the degree, although he considered quitting many times. He said that he never received the same support as the White students. There were two or three Black professors there, but they were also treated with disrespect by administration and staff. The department he worked for experienced financial problems just as he completed the doctorate degree, and he was transferred to another department. The transfer was not a promotion, rather a lateral move to another assistant or coordinator position. (D. Buchanan, personal communication, November 20, 2020). According to Mayes (2016), "learning how to "empower myself in an inherently racially hostile environment" that causes traumatic effects on individuals is

the key to academic success in a doctoral program (p. 111). What motivation is needed for African American and Latinx students to complete doctoral programs and attain degree conferral?

Holly and Caldwell (2012) considered best methods for the design and implementation of mentoring programs for doctoral students. To attain success in a doctorate program, all students must have: academic support; availability of solid resources; and a good relationship with their faculty member, peer, and faculty mentors. The authors found that mentoring is "the most effective and promising practices recognized by the Council of Graduate Schools' Ph.D. Completion Project" (p. 244). Furthermore, the institution must decide to "balance the student's immersion into the academic department with the ultimate goal of enhancing the student's academic and professional development" (Holley & Caldwell, 2012, p. 253). For a student to persist and complete a doctorate degree, effective mentoring, advising, professional associations, and regularly scheduled time for quality engagement between faculty and student are essential.

Students in a doctorate program must be able to rely on their faculty for advisement and direction to successfully complete coursework and final projects. Holly and Caldwell (2012) found that more than half of all students who enroll in a doctorate program do not complete the degree. The doctoral student and faculty relationship is vital to efficacious completion of a graduate degree program (Holley & Caldwell, 2012). African American and Latinx student face systemic racism throughout their educational experience. Many of their professors may be white males and more than a few may have bigoted ideals so ingrained in their culture it is at an "unrecognizable level" (i.e., whiteness). This group of students may have never bonded with any of their white

teachers and conversely, white teachers may have never bonded with students of color. Professors of color are subjected to the same beliefs of inferiority as their students of color by White administrators, faculty, staff, and students (Mayes, 2016). Results from a qualitative study of faculty of color revealed that out of 64 professors only three did not experience discrimination in their academic departments (Turner et al., 1999, as cited in Weidman et al., 2001).

Mentorship, fellowship, academic support, and motivation are essential for students to successfully complete a doctorate degree. For African American and Latinx students, there are internal and external factors that cause their persistence in a doctoral program (Matthews, 2012). Roberts and Tehrani (2020) investigated the impact of the 2020 pandemic, and the role that human behavior and inequities played on communities of color. African American and Latinx individuals are heavily impacted by systemic racism and their concept of survival in the environment is crucial for equity and social justice (Roberts & Tehrani, 2020). Since systemic racism begins in elementary school, many students of color never realize any level of Maslow's (1987) hierarchy, and never gain healthy levels of trust or a sense of belonging at school.

Gaps and Limitations in the Literature

Numerous qualitative studies that research successful doctorate students of color investigate what works and what does not work. Success of fellowship programs and scholarships for African American and Latinx students are tremendous. The problem with those programs is the limited number of students they accept. A review of doctoral scholarships, mentorships, and grant programs revealed high success rates for small numbers of students; the programs only take a very small percentage of students each year (The PhD Project, 2021). There are not many scholarly articles on the examination

of factors that cause African American and Latinx students to complete doctorates without academic support from mentorship or fellowship.

Additional studies on how these students maneuver through doctoral programs without strong support while possibly facing systemic racism can provide guidance to young African American and Latinx students who have dreams of success. The researcher posits that systemic racism is one reason why Maslow's hierarchy of needs are not met in elementary school for many African American and Latinx children. Students of color do face systemic racism from elementary through high school; this may be the one reason why there is not higher enrollment of African American and Latinx students in graduate programs. Although studies offer causes and propose solutions, many do not quite hit the mark on addressing systemic racism in education.

The most glaring issue regarding education is that there are just not enough CEOs, high-level administrators, mentors, and professors of color to influence and inspire African American and Latinx students to complete doctoral studies. Systemic racism exists in education and could be the cause of low enrollment and retention in doctoral degree programs for African American and Latinx doctoral students. Thus, more qualitative studies evaluating the motivators of successful doctoral students from this demographic are necessary, "the recognition of the value of experiential knowledge" … "[counter] stories that challenge white hegemony and further expose racism" must be told to expose systemic racism in education (Mayes, 2016, p. 16).

Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the motivators that influenced African American and Latinx students to enroll and complete a doctoral program without academic assistance from a fellowship or mentorship program.

The aim of the researcher was to understand what factors and motivations of African American and Latinx doctoral graduates and professionals caused determination to complete the degree. The researcher posits that systemic racism has a negative effect on African American and Latinx students. Further, mentorship and fellowship are necessary tools for academic success in a doctoral program for this population. So how do students without academic support complete their doctoral program? The objective of the research was to examine the lived experiences of these students, and how they persist in higher education and complete the doctorate. The following questions were designed to provide insight into African American and Latinx students' survival in doctorate programs. The study was guided by one central research question and three support questions.

How do African American and Latinx students describe the motivators that influenced them to enroll in and complete a doctoral program?

SQ1. How do African American and Latinx students describe the motivators that encouraged them to enroll in a doctoral program?

SQ2. How do African American and Latinx students describe the motivators that encouraged them to persist and complete a doctoral program?

SQ3. How do African American and Latinx students who completed a doctoral program describe any blocks, obstacles, or other experiences they may have had in K-12 and higher education?

Chapter 3: Methodology

Aim of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the motivators that influenced African American and Latinx students to enroll and complete a doctoral program without academic assistance from a scholarship or mentorship program. The aim of the researcher was to understand what factors and motivations of African American and Latinx doctoral graduates and professionals caused determination and motivation to complete the degree. Furthermore, it is the aim of the researcher to determine whether their lived experiences with systemic racism in education may have affected them and what led to completion of a doctorate. The researcher hypothesized that systemic racism has a negative effect on African American and Latinx students. Further, the researcher theorized that fellowship and mentorship is an essential motivator of academic success for this group of doctoral students. A survey of open-ended questions given to African American and Latinx doctoral graduates who were not in a fellowship or scholarship program was developed. Then, the responses were analyzed to define the motivators that cause African American and Latinx students to successfully complete a doctorate degree despite possibly having experienced systemic racism (Creswell, 2016).

Qualitative Research Approach

The purpose of qualitative research is to "develop an in-depth exploration of a central phenomenon," and allow the investigator to understand the phenomenon through selection of a target population (Creswell, 2016, p. 204). The author stated that there are five steps for qualitative data collection; (a) identifying the participants and the target site, (b) gaining access to participants and site, (c) defining the types of data to be used for the research, (d) generating data collection forms, and (e) ethically overseeing data

collection procedures. For this study, the researcher sought to understand the lived experiences and motivators that cause African American and Latinx students to enroll and complete a doctoral program.

Phenomenology is a theoretical principle founded by Husserl at the start of the 20th century. The focus of phenomenology is the documentation of "how subjects experience a particular phenomenon" (Vogt & Jonson, 2016, p. 324). For this study, the phenomenon is academic success despite systemic racism in higher education. Phenomenology usually involves in-depth interviews with subjects who experienced the phenomenon or had similar experiences; then, analysis of the results generates the "essence" of that experience (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 18).

The perspective of the individual with lived experienced of the phenomenon is the focus for this study. Husserl viewed phenomenology as logical; the "essence" was the foundation of human knowledge (Farrell, 2020). Husserl sensed that it had a transcendental meaning, "based on a fundamental distinction between the "inner" world of the mind or soul and the "outer" physical world with which it comes in contact (Thomas et al., 2013, as cited in Farrell, 2020, p. 2). The author indicated that Husserl focused on the essence to achieve a description of the phenomenon and perception through our consciousness. Farrell indicated that this is considered transcendental or descriptive phenomenology.

Heidegger, a student of Husserl, introduced a deviation of transcendental phenomenology that was more interpretive (Farrell, 2020). The main tenet of hermeneutic or interpretive phenomenology is "what it means *to be* in the world," relative "to the very *nature of truth* itself" (p. 3). The author stated that Heidegger considered that meaning was inherent within the lived experience; the subject did not give new meaning

to the experience, interpretation was already there. For this study, the meaning of systemic racism in education presents the same or similar implications to students of color.

According to Groenewald, a phenomenological approach is concerned with the lived experiences of those who are "involved with the issue that is being researched" (Groenewald, 2004, p. 44). Phenomenological research describes the phenomenon, and the aim of the researcher is to give as accurate a description as possible, "refraining from any pre-given framework, but remaining true to the facts" (p. 44). The researcher of the social phenomena to be studied, "cannot be detached from his/her own presuppositions and that the researcher should not pretend otherwise" (Hammersley, 2000, as cited in Groenewald, 2004, p. 45). Open-ended interviews were conducted with successful African American and Latinx doctorates to understand and interpret the lived experiences of students of color who attain academic success in higher education.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

The qualitative design selected for this study was Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). This design allowed for a detailed examination provided by open-ended interviews gleaning the personal lived experiences of participants rather than preconceived theories of a phenomenon (Smith & Osborn, 2014). The authors indicated that further studies on IPA research can provide an explanation for a difficult or profound issue. Phenomenology is "at once a philosophy, a perspective, and an approach to research" (Smith & Osborn, 2014, para. 2; Farrell, 2020, p. 1). According to Smith and Osborn, the lived experiences of one who has been subjected to the phenomenon can provide a level of understanding that may not be apparent to someone who may not have faced the nuances of the phenomenon.

Results from open-ended interviews can allow the researcher to provide further understanding of the consequences that the phenomenon, in this case systemic racism, can have on participants who strive to excel in education (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). An open-ended interview with participants will allow for the emergence of "ideographic descriptions, personal beliefs, and meanings of the phenomenon being studied" (Irarrázaval, 2020, para. 2). Phenomenological interviews assist researchers to identify the participants' conscious experience as it relates to a specific issue. For the study, the issue was how African American and Latinx students enroll and successfully complete a doctorate while possibly facing systemic racism in education. As a qualitative research approach, IPA permits multiple participants facing similar phenomenon to tell their stories without any misrepresentations or judgements (Alase, 2017). The author indicated that an interpretive analytical paradigm could offer explicit narration of "how the phenomenon has impacted the 'lived experiences' of research participants" (p. 12)

Participants

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the motivators that influence African American and Latinx students to enroll and complete a doctoral program. The researcher posted a flyer for doctorate graduates to volunteer through social media and utilized random purposeful sampling by contacting people who may know doctorate graduates for referrals (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Vogt & Johnson, 2016). Participants were selected through criterion sampling for quality assurance to guarantee they were the target population (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To recruit volunteers for the study, the researcher: (a) posted on social media platforms including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn; (b) contacted individuals who know doctorate graduates for referrals; and (c) asked permission from community centers where the researcher volunteers and places

of worship if flyers could be posted.

Purposeful sampling provided the researcher with participants who can give voice to those who may be silenced, provide an explanation, or develop a detailed understanding of the lived experiences of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2016). The aim of purposeful sampling is to "intentionally select individuals and sites" to understand how African American and Latinx students overcome possible systemic racism and complete a doctoral program (Creswell, 2016, p. 205). To effectively capture the essence of the phenomenon, 5 to 10 participants who experienced similar events should be interviewed (Alase, 2017). Participant size for phenomenological research can be anywhere from 2 to 25 and be an accurate representation of the homogenous sample pool (Creswell, 2012, as cited in Alase, 2017). Homogenous sampling is a purposeful sample of individuals, "based on membership in a subgroup that has defining characteristics" (Creswell, 2016, p. 207).

The researcher interviewed the participants to provide a narrative of what motivates an African American or Latinx student to enroll and complete a doctorate. The researcher interviewed 11 participants for an accurate depiction of the phenomenon and to obtain data saturation. Data saturation occurs when the data is rich, coding is complete, and the study can be replicated (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Inclusion

Participants for the study met the following criteria: (a) African American and Latinx graduates of a doctoral program, (b) individuals who were not part of a doctorate fellowship or mentorship program, and (c) must have attended some part or all their K-12 education at an American school within the United States, public or private. The researcher sought only African American and Latinx students for inclusion to the study.

Participants for the study could be male or female, transgender, or non-binary and all age groups were acceptable for inclusion.

Procedures

The first step for this study was attainment of approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Once approval was granted by the IRB, the researcher conducted the pilot study to confirm validity and transferability of the demographic survey and IP.

Recruitment Flyer

Next, the flyer to recruit volunteers for the study was posted online and at community centers and churches for potential recipients (see Appendix A). The flyer briefly explained the research study, eligibility criteria, and why the need for volunteers/graduates from the target site are the best choice. The flyer included the title of the study, informing the participant that they will take part in an open-ended interview that will last approximately 45-60 minutes, how the interview will be conducted (video chat), researcher's name, telephone, and NSU email. The participant could do the interview at home, work, or wherever they prefer if the online video meeting was not disturbed by others or ambient noises. Recipients were notified that there is no compensation for participation in the study.

Informed Consent

An informed consent form was presented to all participants who applied for the study. Informed consent is a "basic ethical obligation for researchers" (American Association for Public Opinion Research [AAPOR], 2021, para. 22). It is vital to phenomenological research to get signed informed consent forms from all the participants (Creswell, 2013, as cited in Alase, 2017). Alase suggested that informed consent allows

the researcher to corroborate the lived experiences or dispute the assertions of the participants. Then, the researcher contacted respondents to go over any questions and acknowledge the informed consent.

Once enough recipients read, acknowledged, and provided an e-signature for consent forms to the study, they were asked to complete the demographic survey either by email or online. Answers from the demographic survey ensured they met inclusion criteria. When participants completed the demographic survey, a Zoom meeting to conduct the interview protocol (IP) was arranged based on specified times and dates agreed upon by the researcher and individual participants. The researcher set a four-week time with evening hours (4:00-10:00 pm) to interview all the participants. For any participants that wanted to interview earlier in the day or on the weekend, the researcher accommodated their request.

Data Instruments

The following section describes how the data collection instruments were developed and how they were utilized to answer the research questions and subquestions of the study. The data collection instruments included the Demographic Survey, the IP, field notes, and a reflective journal.

Demographic Survey

To determine eligibility for the study, the researcher prepared a demographic survey (see Appendix B) to answer the following questions: the recipient's ethnicity, gender, were they awarded the doctorate degree, and age. Two additional questions on demographics survey include (a) how long it took to complete the doctorate, and (b) did the participant receive any portion of his/her/they K-12 education in the United States. The demographic survey was available by email 24 hours prior to the study and Zoom

link for the survey was provided to recipients at that time. Responses from the demographic survey ensures that all participants meet the inclusion criteria for the study.

Interview Protocol

The IP (see Appendix C) was developed by the researcher from the data available on African American and Latinx students, evidence presented in the literature review, personal experiences, field tests, and an aspiration to end systemic racism in higher education for future generations. The open-ended questions of the IP were designed as "general enough that the interviewee can take the question in several directions and leaves room for ideas, impressions, and concepts" that the researcher may not have thought of (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012, p. 4). The researcher's aim for the questions developed was to illicit an illuminating narrative and substantial validation from the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Field Testing

The researcher conducted field tests with experts in the field of study. Field tests are a representation of "information from different sources collected by researcher[s] in a narrative design" (Creswell, 2016, p. 617). Experts for the field test included doctoral graduates, professors, and adjunct faculty of color. The process of the field test included reviews of the IP and demographic survey, individual discussion regarding attaining doctorate degrees for African American and Latinx students, and any further changes, revisions, or deletions of the IP suggested by the field-test group.

The demographic survey and initial questions for the IP were sent to five graduates of a doctoral program. The researcher received responses from three of the five. All three were doctorate graduates of color, two males and one female. One was Latinx, and one was African American, and one was Haitian American (raised in the

U.S.). The researcher sent the original demographic survey and the research question and subquestions to the field-test respondents. Next, the researcher had a Zoom meeting with the group to discuss the necessity of the field test. Then, a follow up phone call with each respondent on what revisions should be made to the demographic survey and IP.

Based on the results of the field tests and discussions with the respondents, the following revisions were made to the original Demographic Survey:

1. Black was added to African American to include people who identify as of African descent but may not have been born in America.
2. non-Binary was added to the question of Gender.
3. Ten years plus was added to the question of How Long Did It Take to Complete the Doctorate?
4. Preparatory School was added to the question regarding K-12 Education.

Based on the results of the field tests, the following revisions were made to the original IP:

1. For SQ1 – How do African American and Latinx students describe the motivators that encouraged them to enroll in a doctoral program? four questions were developed. Of the four questions, “Tell me a little about your background,” was added and “Tell me about what or who encouraged you to enroll in a doctoral program,” was revised during the field test.

2. For SQ2 – How do African American and Latinx students describe the motivators that encouraged them to persist and complete a doctoral program? five questions were created to provide narrative. The questions, “Describe how they motivated you,” and “Tell me about any positive experiences in education that made you want to pursue the doctorate degree” were added, then revised several times for clarity.

3. For SQ3 – How do African American and Latinx students who completed a doctoral program describe any blocks or other adverse experiences they may have had with in K-12 and higher education? Four questions were originally created. After discussions with field test respondents, the researcher developed the question; "What recommendations would you offer colleges and universities to increase graduation rates among this population?"

Finally, during the field test there were several minor additions, revisions, and tweaks to the demographic survey and the IP for grammar, format, etc. After the field test was completed, the IP developed into questions to keep the participant on topic. Questions that start with "tell me about," and "describe how" people and events that occurred during their doctoral program, should keep the participants focused. The IP was field tested and once IRB approval was granted, the researcher conducted a pilot study for validity and transferability of the data collection instruments (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Lowe, 2019).

Pilot Study

The IP was sent to the IRB during their proposal review for approval. As part of the IP development, the researcher created a pilot study from the results of the field test ensure the reliability of IP and make any further revisions and improvements. The pilot study was conducted with an "expert review panel" regarding the phenomenon to be studied. The pilot study facilitated the researcher "to make important corrections and adjustments" (Vogt & Johnson, 2016, p. 326). Pilot interviews can provide the researcher with a better understanding of himself and the value of the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). According to the authors, the pilot study can reveal the strengths and weaknesses in the research, and help the researcher become more comfortable giving interviews and

managing qualitative data.

The pilot study was based on data from the literature review, central research question, and supporting research questions. The pilot study was conducted with a limited number of experts for validity and trustworthiness for use of the IP to participants of the study (Lowe, 2019). Once reliability was established from the pilot test, the IP will be revised based on the feedback and suggestions from the experts who take part in the study. During the pilot study the researcher determined how much time should be allotted to complete the informed consent process for each participant. The pilot study also helped determine how long the interview should take, and the timeline was developed. Once the revisions (if any) are completed, reliability of the final questions are established. Finally, there were no changes to the IP and no need to resubmit to IRB for approval.

The final iteration of the IP was developed to answer the following central research question: How do African American and Latinx students describe the motivators that influenced them to enroll in and complete a doctoral program? There were three support questions and several sub-questions to elicit a detailed response. Participants were prompted to give detailed responses for each sub-question from the following support questions. They were told the questions would prompt them to describe the motivators that influenced you to enroll in and complete a doctoral program and any influences from your K-12 education forward.

SQ1. How do African American and Latinx students describe the motivators that encouraged them to enroll in a doctoral program?

1. Tell me a little about your background. Can you describe what motivated you to pursue a doctorate degree?

2. Tell me about any mandatory doctoral classes or program at the college or

university you attended.

3. Tell me about what or who encouraged you to enroll in a doctoral program.

4. Describe your experience with doctorate faculty members.

SQ2. How do African American and Latinx students describe the motivators that encouraged them to persist and complete a doctoral program?

1. Tell me about a person who encouraged you to persist.

2. Describe one way they motivated you.

3. Tell me about self-motivation, positive experiences, and/or support that pushed you to persist.

4. Thinking about your K-12 education, tell me about a person who motivated you to continue in higher education?

SQ3. How do African American and Latinx students who completed a doctoral program describe any blocks, obstacles, or other experiences they may have had in K-12 and higher education?

1. Describe any obstacles you overcame, if any, during your K-12 experiences.

2. Describe any obstacles you overcame, if any, during your higher education experiences?

3. What advice would you offer African American or Latinx students who want to enroll in a doctoral program?

4. What suggestions would you offer colleges and universities to motivate student enrollment for this population.

5. What recommendations would you offer colleges and universities to increase graduation rates among this population?

Interview Field Notes

During the interview process, the researcher took notes to record the participants' body language, discomfort with any of the questions, and any anomalies that may arise during the IP. The researcher let the participants know that their opinions are valuable and worthwhile to the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). According to the authors, field notes will allow the researcher to reflect on the details of the interview that may not appear in the transcripts. Although there is a necessity to stick to the semi-structured IP, there may be a need to ask follow-up questions. Reactions of the participants can assist the researcher in knowing when to ask to follow up questions, when to ask the participant to provide further explanation, and any other issues that may arise.

Reflective Journal

According to Vogt and Johnson (2016), reflexivity is the "researchers' critical self-awareness of their biases and how these can influence their observations" (p. 370). For this important work to have value and validity, it is imperative that the researcher remain neutral throughout the interview and reporting process so as not to influence the subjects being measured or observed" or causing a reactive measure from the participants (Vogt & Johnson, 2016, p. 370). By keeping a reflective journal, the researcher was able to "check himself" as the interviews were being conducted; write true feelings and thoughts before and after each interview to ensure neutrality and external validity, reliability, and objectivity (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Interviews

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020, the researcher conducted all interviews via Zoom to maintain social distancing and safety protocols. There were not any in-person interviews; all participants agreed to the Zoom meeting for the interview. Based

on information from the pilot study, the researcher determined the length of time it took to conduct each interview and notified the participants as part of informed consent. Then, the researcher made an appointment with each participant for the Zoom interview. Interviews were held during a 4-week period and each individual interview took approximately 30-60 minutes. Transcripts of the meeting were available on the Zoom cloud. The researcher was able to record 100% of the interviews on Zoom; every participant agreed to the recorded interview.

Data Collection

Prior to setting appointments for the interview with participants: the researcher developed a timeline of how long it should take to conduct each interview; rehearsed interviews for ease in asking questions; prepared a script to "guide" the interview process; explained the study in detail and why it is important to gather the information the researcher seeks; ensured each participant signed the informed consent; and eased concerns participants may have had in regard to confidentiality (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Additionally, the researcher gave a prompt for participants to ask any questions as well as gave participants contact information if they had any questions at any time. The goal of the researcher was to interview at least 10-15 participants to achieve data saturation.

During the interview, the researcher remained neutral and asked the questions in order. The researcher answered any questions the participant may have had regarding the study prior to the start of the IP, during the interview, and afterward. Then, the researcher explained that the sub questions are designed to answer the main research question: How do African American and Latinx students describe the motivators that influenced them to enroll in and complete a doctoral program? Participants were notified that during the

video interview that notes were taken, they could stop at any time to ask questions, and they could stop the interview at any time if they felt uncomfortable or did not want to continue. Participants were notified that they may withdraw for any reason and at any time. None of the participants withdrew from the study.

According to Fusch and Ness (2015), interviews can be a method for "study results [to] reach data saturation" (p. 1409). The researcher anticipated reaching data saturation somewhere around 10 interviews. There may be a need to repeat questions again or give more time to respond to ensure participants' answers are comprehensive. The interview was finished when each participant completely answered all the questions on the IP.

The researcher asked each participant if they would like to add any comments, concerns, or opinions to the study to add to the richness of the data provided (Fusch & Ness, 2015). If participants had anything else to say, it was added to the transcripts, analyzed, and evaluated with the rest of the interviews. Next, the researcher thanked the participants for volunteering to take part in the study. The researcher asked them one last time if there is anything else they would like to say regarding the subject. Then, the researcher gave participants a summary of the interview for member checking to ensure the essence of the interview was captured (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The researcher notified participants they could review the transcripts within 1-2 weeks after the interview. Finally, once the conversation ended, the researcher said "thank you" one last time and announced that this is the end of the interview and the ended the video.

The data was collected from the individual Zoom audio/visual interviews with each participant. The transcripts were available in the Zoom cloud, with an encrypted password for the researcher. The data on Zoom was transcribed through Zoom

Transcription and transcripts were downloaded onto the researcher's computer. The computer is locked and can only be unlocked by the researcher. The computer will be kept in the locked researcher's office.

Once the transcripts were downloaded on the researcher's computer, they were checked and then double-checked to ensure the interview was accurately captured and for internal validity. Then, the Zoom transcripts were deleted from the cloud. The transcripts were sent to each specific participant to review and revise for member checking to ensure accuracy and external validity (Birt et al., 2016; Creswell, 2016; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The researcher gave each participant up to 3 days to check their transcripts for accuracy. The researcher sent the participant a friendly reminder on the second day to ensure the response is timely. Every participant agreed to the Zoom interview so there was no need to send notes from the interview by their preference (i.e., postal mail or email).

Data Analysis

Following the interviews and transcription by Zoom, the researcher utilized In Vivo coding for qualitative analysis. According to Creswell (2016), coding qualitative narrative includes: (a) the participants experience, motivators that caused African American and Latinx students to complete a doctoral program; (b) chronology of the experiences throughout their education; (c) collecting lived experiences with systemic racism or other obstacles faced during their education; (d) coding for themes, (e) context or setting of their educational experience; and (f) collaboration with participants to get an accurate depiction of their experiences. The researcher read the transcripts over and over and watched the Zoom video several times to begin the process of inductive and deductive coding. The codes were developed specifically based on the research questions.

The main objective of the study was to address the research questions to identify motivators that caused the target population to complete doctorate degrees in the face of systemic racism.

Codes were determined utilizing In Vivo coding to code data by "prioritize and honor the participant's voice" (Saldana, 2016, p. 106). Saldana found that In Vivo coding allows the researcher to analyze the actual language of the participant and is useful when studying voices that may be marginalized. In Vivo coding is quite appropriate for descriptive ethnographies. After the multiple readings of transcripts to code the data, the researcher reviewed all field notes (observation and epilog) taken during and immediately following each interview. Next, the researcher reread the transcripts again, watched the Zoom video, and compared them to the notes taken during the interview to add to existing codes or create new ones. The researcher utilized In Vivo coding to focus on and identify the themes in the data (Creswell, 2016; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Saldana, 2016). Then, the researcher examined the transcripts and reviewed the codes to ensure all themes were captured. Finally, the codes, themes, and labels identified in the data were organized regarding their association with the research questions and the data was analyzed (Creswell, 2016).

After the codes, themes, and labels were organized, the researcher read, reread, and assessed the field notes. This is to ensure any minor details that may have been missed on the transcripted interview were evaluated. Reactions to certain questions, body language, or hesitations that were not on the transcripts may be of importance during the review of codes and themes. Next, the researcher read the reflective journal to ensure reliability. The thoughts and feelings of the researcher that may arise before, during, and after the interviews are valuable to this study; however, they must be kept in context so

that the results remain neutral, are objective, and have validity. Then, the narrative for the final report was prepared.

Ethical Considerations

When the focus is on the life experiences of an individual, the researcher must take care to be sensitive to the phenomenon and how much information of the participant's is revealed (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). A collaborative relationship must exist between the researcher and participant (Creswell, 2016). The researcher will build upon trust with the participant during the informed consent phase of the study. Full disclosure of the method for the study was discussed with each participant.

All participants of the study were notified that they can withdraw for any reason and without penalty at any time. The participants were informed of the steps that the researcher used to record, store, and upload the data for the study. The participants' names were not used, and a pseudonym was created to protect their anonymity. With the participants' permission, their demographic information (age, ethnicity, gender, etc.), and educational information was shared as a part of the narrative (Creswell, 2016; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The researcher assured participants that once the data was transcribed from Zoom, it was deleted from the cloud. The transcriptions will remain secure on a password protected computer in a locked office.

Trustworthiness

Reliability and validity of the study confirm the rigor of the research methods and make the results believable and worthy (Morse, et al., 2002). These authors found that standards established for research evaluation are "primarily reliant on procedures or checks by reviewers…[that] represent either a minimally accepted level or an

unobtainable gold standard for the researcher in the field" (p. 15). During the 1980s reliability and validity were substituted with the concept of trustworthiness for qualitative study since there can be difficulty measuring findings (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, 1982, as cited in Morse, et al., 2002).

To ensure trustworthiness in the study, the following criteria was included: (a) credibility, information is correctly and truthfully interpreted and identified through persistent observation; (b) transferability, descriptions from the data can be transferred to other settings or participants; (c) dependability and confirmability, how the findings remain stable over time and can be confirmed by additional research; and (d) reflexivity, the researcher self-reflects on personal preferences and preconceived notions of the phenomenon (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Morse et al., 2002).

Moreover, member checking was utilized to ensure the accuracy of the data. The researcher summarized responses, asked questions for clarity, and then repeated the summary to participants as necessary (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Once the interview process was completed, the interview was transcribed in Zoom. Next, the researcher asked each participant to review the transcription from their interview to ensure the researcher captured everything they wanted to express. Then, the participant had the opportunity to add any information or delete any data the participant does not want to reveal.

Finally, the researcher kept a reflective journal of personal feelings and reactions to responses; interview field notes to review written responses by the researcher regarding the participants; and self-memos to stay focused on the transcripted perspectives of the participants while organizing the findings. As an African American LGBTQ male educated in the Southern region of U.S., this researcher is all too aware of

systemic racism in education. I have experienced it first-hand throughout much of my own education. That is what drives this study forward; the one instructor who may realize their subconscious microaggressions and intentions toward students of color, or the one student who may need support can garner encouragement from this research. To that end, I was committed to honestly report the findings from this study without prejudice. The goal of the researcher was to identify all assumptions, preconceptions, and subjective values so the findings are not corrupted in any way (Creswell, 2016; Spiers et al., 2018). By keeping a reflective journal, the researcher was able to examine feelings and perceptions that may have arisen during the interviews to stay as objective as possible.

Potential Research Bias

The researcher posits there is systemic racism in education that begins in preschool and exists throughout college. As previously stated, the researcher is African American LGBTQ, raised with an education in the southern United States. This could pose an issue of bias in a study centered on those who may have overcome systemic racism in education. However, the intention of the researcher was to present an honest and truthful account on motivators for African American and Latinx students to persist and attain doctorates. The importance of the study for future generations far outweighs the preconceptions of racism and whiteness in American culture. Results from this study are far too important to let unfair assumptions or biases affect the outcome. Careful self-examination into the past experiences, present experiences, and a merging of both experiences regarding the phenomenon allowed the researcher to bracket personal experiences from that of the participants. According to Marshall & Rossman (2016), “this phase of the inquiry is referred to as epoché” (p. 153).

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of the qualitative study was to examine the motivators that influenced African American and Latinx students to enroll and complete a doctoral program without academic assistance from a scholarship or mentorship program. The researcher interviewed African American and Latinx graduates of a doctoral program utilizing an approved, field-tested IP via Zoom. The study was guided by one central research question and three support research questions.

How do African American and Latinx students describe the motivators that influenced them to enroll in and complete a doctoral program?

SQ1. How do African American and Latinx students describe the motivators that encouraged them to enroll in a doctoral program?

SQ2. How do African American and Latinx students describe the motivators that encouraged them to persist and complete a doctoral program?

SQ3. How do African American and Latinx students who completed a doctoral program describe any blocks, obstacles, or other experiences they may have had in K-12 and higher education?

Participants

All the participants met all the inclusion criteria. They were awarded the doctorate degree, attended K-12 in the U.S., female, or male, and none were trans or non-binary. Participant 1 was an African American woman that the researcher knows personally and professionally, but she stated that she could keep her answers real and without any bias due to the importance of the work. Participant 2 was an African American woman the researcher met during a summer doctoral conference. Participant 3 was a Latinx female who identified as a first generation Cuban American and used to work with the researcher

at an institution of higher education. Participant 4 (African American woman), Participant 5 (African American male), Participant 6 (Latinx female) and Participant 7 (Latinx female) were referrals from colleagues or other participants and the researcher never met them prior to the study. Participant 8 has an Afro-Brazilian mother and White father; therefore, she identified as African American and Latinx. Participant 10 was an African American male from a single parent home. Participant 11 was an African American male from a blue-collar family and the first to go to college in his family. Participant 9 did not provide demographic information, so the responses were removed from the study. The researcher was unable to recruit any Latinx males for the study. Table 4 presents demographics including pseudonyms for the participants of the study.

Table 4

Participant Demographics

Participant # / Pseudonym	Age at Conferral	Years to complete	African American	Latinx	Male	Female
1 Connie	41-55	6-8	x			x
2 Wilhelmina	41-55	2-5	x			x
3 Alejandra	25-40	2-5		x		x
4 Carolyn	25-40	2-5	x			x
5 William	25-40	2-5	x		x	
6 Lissette	41-55	2-5		x		x
7 Patricia	25-40	6-8		x		x
8 Nikedra	25-40	2-5	x	x		x
9						
10 Alex	41-55	2-5	x		x	
11 Jerry	41-55	6-8	x		x	

Note. Participant 9 completed the interview but did not respond to the demographic survey and was eliminated from participation in the study.

Data Collection

The researcher posted a flyer on social media sites including Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn; and flyers were posted at local churches and athletic venues

where the researcher has contacts. The researcher kept the online postings active for approximately four weeks and kept the flyers that were posted at venues for the same amount of time. As respondents to the flyer agreed to take part in the study, the researcher set appointments for the date and time of the interview. The researcher let participants know the details of the study and asked each participant to sign an informed consent form. interview would be recorded on Zoom and the transcripts would be available for them to review at any time.

Data Saturation

The goal of the researcher was to interview at least 10-15 participants and was able to record 11 interviews. However, one of the respondents (Participant 9) failed to submit the demographic survey and so the responses from that participant were not used in the study. Attaining 10 interviews for data saturation was accomplished. Participants were notified that they may withdraw for any reason at any time during the interview. All the participants expressed an eagerness to take part in the study and no one withdrew.

All the participants agreed for their interview to be recorded on Zoom. They were notified that there would be audio/video and written transcripts from the Zoom recordings. Participants were told that each interview would last between 30-60 minutes. The shortest interview lasted 27 minutes and the longest one ran just over 60 minutes. They were also told that the researcher would be taking field notes and keeping a journal to make summaries of any personal feelings and observations during the interview.

Internal and External Validity

To ensure internal validity, the researcher listened to and watched the audio/video numerous times to make sure no nuance was missed during note taking. Next, the transcripts were reviewed and double checked against the video by the researcher to

ensure any words that may have been jumbled or distorted were corrected, and that all the wording was properly captured by Zoom transcripts. Then, the transcripts were triple checked for accuracy. Each participant was given the opportunity to member check their transcripts. The researcher gave each participant up to two weeks after the completion of the interview for member checking. None of the participants contacted the researcher after the interview, but they asked if they could read the final report once it was compiled. No other changes were made to the master file of the transcripts; all data was kept on the researcher's password encrypted computer in a secure location where no one else could access.

Field Notes and Reflective Journal

The researcher took field notes during the interview and kept a journal of personal feelings and observations before and after each interview. The purpose of the field notes and journal were to assist in interpreting the transcripts, and not to identify themes. The researcher carefully paid attention to the participants, their body language, "what was not being said" to gather knowledge of the phenomenon, and "accumulate patterns of information" (Tenzek, 2017, p. 565). Although the field notes and reflective journal helped identify the themes, they did not affect the results. Therefore, the researcher interpreted the field notes and reflective journal in chapter 5.

Codes and Themes

Codes were determined utilizing In Vivo coding. This coding allowed for the analysis of the narrative to capture the "voice" of the participants. The categories were established through review and analysis of the narrative to determine coding. Then, five themes emerged from the data analysis. The five emergent themes were Theme 1: Academic Mentors Who Supported and Encouraged; Theme 2: Family, Friends, and

Colleagues Who Provided Motivation and Inspired; Theme 3: Self-Motivation to Enroll in the Doctoral Program; Theme 4: Persistence to Complete the Doctorate Degree; and Theme 5: Isolation and Loneliness During Educational Experiences. Table 5 presents the codes and emergent themes based on participants responses.

Table 5

Codes and Emergent Themes

Codes	Themes	Participants
Support	Academic Mentors Who Supported and Encouraged	Carolyn, Jerry, Alex, Patricia, Connie, and Nikedra
Motivation	Family, Friends, and Colleagues Who Motivated and Inspired	Wilhelmina, Patricia, Alejandra, Jerry, Lissette, Alex, Connie, Nikedra, Carolyn, and William
Reaction	Self-Motivation to Enroll in the Doctoral Program	Wilhelmina, Alejandra, William, Patricia, and Nikedra
Determination	Persistence to Complete the Doctorate Degree	William, Jerry, Alex, Carolyn, and Alejandra
Overcoming Obstacles	Isolation and Loneliness During Educational Experiences	Alejandra, Connie, Jerry, Nikedra, Alex, Carolyn, William, Carolyn, Patricia, and Wilhelmina

The following set of tables presents exemplars from the narrative that facilitated creation of the codes and themes. The researcher utilized In Vivo coding to develop the emerging themes based on their responses. Several of the participants mentioned support at the master's level, there was only one participant who spoke of an overall positive experience with doctoral faculty. Most of the participants mentioned specific mentors, academic programs, and supportive faculty or staff. Table 6 presents the In Vivo codes and categories of academic mentors including teachers, counselors, and other staff who were mentors in high school; instructors and advisors in undergraduate studies; and

professors, advisors, and chairs in master's and doctorate degree programs.

Table 6

Categories and In Vivo Codes for Support

Participant	Categories	Narrative	In Vivo Code
Carolyn	Academic Mentors	"Throughout the whole duration of my education ... I picked up mentors[1] in high school who motivated me to further my education[2] "	[1] "Picked Up Mentors" [2] "Further My Education"
Jerry	Academic Mentors	"[counselor] encouraged me to improve my academic skills[3] by going to Community College before 4-year"	[3] "Encouraged Me To Improve Skills"
Alex	Academic Mentors	"Miss McKayham (counselor) was on me about what I needed to do[4], and show them I could do it[5]" "[he] really influenced me (AP Science teacher and advisor) to do my best[6]"	[4] "What I Needed To Do" [5] "Show Them I Could Really Do It" [6] "Influenced Me To Do My Best"
Patricia	Academic Mentors	"[National Hispanic Institute offered] various programs for high achieving Latino youth in high school[7]"	[7] "High Achieving Latino Youth"
Connie	Academic Mentors	"I enrolled in a summer research program, and I was paired with a professor who actually published our research[8]" "doing that experience with her is what kind of fueled the desire to aim for a doctoral degree[9]"	[8] "Enrolled in Summer Research Program" [9] "Fueled The Desire To Aim For A Doctoral Degree"
Nikedra	Academic Mentors	"I was fortunate that I had faculty that were very supportive[10]"	[10] "Fortunate To Have Supportive Faculty"

Note. Adapted from "The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers (3rd ed.)" by J. Saldana, 2016. Sage.

Family, friends, and colleagues was the next theme to emerge from analyzing the data. Several of the participants came from families who anticipated college attendance for them from an early age. Table 7 presents In Vivo codes and categories for motivation from family, friends, and colleagues including: parents, siblings, and spouses; family background and circumstances surrounding upbringing; friends; and colleagues, and coworkers' inspiration and guidance developed from the participant responses.

Table 7

Categories and In Vivo Codes for Motivation

Participant	Categories	Narrative	In Vivo Code
Wilhelmina	Family, friends, and colleagues	"Education has always been a part of my [family] background[1] and expectation has always been important in my household[2]"	[1] "Education Background [2] "Important In My Household"
Patricia	Family, friends, and colleagues	"I was groomed for college[3] right from the start, we need to work together towards building a strong Latino community[4]"	[3] "Groomed For College" [4] "Building a Strong Latino Community
Alejandra	Family, friends, and colleagues	"I was the first in my family to complete a four-year degree[5]. The only one to obtain a doctorate degree[6]"	[5] "First in Family To Complete 4-Year Degree" [6] "Only One To Obtain A Doctorate Degree"
Jerry	Family, friends, and colleagues	"[mother] was a great motivator, extremely hardworking, devoted, and her amazing work ethic[7]"	[7] "Mother was great motivator, amazing work ethic"
Lissette	Family, friends, and colleagues	"My parents worked hard and saved for me to go to college[8] it was just kind of a given that college was the next step[9], my parents had the foresight and the belief in my education[10]"	[8] "Parents Worked Hard And Saved for College" [9] "A Given That College Was The Next Step" [10] "Parents Foresight and Belief In Education"
Alex	Family, friends, and colleagues	"My mother quickly recognized my academic abilities and provided support needed for success[11]"	[11] "Mother Recognized My Athletic Abilities And Provided Support"
Connie	Family, friends, and colleagues	"My husband was my biggest cheerleader and made sure I got it done[12]"	[12] "Husband Was My Biggest Cheerleader"
Nikedra	Family, friends, and colleagues	"[I] developed a very tight friendship with another cohort member that helped push me through[13]"	[13] "Tight Friendship That Helped Push Me Through"
Carolyn	Family, friends, and colleagues	"Became pregnant with my daughter smack dab in the middle [of doctoral program], the nine months to carry her, I was like I'm doing this for my baby, I'm doing this for my baby[14]"	[14] "I'm Doing This For My Baby"
William	Family, friends, and colleagues	"a coworker of mine...[who]provided some guidance and mentorship[15]" "colleagues who were adamant about me finishing the program[16]"	[15] "Coworker Provided Some Guidance and Mentorship" [16] "Colleagues Were Adamant About Me Finishing"

Next, all the participants had reactions to the pressures of degree completion

including self-motivation and persistence. Table 8 presents the categories and In Vivo codes for reaction of participants that caused self-motivation, and Table 9 presents the categories and In Vivo codes for determination that caused persistence by participants.

Table 8

Categories and In Vivo Codes for Reaction

Participant	Categories	Narrative	InVivo Code
Wilhelmina	Self-motivation	"Driven to success[1] and motivated to complete any task before me[2]"	[1] "Driven To Success" [2] "Motivated to Complete Any Task"
Alejandra	Self-Motivation	"I've never been one to quit anything[3], so that definitely helped"	[3] "Never Been One To Quit Anything"
Patricia	Self-motivation	"I really want to do this because I want to progress in my career[4]"	[4] "Progress My Career"
Nikedra	Self-motivation	"I was getting passed up for all of those administrative positions[5] because I didn't have a graduate degree[6]"	[5] "Getting Passed Up For Administrative Positions" [6] "I Didn't Have a Graduate Degree"

Table 9

Categories and In Vivo Codes for Determination

Participant	Categories	Narrative	InVivo Code
Alejandra	Persistence	I wasn't going to quit this[1]"	[1] "I Wasn't Going To Quit"
William	Persistence	"Knowing that I have started this and we're seeing the light at the end of the tunnel[2]"	[2] "Light At The End Of The Tunnel"
Jerry	Persistence	"I had no idea what I wanted to do when I came to college[3], I just know that I don't want to be poor anymore[4]"	[3] "No Idea Of What To Do at College" [4] "I Don't Want To Be Poor Anymore"
Carolyn	Persistence	"[I] sped through the first core courses with straight A's[5]"	[5] "Sped Through Core Courses With Straight A's"

Then, the participants shared their experiences of overcoming obstacles including isolation and loneliness. Some of the obstacles that caused feelings of isolation and loneliness included: family being displaced due to natural disaster; having to leave home because of the country's unstable government and violence; homelessness; ignored and undervalued in high school; not being prepared for college; feeling alone, especially during the dissertation phase of the doctorate; and negative experiences with faculty. Table 10 presents the In Vivo codes of overcoming obstacles during the participants' educational experience.

Table 10

Categories and In Vivo Codes for Overcoming Obstacles

Participant	Categories	Narrative	InVivo Code
Alejandra	Isolation and Loneliness	"I went to a high school with so many students, it was easy to go under the radar and not be seen[1]" "I don't think I ever met with my college advisor[2]"	[1] "It Was Easy To Go Under The Radar And Not Be Seen" [2] "I Never Met With My College Advisor"
Connie	Isolation and Loneliness	"[I] was homeless, didn't always have enough to eat[3], and didn't have an address for college applications[4]"	[3] "I Was Homeless And Hungry" [4] "Didn't Have Address For College Applications"
Jerry	Isolation and Loneliness	"I had to spend summers away from my family to finish the degree[5]"	[5] "Spent Summers Away From My Family"
Nikedra	Isolation and Loneliness	"I tried to avoid those other faculty who were very confrontational and felt like they had to throw challenges at you and make life more difficult[6]"	[6] "Avoided Faculty Who Were Confrontational, Challenging, and Difficult"
Carolyn	Isolation and Loneliness	"I'm evacuating from my home in Louisiana [Hurricane Katrina] to go stay in a shelter[7], to get on a plane to enroll in high school in Florida[8]"	[7] "Evacuated From Home To Stay In A Shelter" [8] "Enrolled in High School In Florida"
Wilhelmina	Isolation and Loneliness	"My first chair was very supportive, but he retired in the midst of my second year and I'm like who does that[9]"	[9] "My First Chair Retired During My Second Year"

Narrative of the Study

The researcher sought answers to the main study question: How do African American and Latinx students describe the motivators that influenced them to enroll in and complete a doctoral program? There were seven females and three males that participated in the study; four females were African American, three females were Latinx; the three males were African American. The emergent themes from analysis and coding of the narrative were

1. Academic Mentors Who Supported and Encouraged
2. Family, Friends, And Colleagues Who Motivated and Inspired
3. Self-Motivation To Enroll In the Doctoral Program
4. Persistence To Complete the Doctorate Degree
5. Isolation And Loneliness During Educational Experiences

As a result, the sets of subquestions were grouped by emergent themes during analysis to gain a deeper understanding of the participants experiences. The first set of questions were regarding how participants described the support and encouragement from academic mentors, as well as motivation from family, friends, and colleagues that influenced enrollment in a doctoral program.

Academic Mentors Who Supported and Encouraged

Carolyn said that supporters stayed with her from high school and her college experience: “[I had mentors] throughout the whole duration of my education, so I picked up mentors in high school that kind of motivated me to further my education to college.” Patricia went to high school in Texas and was a part of the National Hispanic Institute. The global Institute offered “various programs for high achieving Latino youth to come together and work through different scenarios and different programs.” This program and

Patricia's parents instilled a sense of cultural pride; "[we] need to work together towards building a strong Latino community in the country." Patricia said that she was groomed for college right from the start. She stated that the Institute was "cultivating high school youth to go to college or minimally find spaces in their communities where they can make a difference."

Jerry said that he had two people who supported his educational goals; his mother was his inspiration because "she was a great motivator, extremely hard working, and devoted," and his high school guidance counselor who convinced him "to go to a community college and improve yourself to get prepared for university studies." Nikedra had the support of a small cohort during her doctorate degree and "developed a very tight friendship" with a cohort member colleague that helped her "push through."

Family, Friends, and Colleagues Who Motivated and Inspired

Wilhelmina's parents supported and encouraged her to pursue academics beyond high school. Her father has a master's degree in education and her mother attended some college. Wilhelmina stated that "education has always been a part of my background and expectation has been important in my household." Education was important in Alex's working-class single parent family. He said that his mother quickly recognized his academic abilities and provided the support he needed for success. Alex mentioned support from a White male AP Chemistry and AP Physics teacher "who really influenced me to do my best." Alex stated that the teacher told him,

> You don't show this in class, but you can do anything in this life you want to do, do you realize that you have the highest grade on this chemistry exam you got the only A in this class right… And he stuck with me beyond the time that I was actually in his class.

Connie's husband was her support for the doctorate degree. She said that,

> my husband was the biggest cheerleader and made sure I got it done. He himself is a doctoral student and he is very much into education and learning, so I think that just having that companionship and you know, cheering by my side made it all worthwhile.

Lissette came to America when she was 5 years old with her parents who were professionals and had very good careers in their country of origin. She remembers hiding under the bed with her sister "you would hear the rumbles and stuff that was going on. So [because of the civil unrest and violence] my parents felt that at that point we would have a better future if they moved to the United States." Lissette's parents sacrificed their careers and all that they owned "all with the purpose of my sister and I having a better future, so I think that [the highest degree] always was in the back of my mind." Lissette said that her parents were immigrants and they worked hard and saved for her and her sister to go to college. According to Lissette, "after [high school] graduation it was just kind of a given that college was just the next step, my parents did have the foresight and the belief in education."

William stated that there were "people who did assist me moving forward in the program such as a coworker of mine who has a lot of experience and editing who assisted me in in a lot of things, and also provided some guidance and mentorship for me as well." William found strength "[in] colleagues who were adamant about me finishing the program, they were people pushing me for positive experiences."

Self-Motivation to Enroll in the Doctoral Program

The second set of questions asked participants to describe their reactions to life events or circumstances that provoked self-motivation and caused them persistence to

complete the doctorate degree. Wilhelmina stated that she was “driven to success and motivated to complete any task before me.” She described her childhood; while the other little girls were playing house, she used to “literally play college” with her brother. They used encyclopedias as “college textbooks,” and the “dorm room was upstairs in their bedrooms.” Wilhelmina stated that “[she was] always goal oriented and academically focused,”

> And so, the idea of being a doctor was just like Oh, but of course I will be, you know, and I wrote this whole thing. My plan was to have my doctorate I don’t know in what, but my plan was to have my doctorate by time I was 40 [completed when] I was 45.

Alejandra said, “I was getting passed up for all of those administrative positions because I didn’t have a graduate degree.” Alejandra was the first person in her family to attain a any degree. She was a leader in high school,

> I was like captain of water polo team, I was on student Council, I did cheerleading, I was in the honor society, I just had something every day after school, I did track and field. I tried to just be involved in as many things as I could, and I always took on those student leadership type of roles

Nikedra said that she became self-motivated to get a doctorate while working at a university and being passed up for promotions. Jerry’s motivation was a desire to get away from his “blue collar background.” He stated that,

> I had no idea what I wanted to do when I came to college, like no clue, so I just know that I don’t want to be poor anymore and wanted to make some money, and so that’s exactly what I did. I got a business degree, but I hated it when I got the job. So, I stepped away and went back to the university [for the doctorate].

Jerry said that when he returned to college after the business degree and working, “I was really lost,” ... and I was already going into my fifth year.” One of his mentors,

> A white Professor from Michigan who, you know, taught reading and English and had completed his dissertation on Tupac. I was like looking at this guy, this white guy here teaching me about Tupac which was of course a taboo in my time right. And we’re talking about in the mid to late 90s so. It was just wonderful to see how he was trying to connect with the culture and trying to engage.

According to Carolyn,

> I would say it was a goal in mind. So, one time I write something down, I’m gonna stick to it, I must see it through, and I always say that the biggest self-motivation was when I fell pregnant with my daughter because. I was in a program for almost three years, and I fell pregnant with my daughter smack DAB in the middle. The nine months to carry her, I was like I’m doing this for my baby I’m doing this for my baby I’m doing this for my baby.

Patricia said that she recognized “the need to have a doctorate to be at the table to make a real change for students.” Jerry searched for a doctoral program where he could continue to work. He said that “the only way to advance at the community college was to get a PhD and so many of my colleagues Black and White encouraged me to do so.” William said, “knowing that I have started this and we’re seeing the light at the end of the tunnel kept me moving forward [to degree completion]” William said that he had something to prove “to both myself and others that it could be done, especially by someone from a minority underserved community, so there was a combination of self-motivation and influencers.” Connie enrolled in a summer research program that,

> focused on minority students to obtain graduate degrees be it at masters or

> doctorate, they paired you with a professor and you engaged in a research project with that professor so that you could see what it all entails to conduct research, write the paper and in my case ended up with a professor who actually published our research. So, I got to experience being published as an undergrad on a research project. And so doing that experience with her is what kind of fueled the desire to aim for a doctoral degree.

Persistence to Complete the Doctorate Degree

Several of the participants were the first in their families to attend college and be awarded a doctorate degree. Participants' experiences with faculty varied, as did their reactions to mandatory doctoral courses and orientations. Nikedra had positive and negative faculty experiences. She stated that "I was fortunate that I had faculty that were very supportive and helped ... I tried to avoid those other faculty who were very confrontational and felt like they had to throw challenges, and you know make life more difficult." Wilhelmina had three different chairs while working on her dissertation. Jerry said that he had never read a dissertation and had no clue on the research process "because those were not the conversations, I was privy to."

Lissette was scared because her cohort program was an accelerated degree program with tough coursework and assignments, "but I did it with 10 other people who were just as scared." The people in her cohort developed "a camaraderie that we build such a strong team that we really helped and continue to help and are all close, we all successfully completed, we defended in summer and graduated… we're still all cheering each other on."

Carolyn said that she "sped through the first core courses with straight A's," but when she got to the dissertation courses she initially "bumped heads with her chair."

Carolyn thought he was rude; once they had a conversation about it, she found out that he wanted her to narrow her topic. Afterwards, his assistance "was like my saving grace throughout my whole dissertation."

William worked at the university where he was enrolled in the doctorate program. He started as a high school work-study and was hired full-time after he graduated. He completed his bachelor's and master's degree in business at another college within the university. He completed his doctorate at the college where he worked. According to William, the professors who were coworkers and applauded his work ethic in the past, now treated him contrarily.

> They were different, okay. There were some that were very positive and very helpful and very directive and provided a lot of guidance. But I also felt that there were some who I could consider roadblocks to my success for a lot of variety of reasons. Some reasons I can only assume and don't really know; there were some who made it more difficult than I believe that it had to be, did not provide any guidance, did not provide any direction, and did create some difficulty for me moving forward. I also worked with some premier minority instructors who served as motivators and guides.

Isolation and Loneliness During Educational Experiences

The third set of questions were regarding how participants overcame obstacles in K-12 and higher education to complete the doctorate degree. All the participants discussed isolation and loneliness they may have felt from K-12 all the way to the doctorate degree. Three of the participants had support throughout the doctorate and during the dissertation process.

All the participants felt a sense of isolation and loneliness at some point

throughout their educational experience, and while writing their dissertations. Three participants (Lissette, Nikedra, and Patricia) who were in a cohort program received support during the dissertation stage from their fellow students. Wilhelmina had issues when she changed schools during her K-12 experiences. She stated that

> I moved from a city high school to a suburban high school which the standard of Education was completely different the expectations at the white suburban high school that I graduated from were skyscrapers above where I was going to high school in the city district. So much so that I was well over a semester behind when I went to the other high school, and that was disheartening and scary and shocking... and, I had horrible grades that semester. It was the only semester, but I didn't have like straight A's kind of thing right, so I guess I should preface the horrible grades being like seeds, but that was just my experience so that was really a challenge. I would also say that I was a struggling reader. And so, I could only maybe attribute that to elementary school again, where I was in a white school and a white private school and the expectations for me as actually the only black child until my brother came. was that I just behave so there wasn't that academic push or support.

Alejandra stated that "I came from [a very large] public school system, my graduating class at almost 1,000 students, so I think it's hard to have those relationships with teachers and staff at the school." She continued

> because I went to a high school that had so many students, it was easy to go under the radar and not be seen and even though I was academically strong and loved school. I don't think I ever met with my college advisor. I think I met once, they signed a paper saying we met and that was it. Then I ended up attending

> a four-year public institution near my home because that's where everybody went, and I had a great experience there. However, I think about what if I had gone somewhere smaller, had we had more college advisors and I just knew more about higher education would I have gone away, could I have had that out of state experience what would that have been like.

Lissette stated that,

> I went through the county public schools, I was always in a public school, I did not participate in any special programs, such as gifted or anything like that. I didn't attend any magnet schools, because my parents really didn't know a lot about the education, how K 12 education works here in the United States, so I think they were limited in knowing what opportunities, I may have had, so I went from regular school education.

Connie was homeless and suffered food and housing insecurities at different times during her K-12 experiences. A high school math teacher provided a home and employment for her. Connie stated that she needed "[a home] to use as an address for college applications and so forth, because I did not have a home at the time and they [her math teacher and husband] wanted to make sure that not having an address did not create a barrier to me continuing my education. Connie felt isolated as "the only minority music education major" at a big university during her undergraduate experience. She indicated that,

> I was the only minority, and I had some situations where I had a professor make some really inappropriate comments about my ethnicity and I had another you know situation, where I was called a racist by a professor, because of the fact that I challenged some of the things that he said in the classroom. And it almost

caused me to leave the College.

Patricia was motivated by a career that was not advancing as she believed it should, “I had already been working for like 8 or 9 years at that point my motivator was I really want to do this because I want to progress in my career.” Nikedra said, “I remember when I interviewed for a promotion at the university where I worked, she [the interviewer] was like ‘well everybody else has graduate degrees and what makes you think you’re qualified.’” She went on to say that “maybe we’re okay well if all I need is some letters behind my name be qualified, I guess it’s time to go back to school... So, I guess in a weird way is infuriating.”

Jerry had to spend summers away from his family to complete the doctorate. He said, “I had to spend the entire three summers away from my family, right. I have a wife, and a daughter, and you know an extended family that I’m very close with.” Carolyn left Louisiana due to hurricane Katrina, her family lost everything:

> Being I’m like evacuating from Louisiana to go stay in a shelter to get on a plane, because my dad was like real, serious about education. Getting on a plane to enroll in high school in Florida, that obstacle was like extremely tough. Even though we overcame it but that was that was hard that was rough.

Carolyn became pregnant during her doctorate program, “would I be too sick, would I be too tired; like I didn’t know if I will be like stressed out in spite of it all, you know. I didn’t allow those negative thoughts to impact me, but I will feel like that those are the obstacles.” Wilhelmina had to ultimately go to the Dean because of issues with her dissertation chairs,

> My first chair was very supportive, but he retired in the midst of, I think, maybe, my second year and I’m like who does that. What am I supposed to do right? Like

> I said, he was extremely supportive, and I really thought I was doing great things with him. Then the next person that I got as a chair, I turned him in actually because he was not supportive. He was a Black man and could hear in my voice, because he asked me if I was also Black, I can tell he says, and so he was trying to help me get over. Here I'll just give you my study you just use my questions you just do this, and we'll get you through it. And I was like bro you must not know. That's not what I'm about, I'm about getting my degree, I'm not getting your degree. And so, it took me about a year to finally realize that he was not going to be helpful at all, and so I did go to the Dean.

Alejandra did not consider anything as an obstacle on the road to degree completion. She posited.

> I loved my higher education experience. I loved undergrad; I mastered my doctorate; it was all really fulfilling. I would say for my doctorate, I had, I wouldn't call them obstacles, but I would just say it was, you know difficult. At the same time, I was getting married and moving to a different state and so just being an adult and having life adult things happening at the same time that you're trying to study and write a paper is challenging but that's not any kind of hardship or anything it's just kind of learning to handle a lot of things at once.

Alex was determined to be the best in his education after a fifth-grade teacher assumed that he could not read and comprehend since he was a Black student. His mother encouraged him to stand up for himself. "I think it was that point that set me on fire about I'm gonna do my best in school."

Alex stated that,

> I remember very distinctly often being the only black student in certain classes

> and I never knew why I was in advanced classes. But I didn't know that until I got [into] third, fourth grade. I had a black teacher Mrs. Dobbins. And she was kind of the light of my educational career, she believed that I could do anything. And because she believed that I believed it, right. And then I went on to the fifth grade. I had a fifth-grade teacher, I recall name her and so remember these names [because] they are significant in my life.
>
> Miss Calder never really acknowledged my intelligence or my contribution to the classroom and the first week of school she just came over and handed me a reading book, right. And I learned to read the book, I realized that I was not in the same reading groups with people from my fourth-grade class, and that everyone in my group was black. For the most part, and not to be negative, but what I consider to be not really good readers. I was a good reader both to be able to read and comprehend. And so, I would ask her why I was in the low reading group, and she goes that's where you belong. But I was in a high reading of the year before.

Participant Recommendations for Future Consideration

All the participants mentioned the high cost of a doctorate degree, the value of knowing what you want to do before entering a doctoral program, is it worth the cost, and working hard on improving writing and/or research skills when necessary for students of color who wish to enroll in a doctoral program. Further, all the participants offered colleges and universities advice regarding providing financial assistance, increased guidance during the dissertation phase, hiring more administrators and professors of color, and mentorship for students of color. This will be discussed further, with interpretation and evaluation by the researcher in chapter 5 since these responses did not

affect the coding or themes of the study.

Summary

The researcher interviewed 11 participants for the study; seven females and three males; four females were African American, three females were Latinx, the three males were African American and none of the male participants were Latinx. One of the respondents did not complete the demographic survey and was removed from the study and the responses were not analyzed. The purpose of the study was examining motivators that caused African American and Latinx students to enroll and complete a doctorate program. The emergent themes from the analysis of the narrative were: (a) academic mentors who supported and encouraged; (b) family, friends, and colleagues who motivated and inspired; (c) self-motivation to enroll in a doctoral program; (d) persistence to complete the doctorate degree; and (e) isolation and loneliness during educational experiences. Chapter 5 provides an interpretation and analysis from the researcher and participant responses to inquiry about future students of color enrolling and completing doctorate degrees.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the motivators that influenced African American and Latinx students to enroll and complete a doctoral program without academic assistance from a scholarship or mentorship program. The aim of the researcher was to understand what factors and motivations of African American and Latinx doctoral graduates and professionals caused determination and motivation to complete the degree. The study was guided by one central research question and three support questions.

How do African American and Latinx students describe the motivators that influenced them to enroll in and complete a doctoral program?

SQ1. How do African American and Latinx students describe the motivators that encouraged them to enroll in a doctoral program?

SQ2. How do African American and Latinx students describe the motivators that encouraged them to persist and complete a doctoral program?

SQ3. How do African American and Latinx students who completed a doctoral program describe any blocks, obstacles, or other experiences they may have had in K-12 and higher education?

The goal of the researcher was to understand what factors and motivations of African American and Latinx doctoral graduates and professionals caused persistence to complete the degree. The emergent themes gleaned from the In Vivo coding and deep analysis of the narrative included: (a) academic mentors who supported and encouraged; (b) family friends, and colleagues who motivated and inspired; (c) self-motivation to enroll in a doctoral program; (d) persistence to complete the doctorate degree; and (e) isolation and loneliness during educational experiences. The discussion consists of the

relevance and interpretation of the findings; (a) themes, (b) implications of the study, (c) relevance of the findings, and (d) the researcher's reflections. The chapter concludes with (a) recommendations for future research, (b) recommendations for the practice, (c)limitations of the study, and (d) the conclusion.

Relevance and Interpretation of the Findings

As of this writing, there are over 40 states that have introduced bills "that attempt to regulate how teachers can discuss racism, sexism, and issues of systemic inequality in the classroom" (Schwartz, 2021, para. 1). In February 2022, Florida's House of Representatives passed a bill that limited teachers and school personnel discussion of "gender and sexual orientation in the classroom" (Hernandez, 2022, para. 1). The researcher suggests that these types of laws can hurt minorities including African American, AAPI, and LGBTQ+ students. This is relevant to the findings of the study due to the possible pervasive effect that this may have on students of color in the future. Students who feel their identities are marginalized early on in their education may have negative experiences that prevent them from pursuing a doctorate degree (Congleton, 2017). Nonetheless, stories of academic success by this population are necessary to encourage future students to enroll and complete the doctorate degree.

Latinx individuals have many different cultures and ethnicities yet, the people are generally lumped together, just as African Americans are often grouped together with global Blacks. Nikedra identified as African American and Latinx. She said that "my mother is Afro Brazilian, and my father is White Caucasian from Connecticut." However, she does not identify as White. Nikedra stated that, "I was born in Paraguay and then came to the United States as a citizen born abroad when I was six months old." Alejandra was a first generation Cuban American, and the first in her family to get a doctorate

degree. She believed that she would be able to reach goals of success with a doctorate degree and needed, “the kind of education in my resume to be able to make it to where I wanted to be.” Alejandra stated that the degree would help her “create the personal capital” necessary for job success; “other people that had been able to get similar roles to mine may have gotten it because of who they know.” African American and Latinx students have the lowest numbers of doctorate degree conferral in the U.S. when compared to White students. During the 2018-2019 academic year, the percentages of doctorate degrees awarded were 65% White, 9.2% African American, and 8.6% Latinx (NCES, 2019a). The motivation to get a doctorate degree begins early in education.

Theme 1 Academic Mentors Who Supported and Encouraged

Students in doctoral programs who lack basic needs as outlined by Maslow struggle to complete their degree work (Perez-Felkner et al., 2020). Academic success is dependent upon the relationship between the student and the advisor (Tinto, 2006, as cited in Ramos, 2019). There was support from at least one teacher, staff member, or counselor for most of the participants of the study during K-12. Six of the 10 participants received some type of support at school during K-12; one due to parents who worked in education and her father who earned a master’s degree in education (Wilhelmina), one who was homeless and taken in by a teacher’s family (Connie), one who was encouraged by his high school guidance counselor (Jerry), one who was encouraged by a counselor and a science teacher (Alex), and one who was in a high-school program for students of color (Patricia). Lissette had “very good teachers who established a relationship” with her; an English teacher in high school, and a home-economics teacher in middle school who motivated her to continue studies and attend college. Jerry’s high school guidance counselor encouraged him to go to community college to improve his educational skills,

so he could go on and earn higher degrees. The other participants had little, or no support and their basic needs were not met in K-12.

Ramos (2019) found that a positive connection between the student and faculty advisor was vital to doctoral program completion. Alejandra loved her higher education experience from undergrad through the doctorate. Somehow, through self-motivation and persistence she worked through any obstacles and would not let it thwart her degree experiences. Nikedra also had a positive experience during the doctorate and knew, "I was fortunate that I had faculty that were very supportive." However, there was no specific professor that Alejandra or Nikedra named as a motivator or mentor during their doctoral program. Rather, it was a reaction to obstacles and determination to persist that caused self-motivation for these participants to complete the doctorate while maintaining a positive outlook. Most of the participants who were motivated to persist during the doctoral program mentioned family, friends, and colleagues as those who encouraged them.

Theme 2 Family, Friends, and Colleagues Who Motivated and Inspired

Participants families and their backgrounds served as an important motivation in obtaining a doctorate degree. For the study, family included colleagues, friends, and peers of the participants; "[family] includes not only nuclear family members but friends, coworkers, and student/peer groups as well" (Breitenbach et al., 2019, p. 776). All the participants came from poor, working, and middle-class backgrounds and were encouraged to "do better," and advance to earn multiple degrees by family and friends.

Alejandra, Alex, Carolyn, and Jerry were motivated by their mothers to complete the degree. Wilhelmina's parents fully expected her to go to college and complete the highest degree possible. William's professional background was in higher education, and

he was the first in his family to be awarded the doctorate. Although Lissette's parents had degrees from other countries, Lissette's immigrant family sacrificed everything for her and her sister to come to the U.S. to eventually pursue higher education. She said that "I always knew that my bucket list or one of my personal goals was to get a doctorate degree, and I think it was because of my parent's sacrifice, especially my mom." Patricia's family prepared her for educational success by enrolling her in a Latinx program for academic excellence during high school. Connie was motivated by her husband and twin daughters she called "my divas, [who] ... drove me to go further in my education." Patricia's parents "had some college but never completed a degree" yet, her parents instilled a sense of pride for the Latinx community. They taught her the importance of education that led to Patricia's desire to "build a strong Latino community in the country." Ceglie (2019) investigated factors that motivated doctoral students to complete the degree. According to the author, many participants of the study mentioned family, faculty, and peers as motivating factors in degree completion.

Theme 3 Self-Motivation to Enroll in a Doctoral Program

Litalien et al. (2015) suggested that self-motivation "has become a central concept in the understanding of academic persistence and achievement" and may be an indication why some students complete the doctoral program, and some do not (p. 1). Several participants were the first in their families to attend college. Others wanted to set an example for a family member and be awarded a doctorate degree. Wilhelmina always knew that she would go for the highest degree possible, "I wrote this whole thing, my plan was to have my doctorate." Some of the participants sought job promotions to improve their family's life by earning a higher degree. William acknowledged the potential to make more money with the degree, and "to prove to myself and others that it

could be done." Alejandra was the first person in her family to complete a four-year degree and the only one who completed a doctorate. Alejandra said

> My motivation really for pursuing my degree was knowing that where I wanted to go ultimately with my career. I didn't have the social capital I didn't have the cultural capital that a lot of. Other people do so, knowing that I'm first-generation Hispanic I knew I had to kind of get the education inmy resume to be able to make it to where I wanted to be initially, I thought I wanted to be a university President since then I have. changed my goals, but I think having this degree has set me apart when applying for jobs. And it really has helped create that personal capital where other people that have been able to get similar roles to mine may have gotten it because of who they know or. Where their education was, I have been able to achieve it, because of how far I have gone with my education.

Bailey (2019) stated that the motivation to get a doctoral degree begins early on in a person's life and is steeped in preparation and student engagement. The author posited besides preparation "managing external life dynamics and ensuring these factors align with doctoral pursuit" (p. 6). De La Fosse (2019) stated that motivation to obtain the doctoral degree is done for personal achievement.

Theme 4 Persistence to Complete the Doctorate Degree

Much of research on African American and Latinx doctoral students focuses on recruitment and retention but not on persistence (Acosta et al., 2016). Wilhelmina was "driven", and her goal was always a doctorate degree. Carolyn said that "[when] I write something down, I'm gonna stick to it, I must see it through." Nikedra avoided faculty who were "confrontational," but she did not elaborate how this was accomplished.

William persisted due to those who provided guidance including other doctoral students and recent graduates at the university where he worked. Lissette had the chance to join a cohort of her colleagues enrolling in a doctoral program and said, “let’s go full steam ahead, this is the opportunity I was waiting for.” Patricia found motivation to persist by assisting her chair writing articles for publication where she learned how to properly conduct research. She said that this type of encouragement “continues to be something that drives people forward.” Jerry was a graduate assistant where the program director was just awful, but “his [program director’s] boss was a wonderful woman” who encouraged him to persist. Persistence to complete the degree may be due to personal character traits of the student including commitment, determination, and devotion (Bailey, 2019; De La Fosse, 2019). Human behavior such as self-motivation leads to persistence which leads to doctoral degree completion. All of the participants of the study had the persistence and drive necessary.

Theme 5 Isolation and Loneliness During Educational Experiences

Educational struggles begin in K-12 for many students of color. Low expectations for African American and Latinx students during K-12 continued into higher education, sometimes even from professors of color (Rubel & McCloskey, 2019). Wilhelmina’s second chair, who was an African American, offered his research for her dissertation, “so she could get it done.” She thought that he believed she could not do the work herself and was deeply insulted by the offer. A factor that contributes to attrition among doctoral students are feelings of isolation (Holmes et al., 2016, as cited in Mollner, 2019). The researcher can attest to the feelings of isolation caused by teachers with low expectations when they thought that he would “never amount to anything,” and thus was mostly ignored in that classroom. Alex had to prove himself as a competent student to his fifth-

grade teacher. He did not call the teacher a racist, rather he stated, "[she] never really acknowledged my intelligence or my contribution to the classroom." Wilhelmina's chair did not believe she could do the dissertation and offered his research for her to be able to "get through the process." She was insulted, particularly that he was Black. William had concerns regarding professors who once respected his work ethic as their coworker yet doubted his ability to complete doctoral coursework. William went on to say that was when he realized their treatment towards him evolved into racial microaggressions at work. Isolation and loneliness can often have a negative effect on doctoral students as they attempt program completion (Janta et al., 2014). When doctoral students have a good relationship with chairs, faculty, family and mentors' isolation and loneliness can be alleviated.

The Chairman of Psychiatry at Columbia University was suspended after he tweeted what was thought to be a compliment regarding a very dark-skinned model. The professor said, "Whether a work of art or a freak of nature she is a beautiful sight to behold" (Lieberman, 2022, as cited in Lee, 2022, para. 4). The head of a department at an Ivy League university said this, without realization that it may be insulting. How comfortable can students of color feel in that classroom? Connie said that she was humiliated when a professor made inappropriate comments about race. Another professor called her a racist when she spoke out against an injustice. Nikedra learned to avoid "confrontational faculty" who made the doctoral program more difficult for students of color.

Loneliness is a crisis in modern society, and "poses as grave a threat to public health as obesity or substance abuse" (Aspen Ideas, 2017, para. 1). Patricia said, "I felt most alone during the dissertation process, lack of administrative support, [necessary]

paperwork, and the institution didn't lend itself for people to be successful." Whether it was the act of openly singling out or blatantly ignoring the student, participants never said the words systemic racism when describing their experiences at school. Only one participant (William) stated that there were "systematic [problems] in higher education," otherwise no participant claimed "systemic racism" or called a teacher/professor "racist" during the study.

Implications of the Study

During the IP (see Appendix C), the researcher asked questions regarding what advice would participants offer to African American and Latinx students who want to enroll in a doctoral program, and what suggestions would participants offer to administrators at universities to motivate student enrollment and recommendations to increase graduation rates for this population.

Connie suggested that students who want to enroll in a doctoral program should get a mentor or someone "who has been through the process and can be with you every step of the way." Wilhelmina stated, "make sure you have the support of your family, because you are going to go through it." Carolyn said to "go for it, beat the statistics, change those numbers." She indicated that finding "good people that motivate you and keep you on your toes" goes a long way towards success. William suggested that students should "create of list of goals of what they actually want to do with that degree." Jerry said that "it's sad to say, but really count the cost. Above all count the cost." The sacrifice may not be worth going into over $100,000 in debt and then get a job that may only make that amount or less. Alex posited "understand why you want to get a PhD because not every career path requires a PhD"

All of the participants agreed that the doctorate takes a lot of work and huge

sacrifices of money, time, and personal life so be prepared for it and make sure it is the correct career path. Decisions to pursue the doctorate degree must be supported by academic mentors, family, friends, and colleagues. Patricia speculated that "[universities] could do a better job at demystifying the process of applying to PhD programs. I think that many students, don't even know [all] the steps to get into programs, which could be streamlined." All the participants suggested mentorship programs with leaders and professors of color as another way to attract African American and Latinx students.

Participants of the study suggested more advisors, faculty, and mentors of color should be hired by universities to encourage African American and Latinx students to enroll and complete the doctorate. Twale, et al (2016) noted that although students of color numbers have increased in graduate school, executive administration and full-time faculty are still mostly White. During the research for this study, it was difficult to find full-time professors of color, and nearly impossible to find high-level administrators. However, a colleague contacted an African American Dean from a university in California who was interested in the topic of this study and agreed to an interview. Dr Stuart stated that at the university with over 10,000 students, she has met four other African American full-time faculty or deans and several Latinx administrators, yet did not really know if there were more, especially since the pandemic. She did indicate that during her doctorate degree, it was motivation and support from her husband, parents, and church that kept her going; self-motivation and determination to succeed got her to the finish line; and overcoming isolation during the dissertation process that got her to the finish line (L. M. Stuart, personal communication, February 8, 2022). Dr. Stuart noted that it took an incredible amount of hard work to get a full-time faculty, director, and dean position at the university.

Researcher's Reflections

Keeping field notes during and a reflective journal after the interviews was challenging for this researcher. In fact, there were times when I felt very uncomfortable and often troubled listening to the narrative. Because I was on Zoom, I strove to maintain neutrality as I listened to stories that I knew all too well. As an African American LGBTQ male educated in the southern U.S., I know what systemic racism in education feels like. I was born and raised in a city named after a confederate general in rural South Carolina. I identified with Alex whose teacher thought he was not as smart as the other kids. I identified with Alejandra who was a leader among students, yet mostly ignored by teachers, administrators, and staff. I identified with William who worked with the same professors that admired his work ethic yet their behavior towards him changed when he began the doctoral program. During my sophomore year in college, I was very popular, leader of an award-winning cheerleading team, and voted the first African American Homecoming King at a university with a population of 10,000 students of which 250 were Black. Soon after, I received death threats and unpleasant phone calls so pervasive that I had to leave school.

In the field notes, I wrote that when participants spoke about issues that may have been an example of systemic racism in education or a racial microaggression, without saying the words, there was a side glance, a "you know," a brief nod, or pursing of lips from respondents. These signals can be a silent communication among the different social hierarchies (Mayes, 2016; DeAngelis, 2009). Were the participants asking me if I understood what they meant was a reference to systemic racism? These thoughts came to mind as I watched the Zoom video a second and third time and then reread the transcripts several times. Next, I made a note in the journal regarding how these silent

communications happen all the time. I thought of the bond between my mother and I, and when some event occurs or a certain person may pass by, we may share a secret side-glance. I thought about how that look, or nod infiltrates the different cultures; and then I thought about how it felt the time that I walked into a high-end retail shop and was greeted with a look, the pursed lips, and a condescending "May I help you." The salesperson was smiling, but it did not feel like a warm friendly smile. Had I become too oversensitive? Could these feelings effect how I received and analyzed the data?

When I reread the field notes and journal, I thought of bias and briefly questioned if I would be able to maintain neutrality while doing this research. Is it possible to be completely nonbiased? I thought of my own experiences in K-12 and higher education. I was an athlete, a National cheerleading champion, and competed in track during middle and high school. Like Alejandra, I never received recognition from teachers or administrators. During middle school, one of my teachers said that I would never be anything in this life and would not have a bright future. That occurred to me when Alex spoke about his fifth-grade teacher who did not believe in him. That is when I realized that my reaction was to build coping mechanisms to overcome these obstacles or create Black school spaces where I felt safe in "acts of resistance" ... against racialized oppression" (Mayes, 2016, p. 109).

Maintaining neutrality during the interviews and reporting is vital to ensure the researcher does not influence participants in any way (Vogt & Johnson, 2016). Inscribing real feelings before and after participant interviews and sustaining neutrality guaranteed external validity and dependability (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The final note that I made in the journal; "this work is too important for any personal bias, just tell the truth, no fluff, no exaggeration, only the facts and you will be on point." However, it must be noted that

the researcher strove to maintain neutrality for validity of this study. The specific request for the participants to share the experiences of being African American or Latinx in a doctoral program was not part of the IP. The researcher expected that the participants would mention systemic racism in education as an obstacle in attaining their doctorate degree. None of the participants ever mentioned systemic racism in education. Due to the amount of literature available on systemic racism in education, the researcher was surprised by this. Nevertheless, the goal of the study was to investigate the accomplishments of this population. The findings did effectively present this population as achieving academic success and in a positive light. The hope is for increased numbers of African American and Latinx students to attain a doctorate degree. The following recommendations are a combination of participants' responses and the researcher's reflections.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are only two recommendations by the researcher: (a) there need to be more administrators, counselors, mentors, and faculty of color; and (b) more stories of the experiences and success in doctoral programs by the African American and Latinx communities need to be voiced. Their voices must be heard. There are numerous studies and statistics on low enrollment and graduation rates. Sharing the experiences of students of color who graduate and successfully enter academia and the professional arena are necessary to encourage future minority populations to seek doctorate degrees. Acosta et al. (2016) acknowledged that numerous studies focus on how racism creates challenges for this population at the doctorate level. More studies need to focus on the factors that cause persistence to complete the doctorate degree for African American and Latinx students.

The study could be replicated at any school (Ivy League, public, and private), anywhere in the U.S. or internationally. Programs at HBCUs versus PWIs might provide insight into how systemic racism in education affects this population. Latinx students numbers are increasing at HBCUs due to a sense of inclusion (Mathers, 2016). The research could be conducted at multiple areas throughout the U.S. to see if systemic racism in education affects African American and Latinx doctoral graduates similarly in different parts of the country. The study could also be replicated for other students of color and underrepresented minorities including Women, Native American, Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI), and LGBTQ+ students. This population of doctoral graduates could provide more insight into the motivators that influence non-Whites to enroll in and complete a doctoral program. Investigation into these factors could increase the numbers of doctoral graduates of color.

Recommendations for the Practice

The focus of the study was an explanation for the central research question: How do African American and Latinx students describe the motivators that influenced them to enroll in and complete a doctoral program? Results from the findings indicated that certain changes to education that could increase students of color numbers for enrollment and completion of doctoral programs. There are changes that could be easily coordinated. Hiring more faculty, advisors, and administrators of color who are visible and active members of the university; students' needs are met when they have a level of comfort and familiarity at the higher education level (Maslow, 1987). Further, the graduate socialization model by Weidman et al. (2001) and revisited by Twale et al. (2016) (alongside Weidman), implemented a modification of the framework based on contemporary diversity. The authors revealed that students of color must assimilate to

communicate effectively with peers and faculty. Congleton (2017) indicated that students who assimilate to White culture are marginalized, and their self-image is disregarded. If there were more faculty of color to guide African American and Latinx students, assimilation might be less stressful for that population at the doctorate level. If students are more familiar and feel comfortable with their faculty and mentors, they are likely to be motivated to reach their goal of completing the degree work. More affordable programs, scholarships, and academic mentorship for students of color; none of the participants came from wealth or had the finances to afford a doctorate degree. Eight of the 10 participants went into debt to pay for it. Better communication of resources that are available to help this population get through the academic process; each participant was the first in their family or only one to earn a doctorate degree. There may be programs, mentorships, and academic advice that many students who are not familiar with the process may not be aware of. Only one of the participants received scholarship (financial) help, but it was without academic assistance.

Colleges and universities need to hire more administrators, instructors, and full-time professors to better represent African American and Latinx students. As of 2018, there were almost 186,000 full-time professors at degree granting post-secondary institutions in the U.S.; 145,207 were White, 7,005 were Black, and 6,826 were Latinx (NCES, 2020). Further, there are less than 25% guidance counselors of color at K-12 schools and universities (Locke, 2021). The low numbers of faculty of color at universities may not prove that systemic racism exists, but it is an indication of a pervasive problem in education. William acknowledged that there is a “systematic issue in higher education when it comes to minorities and females, especially Black and Latinx students.” He indicated that if schools hired more minority instructors, advisors, and

administrators, African American and Latinx students might "feel more comfortable and their motivation [to persist] would strengthen."

All the participants commented on the high cost of the doctorate degree as problematic. Wilhelmina suggested making the program more affordable, offer more resources to "help doctoral students publish their studies," and give them more support in general. Nikedra mentioned "removing barriers to doing internships and getting practical experience like paid internships and transportation" to help offset the cost of tuition. Jerry, Nikedra, Patricia, Lissette, William, and Carolyn stated that more available funding for doctoral students of color would be a method to increase enrollment and graduation rates among this population.

Limitations

Limitations to the study were the small number of participants and there were no Latinx males who took part. Moreover, there were only three African American males who participated in the study. A reason for this could be that African American and Latinx men are severely underrepresented in doctoral programs (Brown, 2018; Callahan et al., 2018; National Science Foundation, 2019). Since the focus of the study was on academic success of African American and Latinx individuals who have completed a doctorate degree, the findings could be improved by larger numbers of participants.

Conclusion

Often, systemic racism in education can be a perception rather than an evidentiary event. A racial microaggression can be so subtle that the target and offender may not realize it has happened, perhaps that is why it there is not enough tangible proof of its existence (DeAngelis, 2009). The researcher posited systemic racism in education was the cause of low enrollment and graduation rates among African American and Latinx

students. Although participants told stories that may have suggested racism, only one participant called it out. Again, while striving for neutrality and validity, the researcher neglected to ask how their experiences as African American or Latinx students may have affected their education. Instead, participants were laser focused on their achievement and completion of the doctorate degree. All the participants remained positive despite any slights or microaggressions that may have occurred from elementary, secondary, post-secondary and graduate school. Academic success for the participants was a combination of support and motivation from others; their reactions through self-motivation; determination to persist and continue the degree work; and overcoming obstacles including isolation and loneliness before, during, and after enrolling to complete the doctoral program.

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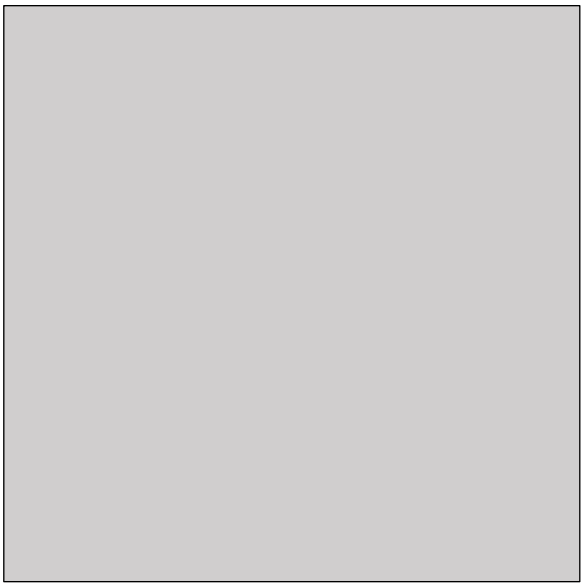
Appendix A

Recruitment Flyer

Study Title: **Examining Motivators That Influenced African American and Latinx Students to Degree Completion of a Doctoral Program**

Nova Southeastern University, Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and School of Criminal Justice

Eligibility Criteria: **Seeking African American and Latinx graduates of a doctoral program for research on completion of the degree by this population**



The purpose of this research is to examine the motivators that influenced African American and Latinx students to enroll and complete a doctoral program without academic assistance from a scholarship or mentorship program. The aim of the researcher is to understand what factors and motivations of African American and Latinx doctoral graduates and professionals caused determination and motivation to complete the degree. The goal of the researcher is to share positive stories of accomplishment that can serve as examples for future students of color.

Participants will be asked to share stories of their educational experiences in obtaining the doctorate degree. To be eligible to take part in the study, participants must be African American or Latinx and been awarded a doctorate degree without the assistance of a fellowship or mentorship program.

The research will be conducted with open-ended interviews at an online meeting such as Zoom or GoogleMeet. The interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes. The time of the interview will be at the suitability of the participants (e.g., before work, after work, weekends, or whatever time is most convenient). The dates will be announced upon approval.

This study is on a voluntary basis, there is no payment for your time; but your responses will be of great value to the literature on African American and Latinx doctoral students who successfully attain the degree.

Appendix B

Demographic Survey

Demographic Survey

Examining Motivators That Influenced African American and Latinx Students to Degree Completion of a Doctoral Program

Ethnicity

African American or Black	
Latinx	

Gender

Female	
Male	
Transgender	
Non-Binary	
Prefer not to answer	

Did you complete the doctorate degree?

Yes	
No	

Were you part of a doctoral fellowship or mentorship program?

Yes	
No	

Age at Doctorate Degree Conferral

Under 25	
25- 40	
41-55	
56-65	
65+	
Prefer not to answer	

How Long Did it Take to Complete the Doctorate?

2-5 years	
6-8 years	
9-10 years	
Greater than 10 years	
Prefer not to answer	

What Part of your K-12 Education was in the United States?

All	
Part	
If Part, what grades did you attend	

Appendix C

Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

How do African American and Latinx students describe the motivators that influenced them to enroll in and complete a doctoral program?

SQ1. How do African American and Latinx students describe the motivators that encouraged them to enroll in a doctoral program?

1. Tell me a little about your background. Can you describe what motivated you to pursue a doctorate degree?

2. Tell me about any mandatory doctoral classes or program at the college or university you attended.

3. Tell me about what or who encouraged you to enroll in a doctoral program.

4. Describe your experience with doctorate faculty members.

SQ2. How do African American and Latinx students describe the motivators that encouraged them to persist and complete a doctoral program?

1. Tell me about a person who encouraged you to persist.

2. Describe how they motivated you.

3. Tell me about self-motivation, positive experiences, and/or support that pushed you to persist.

4. Thinking about your K-12 education, tell me about a person who motivated you to continue in higher education?

SQ3. How do African American and Latinx students who completed a doctoral program describe any blocks, obstacles, or other experiences they may have had in K-12 and higher education?

1. Describe any obstacles you overcame, if any, during your K-12 experiences.

2. Describe any obstacles you overcame, if any, during your higher education

experiences?

3. What advice would you offer African American or Latinx students who want to enroll in a doctoral program?

4. What suggestions would you offer colleges and universities to motivate student enrollment for this population.

5. What recommendations would you offer colleges and universities to increase graduation rates among this population?