The lived experiences of Black males who earned doctorates

Boris D. Turner

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The Lived Experiences of Black Males Who Earned Doctorates

by

Boris D. Turner

Dissertation

Submitted to the College of Education
Eastern Michigan University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
in
Educational Leadership

Dissertation Committee:
Elizabeth Broughton, Ed.D., Chair
Raul Leon, Ph.D.
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February 18, 2019
Ypsilanti, Michigan
Dedication

To my parents who raised me to be the best person I could possibly be: I appreciate you raising me in a Christian home and providing me with the ability to love God and my fellow man.
Acknowledgments

“And we know that all things work together for the good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28).

This scripture has been inspiration for me over past years since beginning this study. Embarking on a doctorate was more than I had ever imagined. I needed divine inspiration to guide me as I experienced this in-depth and tumultuous study. During my undergraduate, graduate, and academic career, I noticed the scarcity of Black males who taught me and who worked in higher education. Thus, this was the means that inspired me to begin and complete this study.

This study could not have been possible without the assistance, guidance, and encouragement from certain people. First, I could not have completed this journey without the support and love of family. How thankful I am to my family that they, in many ways, went along this journey with me. Therefore, to my mother, Barbara Jean Turner, you always believed in me and pushed me since I was a little boy and to always do the best I could do. Even now, you are my biggest supporter and continue to encourage me when I need it most. When, at times, I considered throwing in the towel, I thought about you and how strong you have been. Because of your personal endurance, I was inspired and continue to be encouraged from your example. Thank you, mother. To my father, Clifton Turner Jr., who not only taught me the perfect example of how to be a man, yet, how to be perseverant and responsible and to use knowledge and wisdom in every aspect of my life. Thank you, for being the godly man and father you are.

To my sister, Tonya, and older brother, Anthony, I love you and thank you for your support and encouragement during this journey. Although you may not have had a clue about the specifics of this study, you seemed genuinely interested and excited about my prospects. To my sister-in-law, Dollene, and my brother-in-law, Richard, thank you for your kind words and the assistance you
provided in any way that you could. To my nieces, nephews, cousins, uncles, aunts, and dear friends who provided encouragement and emotional support, I thank you.

Entering the doctoral program at Eastern Michigan was unexpected. I remember one morning waking from sleep having the thought of applying for a doctoral program. I had attained my specialist degree, yet I felt unfulfilled. Being unfulfilled, I felt some trepidation to think about applying for a doctorate. Nevertheless, I conjured up the nerve to contact my mentor at the time, Ebony Zamani-Gallaher (Dr. ZG) and I asked her bluntly, “Do you think I have what it takes to be a doctor in education?” Immediately, she answered, “Of course you do!” and we had a conversation. This was the first time in my life that someone in the educational setting seemed to be invested in what they saw in me and not something I didn’t necessarily see in myself. The moment this occurred, I was inspired and happily anxious. After entering the doctoral program, Dr. ZG volunteered to chair my committee. Soon after I entered the program, however, she had to broaden her horizon and moved on to another institution. I am blessed, though, that God placed her in my life at the right time. So, to Dr. ZG, who believed in me and provided me with an opportunity and support applying and entering the doctoral program, I thank you. To my dissertation committee, I thank you from the bottom of my heart. You did not have to place yourself in this position for the past four years, yet I want you to know that I appreciate you providing your time and educational approach to assist me. I am aware that this process took time, yet you were patient with me. Each committee member, past and present, Dr. Bleyaert, Dr. Leon, Dr. Philips, Dr. McCallum, and Dr. Jackson, who gave their time to this process, who provided me with the constructive criticism, feedback, and suggestions, thank you, so very much.
I want to extend a special heartfelt thank you to Dr. Broughton, my dissertation chairperson, who excepted to be over my committee when I needed it, when Dr. ZG had to move on. Dr. Broughton, you have been very instrumental, not only in my doctoral process, but in my student affairs courses in graduate school. Thank you for helping me to expand my ideas that were so profound inside, yet, seemed at times so difficult to express on paper. I am forever grateful. Dr. Pollakow was also very instrumental during the beginning phase of my specialist degree and then in my doctoral process. When I had no high skill set of writing, and the qualitative process, she pushed me to become a better writer and to think at a deeper level. Her courses made me understand more, my process and where I wanted to take my research. Thank you, Dr. Pollakow. To Dr. Tracy, the department head at the time, a special thank you is needed. Not knowing higher education vernacular, I called Eastern, and someone connected me to you in the spring of 2011. I expressed what I felt about the need to help students at a different level. You were able to guide me to the division of student affairs, and you explained the process which helped me validate what I felt and believed. Although this was a brief encounter, you were instrumental in my process, informing me of how I may fit in higher education and how I should proceed. I thank you very much.

To the members of the Department of Leadership and Counseling who taught the courses, I understand the commitment to student learning it takes to teach and provide instruction and critical insight in content. To Dr. Carpenter, thank you, for making a difference in my educational career and for pushing me in the number’s world.

I would like to thank the EMU staff and administration in the Division of Student Affairs, particularly, the Diversity & Community Involvement and the Office of Student Conduct, Community Standards and Wellness. The opportunity to work in these departments and with
individuals enabled me to gain experience and knowledge and more of an appreciation for what my purpose will be working in an IHE. So, to Reginald Barnes, Dr. Leon, Jessie Peck, Dr. Ramona Lewis, Julia Heck, Erica Cooper, Eric Ward, and Sade, thank you for the time, effort, and understanding.

While journeying this doctoral process, I needed to connect with individuals that could possibly assist me in how I may think about the spectrum of higher education upon entering the field. Thus, I was able to connect with April Calkovsky, who works in advising. April, you are amazing. Transitioning from secondary education to higher education is not easy, and you provided me with critical insight and perspectives that enabled me to be more purposeful in presentations of vitae and resume production. Thank you, April, for all you did for me and the suggestions were very helpful.

Before I entered the doctoral program, I heard about cohorts and the significance of having those around you who were experiencing the same situations. I had imagined when I first began the program that there would be a few, if not more than a few of us who would proceed together. I was wrong; there were only a few. So, Carlton, and De’Shield, it seems as if we were striving together. For those times when we depended on each other, meeting late at cafés with our computers, staying after class discussing our concerns and insights, and supporting each other as we encountered uncharted territory, thank you, for your support and sharing your experiences of this journey; it was an encouragement to me. Thank you to the EMU librarians especially, Keith Stanger and the writing center. Without your assistance, I could not have made this journey. There were countless days when I needed to find research portals and ways of finding data, and Keith was always friendly and helpful. To the writing center, and my writing
coach: When I needed just a second opinion who could look over some of my writing, it was very helpful, and I appreciate it very much.

Special thanks to my students at Carman-Ainsworth High School. What an awesome set of students you are. As I shared with you the times why I came to work tired and sleepy, you understood. To the times you gave me words of encouragement when I did not expect to receive it from teenagers, I thank you even more. Who would have thought that you would be some of my biggest supporters? To those of you in my church family, Tammy Cummings and Dr. Patricia Lewis, thank you, for always asking how I was doing. It is hard to believe that unless you have experienced something like this, people simply assume that everything is okay. Because you were always asking about my process, and how I was faring, you helped to make the process easier.

Because all of you in some capacity supported and encouraged me, now, I can continue to help students in a different capacity. May God bless each of you!
Abstract
This dissertation described the lived experiences of Black males who earned doctorates. Using an anti-deficit framework, this study explored the post-college experience and doctoral completion. Past research about Black males utilize a deficit perspective indicating how negative experiences, at times, prevent academic achievement. This study used an interpretive approach with one-on-one face-to-face interviews with seven participants. The interviews were conducted in the geographic area of the Midwest, Southeastern, and Northwest regions of the United States. The narratives, rich and thick in descriptions, provided seven themes. The themes included (a) race, and how participants overcame stereotypes and certain challenges, (b) how a strong female presence was critical in their doctoral accomplishment, (c) how the identities of participants enabled them to get through challenges they confronted, (d) how determination helped them complete their graduate degrees, (e) how mentorship provided by key people enabled Black males to graduate with their doctorate degree, (f), how support systems were crucial in making it through and “being pushed” to succeed in graduate school and doctoral programing, and (g) how their academic abilities enabled them to thrive although “the struggle was real” and difficult at times. The themes were placed into three main categories: social, personal, and academic. Finally, these three categories, the social, personal, and the academic, may contribute to future researchers as they explore Black males in completing graduate degrees.
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Chapter I: Introduction to the Study

During my educational journey through undergraduate and graduate programs, I have observed the scarcity of Black males who have earned a doctoral degree. I only knew one Black male during my college experience; this circumstance has prompted my study.

Research has focused on Black males in K-12, undergraduate programs, and attrition and retention perspectives (Allen, Epps, Guillory, Suh, & Bonous-Hammarth, 2000; Harper, 2009a; U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Limited research has been conducted on the experiences of Black males as graduate students and their professional aspirations in higher education. Although Black males are making advancements in institutions of higher education (IHE) (Jackson, 2006), there is a need to highlight how their experiences of post-graduate programs increased or decreased the likelihood of Black male representation in an institution of higher education IHE (Jackson, 2003). The reason for this study was to explore Black male graduate and professional practices.

This qualitative study is not based on a deficit perspective on Black males. Rather, the study reflects an anti-deficit approach which focuses on participants’ experiences. Their stories counter previous ideas, beliefs, or principles found in the past about Black males. As this is a phenomenological approach, I explored Black male stories’ that highlighted their experiences and the structures of meaning making (Krauss, 2005). In doing so, this study enabled a selected group of Black males who described how they “experience what they experience” in their world (Patton, 1990, p. 71).

Although stereotypes and the lack of social distance associated with Black males being diverse have been presented in research (Fries-Britt, 1998), the Black male experience is diversified (Harper & Nichols, 2008). Thus, the experiences they share through this study is
significant to theorists, educators, parents, and those who seek to understand and become more knowledgeable about the lived experiences of Black male’s with doctoral degrees.

**Statement of the Research Problem**

There is not much positive research of literature about Black males and their experiences attaining a doctoral degree and working in an IHE. Research revealed a scarcity of Black males who earned doctoral degrees in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, [NCES], 2014). The scarcity of Black males with doctorates can be attributed to both systemic and personal structures (Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011). These structures marginalize Black males regarding their race, gender, and/or class, thereby limiting their journey through the educational system. For many years in the academe, the research focused on a lack of preparation, underrepresentation, poor academic performance, stereotypes, or even disengagement by Black males (Davis, 2003; Jackson, 2003; Noguera, 2003; Ogbu, 2003; Scott, Taylor, & Palmer, 2012; Smit, 2012), instead of building on the accomplishments and strengths of Black men who earn doctorates. Thus, not much research has highlighted other factors that may have motivated Black males to achieve doctoral degrees (Jackson, 2003; Maton, & Hrabowski III, 2004). Black males possess the intellect and the capability to excel as they move through the educational system. For example, research supports they are career-driven college graduates and productive members of American society (Harper & Davis, 2012; Harper, 2006b, 2007, 2009; 2009a, 2009b, 2012; Hood, 1992). Per the National Black Male College Achievement Study (NBMCAS), an anti-deficit achievement approach assists in countering discourse and strategies that prevent certain individuals from an understanding of not only how Black males earned a doctorate, but also how their doctorate enables them to work in HE
(Harper, 2006, 2009a; Krueger, 1998). Nonetheless, research from an anti-deficit approach that highlights these accomplishments is lacking.

Table 1 illustrates graduate and post-graduate statistics for Black males. For undergraduate Black males, 66% of all Black males entering college leave prior to completing a degree (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). However, when retained, Black males tend to be compared to their White counterparts when attaining degree completion (Harper & Wood, 2016). For example, comparing Black males in graduate programs with their counterparts, Black males are represented lower in undergraduate and graduate programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Table 1 illustrates the numbers of Black males in post-secondary institutions that has increased in comparison to White and Hispanic males, yet the numbers of Black males remain low (NCES, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Furthermore, the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), reports that in 2005, there were 17,384 Black males who graduated with a master’s degree. In 2015, that number increased to 26,317. From the fall of 1976 to the fall of 2014, the percentage of Black males rose from 8.3% to almost 14% (NCES, 2013). From 2005 to 2015, the number of conferred doctoral degrees for Black males nearly doubled (NCES, 2015). For Black males who seek doctoral degree attainment, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU), tend to be their choice as a replacement for a Predominately White Institutions (PWI) (Allen & Jewell, 1991; Brazziel, 1983; Brown & Davis, 2001; Pascarella, Wolniak, Pierson & Flowers, 2004; Perna, 2001; Solorzano, 1995; Wenglinsky, 1996). Whether the institution of choice is a HBCU or a PWI, the number of Black males who enter and complete doctoral degree programs continue to increase (NCES, 2015). The NCES, (2015) for example, reported that in 2005, there were only 2,949 (5.1% of distribution) of Black males who were conferred doctoral degrees by post-secondary institutions. In 2015, that number
doubled to 4,467 (6.2% of distribution). Yet, despite the growth in post-graduate degrees for Black males, there is little research on post-graduate experiences for Black males (Mitchell, 2010).

Table 1.

National Center for Educational Statistics

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<th>Table 323.20 Master’s degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions, by race/ethnicity and sex of student: Selected years, 1976 through 2015</th>
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<tr>
<td>Year and sex</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Males</td>
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Harper (2010, 2012) introduced the idea of the anti-deficit achievement approach surrounding Black males student success. Harper explored how Black males navigated through undergraduate school equipped for a career. Although Harper suggested career readiness as a part of post-college success, the anti-deficit approach does not describe the lived experiences that were most effective in assisting Black males as they made their way into their profession in a IHE, nor does it describe how they persisted, despite negative forces to attain their doctorate and a position in an IHE. This research described what compelled Black males to pursue and attain positions in higher education. Hence, it was worth describing the lived experiences of Black males who earned doctorates so that a better understanding of their experience emerged.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to describe the lived experiences of black males who earned doctorates. Due to the low numbers of Black males in higher education with doctorates (Fisher, 2015), this study sought to understand how the lived experiences influenced their
doctoral attainment and post-graduate completion. This study adds to the research about Black males in higher education. Past research has provided an understanding of their experiences from multiple perspectives, more specifically, a deficit perspective (McGee & Martin, 2011), which provided experiences of doom and gloom, and many times placing the blame directly on Black males themselves (Harper, 2006b, 2010). Moreover, this study was conducted for the purpose of providing educational leaders with a more comprehensive view of how Black males navigated doctoral completion and working in higher education. This study seeks to provide first-hand knowledge of how Black males handled certain experiences as they managed graduate and post-graduate work.

**Research Question**

This qualitative study involves an inductive process, building from the bottom up, rather from a top down approach (Glesne, 2011; Thomas, 2006) The following research question was developed for the purpose of guiding this study. An examination of this study was as follows:

- What are the lived experiences of Black males who earned doctorates?

The research question was centered on the anti-deficit reframing by Harper’s (2012) Black male student success in higher education study, which may explain the factors that influenced doctoral and professional attainment in HE.

**Conceptual Framework**

Literature about Black males are broad in context (Harper, 2010, 2012; Jackson, 2003; Noguera, 2003; Ogbu, 2003, Scott et al., 2012; Smit, 2012). Yet research has revealed a lack of insight about their journey through post-graduate positions they now hold in an IHE (Griffin, Bennett & Harris, 2013). Research suggested that “explicating the processes by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world (including themselves) in which
“they live” create meaning from the lived experiences of Black males’ post-graduate experiences being explored (Griffin et al., 2013, p. 266). Given the importance of Black males who earned doctorates, my conceptual framework explains the process of doctoral degree accomplishment and how that accomplishment prepared them for a position in an IHE. Figure 1 illustrates Harpers anti-deficit framework, comprising of pre-college socialization and readiness, college achievement, and post-college success. Figure 1 represents Harper’s framework with permission to use by S.R. Harper (personal communication, January 27, 2019).

Harper does not consider the experiences of doctoral and job attainment. Therefore, based on the anti-deficit achievement framework developed by Harper (2012), there was a need to explore beyond undergraduate success.

![Harper's Anti-Deficit Achievement Framework](image)

**Figure 1.** Harper’s Anti-Deficit Achievement Framework.
The theoretical conceptual framework (Figure 1) describes the post-college success to post-graduate/doctoral and career attainment process. Like Harper (2012, 2009a, 2006b), I believed that there are critical experiences for Black males as they move through the educational system. For example, Harper suggested that race and racism are some pitfalls Black males learn to deal with or avoid while at PWIs. As Black males graduate and move into the workplace, Harper also suggested that they encounter racial politics. Akin to Harper’s suggestion of how some Black males encountered racial politics, this study explored how Black males dealt with other institutional agents like faculty/ support and/or self-persistence during their doctoral studies and career attainment. I was aware that the research stated that Black males have and will continue to experience many of the same circumstances and pitfalls, such as low expectations from teachers and educators (Bonner & Bailey, 2006), or academic underperformance (Harper, 2010): a deficit perspective. However, if Harper (2010) suggested that there is an educational disadvantage, does his concept apply at the post-graduate level and a career in HE?

**Significance of the Research Study**

Although there has been a concentrated effort attempting to understand the Black male lived experience (Bennett, Tillman-Kelly, Johari, Viera, & Wall, 2012; Cuyjet, 2006; Gasman, Baez, & Turner, 2008), not much change has occurred, especially focusing on graduate and professional practices (Harper, 2012, 2014). Most research studies have focused on the negative experiences and the lack of support Black males received during undergraduate and graduate experiences (Bonner & Bailey, 2006). This study was significant because it utilized Harper’s anti-deficit model (Harper, 2012), and it was significant in understanding the lived experiences of Black males by providing a perspective from newly informed data about their post graduate experience. For example, Harper (2010) and McGee and Martin (2011) argued that a deficit
perspective stresses the low performance and the academic failure of Black males, at points, “adding to the now exhaustive body of literature and conversations about why Black male enrollments and degree attainment rates are so low” (Harper, 2010, p. 6), and defining why Black men in college are “troubled and lost” (Fisher, 2015, p. 4). Nevertheless, grounded in Harper’s (2010, 2012) research, an anti-deficit framework of pre-college socialization and readiness, college achievement, and post-college success, counters the deficit perspective. Harpers research provided an explanation for how Black males navigate their way through IHE and beyond.

In years past, research studies have shed light on specific Black male experience, particularly academic success (Habermas, 1989; Harper, 2012; Harper & Davis, 2012; Noguera, 2003). This study was significant because several Black males stated that they were not ready for the academic process, both graduate, and more specifically, the doctoral process. Black males stated the need for academic support as some males thought they were underprepared. As a result of some feeling underprepared, they described certain barriers and difficulty moving effectively through graduate and doctoral programing. McCallum (2012) stated that Black Americans in the classroom setting “encounter different barriers” dissimilar to their peers (p. 24). Participants in this study realized that when they were in trouble academically, they had to self-navigate in order to seek out systems of support, such as advising, library, or even mentorship services (Cain, Marrara, Pitre, & Armour, 2007; Hyun, Quinn, Madon, & Lustig, 2006; Jankowska, Hertel, & Young, 2006; Oswalt & Riddock, 2007). Cain et al., (2007) suggested that it was support services that was an important role in graduate degree accomplishment. And, this study identified the importance of academic and personal support in completing a degree and their current work.
Additionally, this study was significantly related to mentoring opportunities. Although participants in this study did not specifically state that they were part of an organized mentoring program, they were able to find someone, whether a professor, administrator, or simply a friend, to mentor them, and participants felt the need to mentor students, specifically, in their current roles in higher education. All participants voiced the importance of mentoring and its benefits. Therefore, access to mentorship systems for Black males is critical. Ray, Marion Carley, and Brown (2009), suggested that community colleges and universities with solid mentorship systems in place that effectively engages Black students can be effective in countering attrition. Furthermore, a good mentoring program is a strong indicator of academic accomplishment (Brunsma, Embrick, & Shin, 2017). Black males in this study did just that. After completing their doctorate degrees and working in higher education, Black males in this study purposely set out to either create a support system or mentorship program, or, they simply set out to help students using their experience as a guide.

Another significant aspect was how Black males were able to overcome racial issues. Black males in this study experienced forms of microaggressions that were discouraging. Unfortunately, this study significantly underscored the reality that Black males do and will continue to experience racial barriers in graduate and post-graduate settings. Although the participants experienced these barriers, it did not prevent them from doctoral attainment. Black males in this study were able to deal with the disparities because the social support systems such as faculty-student relationships and family were available. Felder, Stevenson, and Gasman (2014), asserted that the social relationship between student and a faculty member was critical to have in the doctoral process. And having someone in the social and academic setting enabled Black males to feel more connected with the process.
And finally, the need for this study was significant, and it was timely. There have been countless studies conducted on, or about, Black males. Because there continues to be a deficit perspective of Black males in educational settings, and because Black males still fall short academically, a contribution from my research is important. At a place in time where race is contentious in America, this study underscores the reality that race is a significant factor in Black males’ lives and carries with it the potential to affect social and academic interests. Support systems that counter microaggressions can help erode some of the salient barriers Black males face. In turn, it may assist the uncovering of other components that can strengthen Black males through their academic process. This study suggests that there are support systems that counter academic issues and that it can be overcome with mentorships and strong relationships. However, to overcome any barrier, it takes a better understanding of what relationships are; and how effective these relationships are between Black males, faculty, and persons in their social, personal, and academic settings.

In summation, this study was important in addressing Black males and their doctoral completion and working in an IHE. The significance of this study demonstrated that Black males are graduating with doctoral degrees. Yet, due to certain experiences and circumstance, the rate of doctoral attainment remains low. It is important to address that Black males experienced and expressed the different types of barriers and needs, e.g., the need for additional academic support, and mentoring strategies. However, because of self-navigational skills and personal and professional relationships, these skills and relationships enabled the participants to navigate higher education settings; they were able to accomplish doctoral attainment and a position in an IHE. Black males in this study faced micro-aggressions and navigated around racial barriers successfully. Although participants had the personal skill set to navigate racial barriers,
continued support from the academic community is warranted to create a more comfortable space.

**Methodology Overview**

This research employed a qualitative phenomenological approach that dealt with the study of Black males’ lived experiences. Purposeful sampling was utilized to locate participants (Seidman, 2006), seeking Black males from Midwest, Southeastern, and Northwest IHEs, who were faculty, administration, or staff; and who had attained their doctorate within the last five years. Their fresh perspective may enable them in seeing things differently than those who are knee-deep in academe (Harris, Li, Boswell, Zhang, & Xie, 2014). The participants were identified by means of snowball, chain, or network sampling (Patton, 2002). Research has suggested that a minimum of three participants (Englander, 2012; Giorgi, 2009), or up to seven, may be used to enhance credibility and validity. This study used seven participants. However, a larger sample does not provide generalizability (Creswell, 2009; Kvale, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Robson, 2002; Seale, 1999b). I conducted two rounds of semi-structured interviews for each participant (see Appendix A). The first interview with participants was 60-90 minutes. Audio was used to record the participants, and I employed a descriptive journal and hand-written notes (Holstein & Gubrium, 1994; Russell & Kelly, 2002). For clarification, follow-up questions for accuracy of fit was administered. To ensure the trustworthiness of this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), credibility (Morse, Barrett, Mayen, Olson & Spiers, 2008), replicability, and reliability were considered (Ritchie, Lewis & Elam, 2003). After the interviews were transcribed, a thematic analysis was conducted to identify coded and macro-themes (Creswell, 2009; Glesne, 2011). Raw and contextual data was converted into summary format to enhance meaning from the data collected in order to identify patterns (Lodico, Spaulding & Voegtle, 2010; Creswell,
As a result, patterns of themes emerged from the coding procedures, themes were found and placed into appropriate categories.

**Trustworthiness**

To ensure the trustworthiness of this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the researcher gave special attention to transferability, credibility (Morse et al., 2008), replicability, and reliability (Ritchie et al., 2003). For example, transferability was conducted by means of providing rich and thick descriptions of the phenomenon (Guba, 1985). Both rich and thick descriptions provided a robust account of data collected so that the researcher and the reader were able to make connections to the phenomenon. Moreover, transferability was at play by, at times, providing insight of where and under what circumstances the interviews took place.

My strategy for credibility was identifying who was going to be a part of the study. Shenton (2004) suggested that “only those who are genuinely willing to take part and prepared to offer data freely” will help ensure a truthful study (p. 66). So that the stories of participants were credible, there were follow-up questioning and, at times, a third and fourth brief question for clarity. Another strategy was to link my findings from what the participants stated with literature, which, in turn, demonstrated the truth value of the study’s findings.

To ensure replicability, this methodological procedure and the connotations that truth will be objectively perceived will enable researchers to be able to arrive at similar interpretations or conclusions regarding the phenomenon. Furthermore, if more in-depth research was conducted on this study, finding would be similar or the same (Asendorpf, et al., 2013).

And, finally, reliability was used to verify that the finding was consistent with the data the researcher collected. To enhance reliability, data were collected from two or more interviews from the pool of participants (Morse, et al., 2008). As reliability is concerned with the
replicability of this study (Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam, 2003), the researcher used authentic, clear, and concise questions for the interview questionnaire. Therefore, reliability was adhered to by reviewing and researching articles about the phenomenon, or reviewing debriefing audits; or researching peer reviewed data surrounding Black males (Seale, 1999a).

**Ethical Considerations**

To conduct my study, a semi-structure interview guide was created (Appendix A). However, before I began to administer the interview guide, I sought approval from Eastern Michigan University Institutional Review Board (IRB) allowing me to move forward with this study (Appendix B). After receiving approval, I emitted an informed consent form (Appendix C). The informed consent form provided participants with the focus of the study, purpose, procedures, confidentiality and risks, benefits, contact information, if participants needed to contact me, and informing participants that this study was voluntary.

I sought out to do no harm (Magolda & Weems, 2002) by maintaining confidentiality, requiring participants to use pseudonyms, and promising the safe storage of recordings and data in a locked file cabinet in my office. In doing no harm, a participation solicitation email was sent to all participants explaining the procedures for the study (Appendix D).

**Delimitations**

The participants of this qualitative research study were Black American males who earned a doctorate and now hold a position at an IHE. Thus, African men (those of African descent/ non-native Americans), Latinos, or Spanish ethnic males were not included in the study. However, due to purposeful sampling, I respected self-identification of Black males and would, if presented, Black men who identify themselves as African American even though they may be of mixed race (one parent being of the Black race and the other parent being from any other).
Furthermore, Black males who have doctorates, who work in K-12, or in another profession other than higher education were not used for the study. I sought out participants who have earned their doctorate in the last five years. Lastly, I delimited my study to the geographic area of the Midwest, Southeastern, and Northwest regions of the United States.

Limitations

The findings of this study cannot be generalized to the entire population of Black males. Size of the population from the sample was limited as there is a lack of Black males serving in positions in HE (Gasman, Kim & Nguyen, 2011; Harper, 2006; Kalton, 1983; Lumpkin, 2011). As the research instrument, my positionality and power, as well as my insider/outsider status was restricted (Merriam, et al., 2001). However, every effort by the researcher was made to remain objective. Johnson-Baily (1999) suggested that if the researcher and the participant were of the same race and gender, their views, beliefs, and personal experiences may be similar; this may affect my subjectivity and bias. In addition, there was a limitation in terms of geographic location, timing, and finances.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions is used to help define data:

- **Academic Experiences**: Events and environment surrounding grades, school, and educational outcomes.

- **African American**: Black Americans who have been identified, or identify themselves as African, or as being from African descent. For this study, Black males who hold doctorates, and who identify as African American/Black American, or as one or more of an ethnic identity will be selected to participate (Gollnick & Chinn, 1994).
• **Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU):** Institutions of higher education that historically educated disadvantaged black students, because of desegregation (Roebuck & Murty, 1993).

• **Institution of Higher Education (IHE):** Institutions that (a) institutions that except students who have earned a secondary certificate; (b) are legally authorized by the state to provide a program beyond the high school setting; (c) provide either an associate, bachelors, masters, doctorate, or any other degree above the secondary level; d) public or nonprofit organizations; and (e) offer accreditation by the local and national level (Johnson, 1965).

• **Life and System World:** Characterized by Habermas (1989) as public and private spaces, such as the home; neighborhood; university; public facilities; and spaces of public, personal, academic, and social interaction.

• **Minority Serving Institutions (MSI):** “Those institutions created for or that enroll large percentages of African-American, Latino or Native American students” (Gasman, et al., 2008, p. 2).

• **Personal Experience:** Experiences in an individual’s family, and the relationships between family and friends; and the cultural make-up in their community.

• **Post-graduate:** Persons who are enrolled in an academic program beyond a master’s degree.

• **Predominately White Institutions (PWI):** Colleges or universities where the student population is primarily White.

• **Secondary Education:** The period a child attends a public, private, or parochial school from 9th thru 12th grade years.
• **Social Experiences**: Experiences with individuals in neighborhoods, schools, and other places in their system worlds.

**Summary**

This chapter provided a brief introduction to the problem, purpose, research question, significance of the study, conceptual framework, and methodological procedures, concerning Black males who have earned a doctorate and hold professional positions at an IHE. In this research study, chapter II reviews, to a greater degree, the relevant literature that supports this qualitative study. Chapter III provides the researcher’s details of the methodology that was used in this study. Chapter IV provides the personal experiences from the subject’s personal points of view, illuminating themes. Chapter V provides a thematic analysis from all the codes and themes extracted from the participants stories. Chapter VI offers a summary, a discussion, the researcher’s perspective and learning process, and a review of implications and recommendations for future studies.
Chapter II: Review of Literature

Introduction

Chapter II expands on theories used to explain the lived experiences of Black males who earned doctorates. This review highlights relevant literature from sources such as the internet, dissertations, on-line data bases, scholarly journals, and books. This literature review explored the influential aspects, such as, parental influences, and socioeconomic status (SES) to name a few. This literature review also highlighted empirical research that surrounds the experiences of Black males, both theoretically and in practice.

This chapter begins by characterizing a historical perspective of Black males. This literature review illustrates how the influences of family, friends, and community are influential in the social formation of Black males. A theoretical perspective is provided, as it underlines the academic journey Black males experience from K-12 through undergraduate and PhD attainment.

Historical Background

The opportunity for Africans to succeed academically in the United States was difficult to achieve due to the discriminatory effects of slavery (Feagin, 2000; Stuckey, 2013). As a result, systemic racism became a cause in the denial of the inevitable rights of African Americans in a “U.S. racial hierarchy” (Feagin, 2014, p. x). In a racial hierarchy, many African Americans were used for chattel slavery and not provided with the opportunity of schooling as they “were largely excluded from selective colleges and universities in the United States through a combination of de facto and de jure mechanisms” (Feagin, 2000; Massey, Mooney, Torres, & Charles, 2007, p. 243). It was not until around 1835, during the insurrection movement, that advocating for the educating of Negroes was introduced (Woodson, 1919). This occurrence
involved: (a) slave owners, who desired to increase the economic capital of their property, e.g.,
his or her slaves; (b) the sympathizer, who desired to help the oppressed; and (c) compassionate
missionaries, who believed in divine love for all. Together, it had a part in the re-direction of the
education of the Negro. Because of a moral justification of slave owners, affirmative action was
created as a form of restitution for slaves (Johnson, 2005). As restitution, slaves were
deliberately recruited to American colleges and universities with an “emphasis on diversity
rather than restitution” (Massey et al., 2007, p. 244). Moreover, a legislative movement such as
Plessy vs. Ferguson (1896) enabled Black Americans to make significant personal, professional,
and academic advances. During the civil rights era of 1964 and the attempt at excluding
discrimination, Black Americans could make meaningful advances. In time, research
demonstrated that first and second-generation Black student immigrants doubled in population
when the National Longitudinal Survey of Freshmen (NLSF) (Charles, 2003), was conducted.
As a result, Black males could make significant gains (Johnson, 2005; Plessy vs. Ferguson,
1896). Although barriers still exist for Black males, more specifically in education (Allen, Epps,
2012; Noguera, 2003; Reynolds, 2010; Solorzano, 1997), understanding the lived experiences of
Black males may illuminate the decision they made to attend graduate and post graduate school
and the attainment of a doctorate.

**Personal Experiences**

Although people are distinguishable in varying backgrounds, color, and creed, there is an
assumption that Black males share the same type of experiences (Harper, & Nichols, 2008); Black males are not all the same; they are distinguishable. They have varying SES, as well as
physical characteristics that influence the experiences of being a Black man in any environment,
including educational settings (Celious & Oyserman, 2001). Research has shown that there are achievements to be made when observing and describing the lived experiences of Black males who earned doctorates (Allen, Epps, Guillory & Bonous-Hammarth, 2000; Cole & Espinoza, 2008; Harper, 2009, 2012; Noguera, 2003; Reynolds, 2010; Solorzano, 1997). Noguera (2003) proclaimed that, “black males are confronted with a vast array of risks, obstacles, and social pressures the majority manages to navigate, with some degree of success” (p. 435).

The lived experiences of Black males, at times, become barriers to academic accomplishment (Allen, et al., 2000; Cole & Espinoza, 2008; Cuyjet, 2006; Harper & Davis III, 2012; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Harper, & Quaye, 2007; Noguera, 2003; Nettles & Millett, 2006; Reynolds, 2010; Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011; Solorzano, 1997; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Solorzano & Villalpando, 1998). For some Black males, they bear the burden of acting White, primarily in the secondary settings when they performed academically smart, as some of their peers may ridiculed them for demonstrating academic achievement (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Harper, 2007). Due to remnants of discrimination, there is a lack of opportunities academically for some Black males (Feagin, 2000, 2014; Stuckey, 2013; Fashola, 2003). In times past, Black males were described as an endangered class of people (Cooper & Jordan, 2003). Yet, through means of support of their community, family, and friends, they are able to navigate barriers of prejudice and discrimination overcoming many stigmas (Grusec & Hastings, 2008; Oliver, 2006; Hines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2013; Noguera, 2003; Somers, Owens, & Piliawsky, 2008). To some degree, Black males have experienced macroaggressions, i.e., the non-verbal and sometimes visual and other forms of marginalization that may have aided in some aspect of psychological harm (Ogbu, 1978; National Institute of Health, 2009; Solorzano, et al., 2000). For example, some Black males dealt with the experiences of negative encounters
with the law (Warren, et al., 2012; U.S. Department of Justice, 2009); Black males experienced more health risks, violence, and even higher incarceration rates opposed to white males (Warren, Chiricos & Bales, 2012; U.S. Department of Justice, 2009); and Black males have experienced cultural, individual, and institutional racism unlike any other males from other races (Black & Men, 2015; Franklin, 1999). During their personal, educational, and professional journeys, they experienced a stereotype threat “directed toward people of color, often automatically or subconsciously” (Ogbu, 1978; Pérez Huber, & Solorzano, 2015; Solorzano, et al., 2000, p. 64), which fostered invisibility, “an inner struggle with the feeling that one’s talents, abilities, personality, and worth are not valued or even recognized because of prejudice and racism” (Franklin, 1999, p. 761). According to the National Institute of Health (NIH; 2009), Black males who were exposed to traumatic occurrences demonstrated symptoms of distress, both emotional and psychological harm; they experienced, at times, racial battle fatigue (RBF) or mundane extreme environmental stress syndrome (MEES); (Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011, 2012). Research conveyed that some Black males experienced an individuals’ or an institutions’ expression of dominance and/or superiority over a person’s racial heritage and/or the person’s race, suggesting that a superior race has dominance over an inferior race in superior settings (Franklin, 1999). According to Franklin (1999), any organizations can affect an individual’s assumption or bias where the organization manipulates an action to maintain an advantage over another individual. To counter this advantage, Black males may ascertain, two identities (Diemer, 2007). Diemer (2007) conveyed that Black males continue to balance between two identities: (a) retaining identification as a Black or African-American, and/or (b) retaining an identity of being Black while working in a predominately White institution (PWI) structures.
Nevertheless, despite these ways in which Black males deal with obstacles, they could not have made significant gains if it were not for support from their parents (Wilson, 2014).

**Parental Influence**

Black males succeed in life largely due to parental influence and self-motivation (James, 2015; Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems, & Holbein, 2005). Together, fathers and mothers educate their sons to cope with life and life’s challenges as they move through the home environment, the neighborhood, and in education (Jeynes, 2003; Stevens, 2006). Studies have shown that Black boys, specifically, those who had affectionate, loving, and supportive relationships with parents, fared better in adulthood (Gonzalez, Cauce, Friedman, & Mason, 1996). Factors such as the educational level and occupation of the parent had an influence in their son's’ academic accomplishments, enabling Black males to graduate from high school and continue onward through life and college conquering challenges along the way (Hines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2013; Kean-Davis, 2005; Shah et al., 2012; Sirin, 2005; Somers, Owens, & Piliawsky, 2008; Hines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2013; Stevens, 2006).

Research stated that children who came from homes where a mother and father were together fared better academically (Pong, Dronkers, & Hampden-Thompson, 2003). Research continues to convey that even though the two-parent family structure continues to change, coping with challenges can be difficult for some Black males, even in a one parent home (Allen, 1992). A father, for example, who provides his son with a sense of support and security tend to fare well psychologically, emotionally, and socially (Lamb and Tamis-Lemonda, 2004). The literature also conveys that the maternal role is a crucial factor in Black male accomplishment (Allen, 1992). Still, fathers and mothers of Black sons were inclined to experience some of the same challenges single parents encountered while raising their sons (Wilson, 2014).
The percentage of single Black fathers and mothers raising their sons alone has increased in recent years (Cartwright & Henriksen, 2012; Bhargavab & Witherspoon, 2015; Robinson & Harris, 2014; United States Census Bureau, 2014; Vespa, Lewis & Kreider, 2013). However, even when the family structure of a two-parent home declined, parents who were involved with their son's schooling worked hard to provide them with the best education possible (Gonzalez-DeHass, et al., 2005; Noguera, 2003; United States Census Bureau, 2014). More importantly, Black males who were supported by “strong mothers,” aided in their son's ability to deal with barriers (Stevens, 2006, p. 4). Parents who prepared their sons to understand the dynamics of race and how to carry out strategic plans to maneuver through their life and system worlds, enabled them to overcome barriers, intolerance, and prejudice (Habermas, 1989; Hines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2013). Some parents also empowered their sons “to succeed academically, economically, and socially, partly due to their awareness of racism and racially discriminatory practices in education and employment” (Sanders, 1997, pp. 84-85). Therefore, parents of Black males support, instruct, and defend their sons; raising their sons with a style of parenting that encourages them to become responsible and successful adults (Hines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2013; Jimerson, Egeland, & Teo, 1999).

Hines and Holcom-McCoy (2013) mentioned that parenting styles such as authoritarian, authoritative, permissive-indulgent, and uninvolved, have been associated with a child’s motivation to succeed academically. According to literature, an authoritative style of parenting has been associated with academic success in Black males as it provided their sons, with less support (Baumrind, 1978, 1991; Mandara, 2006). Referencing the research by Gorman-Smith, Tolan, and Henry (2000), and Taylor, Hinton, and Wilson (1995), Hines & Holcom-McCoy (2013) stated:
African American parents who used an authoritative style had boys who were involved with more pro-social activities at school and higher educational aspirations across five waves of assessments. Children from homes with authoritative parents had higher grades than those whose parents used an authoritarian or permissive parenting style. (p. 69)

Regardless of the parenting style, parents raise their sons to do their best. Black males who were loved and who was raised with discipline; who were given high expectations, and consistency, more often succeeded academically (Hrabowski, Maton & Greif, 1998). Garibaldi (1992) pointed out that to succeed academically, self-motivation could possibly become a remedy to academic success. Research asserts that if parents, the academy, and community supported academic goals for Black males, it would render them capable of succeeding academically even more, providing them with a skill set and the navigational capital to survive in any environment (Brooks, 2012; Cloward & Ohlin, 1960; Yasso, 2005). Thus, Black males who overcame these experiences is a result of competence by means of parenting style, communication strategies, both concrete and social interactions, as well as their upward academic ability (Hout, 2015; O’Connor, 1997).

Social Experiences and Economic Status

The social environment, i.e., family, neighborhood, influences Black males (Hines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2013). The process of socialization by means of facilities and educational institutions purposely indoctrinates in “young people the beliefs, values, and norms that will allow them to functionally adapt as members of society” (Oliver, 2006, p. 918). Newman, Myers, Lohman, and Smith (2000) suggests that social support begins with the emotional support of family, friends, and educators. Newman et al., (2000) alleged that schools, parents, teachers,
and neighborhoods swayed the role of social support that translated into academic success in African American children. African American children, therefore, considered self-socialization important to experience in the secondary and college setting (Grusec & Hastings, 2008; Somers, Owens, & Piliawsky, 2008). And, although many kinds of social interactions were significant to the success of Black males, the economic circumstances contributed to that success (Agirdag, Van Houtte, & Van Avermaet, 2012). These economic circumstances, such as a parent’s income, have had an influence on the success of Black males (Jimerson, Egeland, & Teo, 1999; Kohn, 1963; Luster, Rhoades, & Haas, 1989; Sirin, 2005). All the same, SES has been shown to be closely related to academic accomplishment in Black boys from the formative years to adulthood (Davis-Kean, 2005; French et al., 2006; Jimerson, Egeland & Teo, 1999; Kohn, 1963; Luster, Rhoades, & Haas, 1989; Nettles et al., 2000; Waterman, 1982; Shah, Atta, Qureshi & Shah, 2012).

SES is “an individual’s or a family’s ranking on a hierarchy according to access to or control over some combination of valued commodities such as wealth, power, and social status” (Sirin, 2005, p. 418). Duncan, Featherman, and Duncan (1972), and Shah, et al., (2012) suggest that the nature of SES incorporated three components: (a) parental education, (b) parental income and (c) parental occupation. In the past, research proclaimed that Black males who were from lower income-based families and backgrounds underperformed on standardized tests when compared to student who came from a high-income-based, high educational parental backgrounds (Bowen, Kurzweil, Tobin & Pichler, 2006). Due to the diminishing group of high SES families, academic opportunities can become strained, i.e. economic hardships, being poor, financial strains, and/or unstable environments etc., did not necessarily restrict academic development in African-American children (Carnevale & Rose, 2003; Davis-Kean, 2005).
Actually, African American parents who lead economically disadvantaged households has been closely associated with Black male achievement (Halle, Kurtz-Costes, Mahoney, 1997). What Halle et al. (1997) fail to state, and what Alexander and Bedinger (1994) point out, is that high expectations and low SES do not necessarily mean academic failure. A high SES and low academic expectations does not denote a lack of success either. Still, Alexander, Entwisle, and Bedinger (1994) support the observation that it would be irresponsible to assert that either high or low SES is the sole factor that determines academic achievement in African American male students. Beginning from elementary through high school, research has demonstrated that children from a higher SES have performed better academically (Agirdag, Van Houtte, & Van Avermaet, 2012, p. 366). Although a high SES does not guarantee high academic performance, research suggest, that academic performance is related to high SES and a father’s education (Sackett, Kuncel, Arneson, Cooper & Waters, 2009; Sewell & Shah, 1967). The higher a father’s educational status was, for example, the higher the socioeconomic status of the son was predicted to be (Sewell & Hauser, 1975). However, the literature also suggests that a mother’s education can be measured to be attributed to Black males K-12 and post-secondary accomplishment (Gasman & Palmer, 2008; Sirin, 2005).

**Academic-K-12**

The K-12 school environment and the support the school environment provide have influenced academic achievement in Black males for years (Stewart, 2007). Research suggests:

Student effort, parent–child discussion, and associations with positive peers play a substantial role in increasing students’ achievement… the sense of school cohesion felt by students, teachers, and administrators—are important to successful student outcomes. (Hines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2013, p. 70)
Although the graduation rate is 64% for Black students (Harper, 2006; NCES, 2014), there was a decline in K-12 (NCES, 2015). Unlike the steady academic performance of their White and Latino male counterparts (NCES, 2010), the combination of Black male test scores, bias, and retention played a part in the decline (Harper, 2006; Noguera, 2003; NCES, 2015; Ogbu, 2003). Since graduation rates in K-12 have been on the decline for Black males, theoretical research has been illuminated to suggest why and what may be orchestrated to counter the decline (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2010; Strayhorn, 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 2010, 2011). Researchers have stated that pitfalls such as isolation, poor performance, test scores, discrimination, and attrition have been factors for the decline (Davis, 2003; Harper, 2009; Jackson, 2003; Noguera, 2003; Ogbu, 2003). According to Harper (2012) and the Schott Foundation for Public Education (2010) report, attrition and disengagement has been a leading cause for the academic decline (NCES, 2014). The widening of the achievement gap between Black males and their Latino and White male counterparts continues to grow, partially due to an anti-deficit mindset (NCES 2010, 2014; Harper, 2009a; Harper, 2009b; National Science Foundation, 2013; Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2010.

**Anti-Deficit**

At points, some researchers have chosen to tell stories of “doom and gloom” of Black males (Jackson & Moore, 2008, p. 847), as opposed to placing the blame on structural components and offering remedies (Valencia, 2012). Jackson and Moore (2008), concluded that there has been minimal focus on remedies for solving the problems Black males face in education, thus, rendering an almost irreversible, “bleak” outcome (p. 699). Thus, countering a deficit viewpoint regarding Black males is necessary by moving from deficit models and placing
more emphasis on the “potential, theoretical, empirical and policy significance of the proposed paradigm shift from illness to health, from vulnerability to thriving, from deficit to protection and beyond ought not to be underestimated” (O’Leary, 1998, p. 426). Research contends that although some teachers and educators hold low expectations of Black males, whether during K-12 or college, Black males can overcome this lack of expectation (Harper, 2009). Furthermore, if research focuses more on an anti-deficit re-framing structure (see Table 2), then, there may be less of a deficit-oriented perspective which can facilitate understanding how Black males excel academically (Harper, 2012).

Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deficit-Oriented Question</th>
<th>Anti-Deficit Reframing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Why do so few Black male students enroll in college?</td>
<td>Why are Black male students’ grade point averages often the lowest among both sexes and all racial/ethnic groups on many campuses?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why are Black male undergraduates so disengaged in campus leadership positions and out-of-class activities?</td>
<td>Why are Black men’s relationships with faculty and administrators so weak?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why are Black male students’ rates of persistence and degree attainment lowest among both sexes and all racial/ethnic groups in higher education?</td>
<td>How were aspirations for postsecondary education cultivated among Black male students who are currently enrolled in college?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What compels Black undergraduate men to pursue leadership and engagement opportunities on their campuses?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How do Black male collegians manage to persist and earn their degrees, despite transition issues, racist stereotypes, academic under preparedness, and other negative forces?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What resources are most effective in helping Black male achievers earn GPAs above 3.0 in a variety of majors, including STEM fields?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How do Black men go about cultivating meaningful, value-added relationships with key institutional agents?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 2010, the Schott Foundation for Public Education published a report: Yes We Can: The Schott 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males. The report highlighted the gaps between Black males and their Latino and White male counterparts; one factor that helps to identify attrition gaps and how Black males may excel academically and socially (Harper, 2012). Research demonstrated the following:

Black male attrition is much more likely to be due to academic dismissal than to dropping out…opposed to those who leave voluntarily. It has been posited that
those who leave voluntarily, for whatever reason, face a different academic landscape than those who are dismissed (Hood, 1992, p. 13).

Presently, 78.2% of high school students graduate on time (U.S. Department of Education, 2009, 2010). Nevertheless, the attrition rate for Black males in the U.S. was 48% compared to 78% of White males, which demonstrated a gap of 31%. Furthermore, retention was also higher compared to White males (Davis, 2003; Jackson, 2003; Noguera, 2003; Ogbu, 2003). As of 2003, Black males were comprised of only 40% of the U.S K-12 school populace (Harper, 2006). The NCES (2014) stated that, “there was no measurable difference in the 2009 event dropout rates for males” (p. 5). However, when observed by ethnicity and gender, Black males had a higher percentage dropout rate than White males. Despite efforts implemented by K-12 politicians, administrators, parents, and educators, to improve retention and lessen attrition, the dropout factor continues to be a point of debate (Hood, 1992; NCES (2014). However, there are six factors that promote retention: (a) aspirational capital: which means having the ability to maintain the hopes and dreams despite obstacles that may inhibit an individual’s state of mind; (b) linguistic capital: which implies that students of color arrive at school with multiple communication skills that are different from a middle class skill set perspective and that these communication skills may take the formation of oral histories and storytelling’s; (c) familial capital: which references a knowledge base brought about by and through family relations (this is where their sense of community, cultural intuition, and history is formed); (d) social capital: which means having a vast array of connections between the community and social arenas is important; (e) navigational capital: which is the possession of an ability of Black males to find direction in and through the pipeline of education in order to attain their educational doctorate; and (f) Resistant capital: which is a knowledge base that is keen on recognizing inequities in
education, therefore, oppositional behavior is used to challenge a system of inequality (Yasso, 2005).

**Journeying Academically in College**

According to Harper (2006), “While troublesome outcomes among and challenges faced by Black males in K-12 schools have been explored and consistently documented, it has only been in recent years that an emphasis has been placed on Black male college students” (p. 1). Over the last three decades, college enrolment rates have increased (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Black male undergraduate enrollees consisted of 33.3 % when compared to the overall graduate rate of 48.1 % (U.S. Department of Education, 2011; Harper, 2012). Once Black males enrolled into college, they were likely to be enrolled at two-year colleges; Black males earned lower grades; they studied less and were less likely to be involved in campus activities. As Black males enter college, they are sometimes burdened by a lack of enrolment, low graduation rates, and high dropout rates (Cuyjet, 2006; Flowers, 2006; Bonner and Bailey, 2006; Flowers, 2007; Harper, Carini, Bridges & Hayek 2004; National Urban Leauge, 2007). Furthermore, there was a lack of retention and disengagement in academic preparedness of young Black college males (Harper, 2006; Yosso, 2005). Research conveys that Black males graduate at a slower pace than their peers, due to a higher dropout rate or abandoning college abruptly (Cuyjet, 2006; Flowers, 2006, 2007; Bonner, and Bailey, 2006; Harper, et al., 2004; National Urban Leauge, 2007). Some Black males abandoned college because of alienation, discrimination, environmental incompatibility, and/or isolation (Noguera, 2003). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2012), 11.5% of Black males abandoned college in their first year. During their fifth year, studies predicted that 83% of Black males left voluntarily, dropped out, or were dismissed (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Moreover, they were dissatisfied
with their college experience and expressed dissatisfaction from the feeling of not fitting in, or not considered, in similar fashions, as comparable to their White male counterparts (Gibbs & Ann, 1988; Noguera, 2003). Even disparities such as a lack of preparedness, persistence, or unforeseen circumstances became obstacles and reasons for leaving school (Cole & Espinoza; 2008; NCES, 2011; Wood, 2011). The lack of preparedness Black males faced became obstacles when performing on tests and in doctoral programs (Nettles & Millett, 2006; NCES, 2010-2011). Researchers have proclaimed that some Black males were not academically prepared for higher education and, more specifically, the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) or even doctoral studies (Nettles & Millett, 2006). The GRE is administered to adequately measure the intelligence of a student’s knowledge (Herrnstein & Murray, 2010). However, what may be more telling is the component of poor schools, impoverished neighborhoods, and a lack of parental education, which has been shown to have an impact on Black males from achieving high test scores, and alienate them from entering college, or entering doctoral programs (Nettles & Millett, 2006). Black males’ ability to choose colleges, enter college, pay for college, attempt matters of engagement, and responding productively to racism, were factors Black males experienced in college (Harper, 2012). Although there were Black males who either dropped out of school or entered college at a later point in life, they still succeeded because of student and campus engagement, persistence, and a determination to thrive well beyond all expectations (Habermas, 1989; Morales & Trotman, 2011; Quaye & Harper, 2012, 2014). Exceeding the expectations of many is “a function of meaningful interactions with diverse peers, supportive relationships with university faculty and staff, as well as frequent and educationally purposeful engagement in campus activities and student organizations” (Strayhorn, 2014, p. 2) and, furthermore, on building capital (Yasso, 2005).
The National Black Male College Achievement study focused on different forms of Black male capital in order to make their way through the educational system (Harper’s, 2012; Yasso, 2005). In Harper’s (2012) study, he interviewed undergraduate Black males from low income and working-class families from 42 colleges in different states, in the United States. Not only did Harper explore, how they acquired various forms of capital that they did not possess when they entered their respective colleges…. the study also explored how these students negotiated popularity alongside achievement in peer groups and thrived in environments that were sometimes racist and often culturally unresponsive. (p. 6)

More than any researcher, Harper asked Black males about their:

- educational disadvantage, underrepresentation, insufficient preparation, academic underperformance, disengagement, and Black male student attrition. It included some questions that researchers could explore to better understand how Black undergraduate men successfully navigate their way to and through higher education and onward to rewarding post-college options. (p. 5)

Building on Harper (2012, 2014) and Strayhorn (2014), continued research has shown that Black male student engagement aided in student success. Part of student engagement was to observe how forms of Black male capital can assist Black males to become successful in the educational system (Harper, 2012; Yasso, 2005). In chapter I (Figure 1), Harper’s Anti-Deficit Achievement Framework summarized factors Black male experienced as they “navigate their way to and through higher education and onward to rewarding post-college options” including doctoral attainment (Harper, 2012, p. 5). Pre-college socialization and readiness, college achievement,
and post-college success was utilized. Thus, there is a need to focus on the three domains seen in Figure 1:

a) Pre-college socialization and readiness

- Familial factors- i.e., how family nurtures Black males’ interests in school, and their aspirations, etc.
- K-12 school forces, i.e., teachers and educator’s assistance to help Black males get into college, negotiated between academic achievement and peer achievement, etc.
- Out-of-schools college prep resources, i.e., acquiring knowledge about college from low-income and first-generation Black males, Black male’s college readiness through programs and experiences, etc.,

b) College achievement

- Classroom experiences, i.e., being the only Black male in a classroom setting, earning a GPA above 3.0, responding productively to stereotypes in the classroom, etc.
- Out-of-class engagement, i.e., taking advantage of college resources and engagement opportunities, benefiting academically from of Black male student leaders, fostering supportive relationships with lower performing Black male peers, etc.
- Enriching educational experiences, i.e., development gains from studying abroad, cultivating value-added relationships with faculty and administrators, doing research with professors, etc.

b) Post-college success

- Graduate school enrollment, i.e., factors that contributed to the developments and support for Black males in perusing degrees beyond a bachelor degree, and how they stay
committed to attaining graduate and professional degrees while dealing with racism at both IHE/PWIs etc.

- Career readiness, i.e., experiences that enable Black males to compete successfully for careers in their fields, encountering racial politics in post-college workplace settings, how faculty and institutional agents enhance the career readiness and development of Black males, etc.

The third domain of Harper’s anti-deficit framework aimed to demonstrate how graduate school enrollment and career readiness are a part in post-college success.

**Graduate Education & Post-Graduate Experience**

Black males accounted for approximately 12% of the total student enrollment in U.S. institutions of higher education (NCES, 2015). Of this enrollment data, a smaller percentage pursue graduate education. While Black males pursued graduate programs, they reported different experiences that helped them make their way to the completion of their degree. Research found that without some type of academic support, mentorship, or spirituality, Black males would not have been able to thrive effectively (Gasman, Hirschfeld, & Vultaggio, 2008). Cuyjet (1997) suggested that a successful mentoring program coupled with spirituality were important for bolstering the college experience for Black males. However, he did not refute Black males when they, and other graduate students voiced their dissatisfaction with certain issues. Anderson and Swazey (1998) found that many graduate students considered the academic workload interfered greatly with their personal life, and many of them “found evaluating their own progress difficult” (p. 8). Despite these circumstances, graduate students believed that the graduate school experiences reinforced who they were spiritually, academically, and personally and how they navigated the workforce (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979).
Johnson-Bailey, Valentine, Cervero, and Bowles (2009) explored Black male graduates from a slightly different perspective as they wanted “to provide an accurate and first-hand account of the Black graduate student experiences” (p. 190). Results from their study found that Black males experienced hidden dimensions of social problems. For example, Black males expressed that they experienced subtle racism from some faculty, they experienced avoidance from their White peers, they felt that there was a lower expectation for them to succeed academically; and they felt there was a tendency, of White professors to assume that Black males were the spokesperson for their race.

Gardner and Holley (2011) indicated that Black males, more specifically, first-generation PhD students, self-navigated for a few reasons. First, they had to self-identify with “braking the chain” (Gardner & Holley, 2011, p. 82). “Breaking the Chain” is a phrase used at times for how Black students believed they were sometimes limited academically due to familial circumstance or personal and social factors that also hindered other family members from entering college or completing it. They also voiced at times that “not knowing the correct pathway to take brought confusion” (p. 84), and that it was as if they “were living between two worlds” (p. 85); between the life and the system worlds (Habermas, 1989). Secondly, with no support systems, they found their way. For example, Moore, Madison-Colmore, and Smith (2003) indicated that black males performed better academically as a result of a, “Prove Them Wrong Syndrome.” This “syndrome” was explained through the social, personal, and academic experiences of Black males in graduate school. Howard and Hammond (1985) explained further that the syndrome is a psychological phenomenon that resulted when the main stream society projected an image of intellectual inferiority. As a result, Black males were motivated to prove the syndrome wrong. Doing so, Black males became more determined to attain their degree (Hamilton, 2007).
Inadvertently, this syndrome brought about coping mechanisms that established rigor and grit (Duckworth & Duckworth, 2016). Thus, Moore et al. study found that Black males would walk with more purpose, take on more academic work, and attempt to appear just as intelligent, if not better, than their White peers (Howard & Hammond, 1985). Furthermore, they became more assertive in their academic studies and held more purpose and confidence in their graduate experiences (Howard & Hammond, 1985; Strayhorn, 2017).

Regardless of the circumstance or where they were in their academic career, Black males searched for support. Felder (2010), for example stated that:

faculty members who employed mentoring practices that promoted success for African American doctoral students were accessible. It appears that faculty members who shared brief, sincere encounters with students were viewed as considerate and helpful. This was especially important when students wanted to discuss ideas about research. (p. 470)

Employing mentoring practices was helpful. Flowers (2006) suggested that IHEs focus on services that would assist Black males. For many Black males, finding mentors in their area of study was helpful, especially when they were disconnected from their doctoral program. Lewis, Ginsberg, Davies, and Smith (2004), for example, indicated that a good predictor of Black male enrollment and graduation were, Black males’ having a mentor who was Black and who was part of their doctoral process. In IHEs, Louis and Freeman (2018) found that mentorship was an important reason for Black males’ satisfaction. Referencing Strayhorn and Terrell (2007), a mentor is a “role model, teacher, advisor, guide, and resource” (p. 70), and these attributes were important for Black males while working on their doctorate or later working in an IHE. Research suggested that having a colleague to support them professionally was not as important in their
current positions compared to doctoral programs. Still, they would attempt to connect with faculty who were Black and those who were tenured (Tillman, 2001).

Black faculty make up 6% of full-time instructional faculty and the percentage of Black males in faculty positions is smaller (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Yet, Black males continue to graduate with doctorates and find jobs in higher education.

Unfortunately, there is little empirical research that supports the experience of Black males who work in higher education, specifically, those who teach. Research suggested that job satisfaction for African Americans in IHEs is increasing (Flowers, 2005). As a result of IHE-supported diversity initiatives, there is greater demand for inclusion and Black professors believed that their race was an issue to be explored. McGowan (2000) found that the race of the professor had an impact on the teaching process. Black professors at times believed that White students did not respect them as much as they respected their White professors and that White students had a “readiness to critique the faculty member’s work, and their rating of poor on teacher evaluations” (McGowan, 2000, p. 19).

This experience was summed up best by one un-named professor from research at one IHE:

I have come to understand that I do not have the privilege of walking into a classroom and having students assume that I am a capable and credible teacher. Nor do I have the privilege of walking into a classroom and having people assume that I have earned my position through hard work and determination. I have to be deliberate (Tuitt, Hanna, Martinez, del Carmen Salazar, & Griffin, 2009, p. 69)

As faculty members in IHE, Black males still continue to identify some type of professional relationship, even in the faculty role (Tillman, 2001). Nevertheless, when Black faculty found support and comradery with other faculty members, especially those with tenure, a closer
connection with the department and the university was established more (Cobb, Fox, Many, Matthews, McGrail, Tinker Sachs, Wang, 2006; Tillman, 2001). As a result, when Black faculty can confide in them and with other faculty members who shared or had similar experiences, they experienced more of a belonging and connection.

During graduate and post-graduate experiences, Black males needed support from certain individuals, and more importantly, they used their own motivation as support. At points in time, Black males relied on their own intuition and self-motivation to attain their degree as they were confronted with challenges. As Black males are the minority, both literally and statistically, in institutions of higher education, support is important. And furthermore, Black males appreciated support when in their professional positions. Although Black males will continue to experience some predicaments, it is obvious that they do succeed.

**Post College Success and Doctoral Attainment**

Post-college success can be considered a factor in Black males’ accomplishments, considering their journey through pre-and post-graduate degrees. Research has shown that once Black males are hired in the professional arena, they will encounter the same type of experiences they encountered during their undergraduate and graduate careers (Harper, 2009, 2012; Wood & Harper, 2015; Wood & Palmer, 2014). Akin to the academic experiences during K-12 and undergraduate programs, doctoral attainment is least among Black males compared to their White counterparts (Kim, 2002; Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2009; National Center for Education Statistics, 2011; Willie, Grady & Hope, 1991). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2011), in 1976, the percentage of Black males who entered a post-baccalaureate degree was 4.7%; White males’ percentage during that same time was 90.7%. In 2011, the percentage of Black males entering a post-baccalaureate degree increased to 10.6%; for
White males, the percentage decreased to 71.1%. Therefore, an exploration of college success factors and a “measured” design, which points toward “discussions or exploration,” enables this exploration (Harper, 2007, p. 128). Furthermore, the numbers of Black males who acquired a bachelor, masters, and doctoral degree performed better academically than when they were in secondary and undergraduate programs (Harper, 2007). However, similar experiences Black males faced during undergraduate and high school still emerged as a re-occurring experience during and after doctoral degree attainment (Kim, 2002; Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2009; Willie et al., 1991). Black males who sought out doctoral degrees experienced some trepidation of high tuition, receiving less counseling and advising, and were less likely to enter and complete graduate school (Kador & Lewis, 2007; Kane, 1994). Therefore, having access to doctoral programs and developing a relationship with advisors, councelors, and mentors assisted Black male doctoral students in matriculating through set programming (Johnson & Huwe, 2003). Components such as being: (a) being empathetic, (b) dedicated, (c) flexible, (d) humorous, (e) warm, (f), and (g) supported assisted in doctoral attainment for Black males (Johnson & Huwe, 2003). Cujet (2006) conveyed that understanding Black male rituals, understanding their cultural attributes, and having a familiarity of their individuality and identity, by means of curriculum and classes, promoted equity of cultural authenticity and created an opportunity for students to academically succeed during pre and post graduate degrees and professional positions in HE.

**Retention of Professional/ Professorate Positions**

There has been minimal research surrounding the professional and professorate experiences of Black males who work in HE (Griffin, Bennett, & Harris, 2013; Mosley, 1980; Wood & Harper, 2015). Once Black males receive their doctorate, some enter HE working as
professors in PWIs and HBCUs (Fleming, Gill, & Swinton, 1978). While working in HE, they work hard at creating a mentorship and fostering relationships with faculty, staff, and students (Griffin & Reddick, 2011; James, 2015). In IHEs the percentage of professorship for Black males did not keep pace with their White and Latino male counterparts (NCES, 2010, 2011). The profession illuminated a great underrepresentation of Black men who occupy IHEs which does not reflect the increasing and diverse campus and student population in many cases (Allen, Epps, Guillory, Suh, & Bonous-Hammarrth, 2000; Bible, Joyner, & Slate, 2011; Harris, Joyner, & Slate, 2010). Although Black males work in HE at higher levels of the academic spectrum than previous years (Ryu, 2008), there is a shortage of post-secondary males of color (The National Center for Education Statistics, 2003); only 7% of Black male faculty are represented (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Research has shown that when Black males are employed at colleges and universities, they are employed at junior colleges and comprehensive universities (Konrad, 1991). When minorities are hired into IHE, they tend to be the only minority in their department (Turner & Myers, 1999), and are at points seen by colleges as “less qualified as the ‘token’ person of color” (Harte, et al., 2011, p. 46). Once in HE, their lived experiences tend to be affected by remnants of the same challenges they faced throughout their educational journey which affected their professional growth (Hunn, Harley, Elliott, Min & Canfield, 2015; Mack, Watson & Camacho, 2014). Moreover, Black males with doctorates working in positions such as, dean of Students, assistant provost, professorship, and executive and assistant directorships have increased (Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2016). Still, while working in these positions, their capacity for autonomy, institutional fit, and job satisfaction appear to be less than White and Asian males (Hooker & Johnson, 2011).
The enrolment of Black male students on college campuses has increased, signifying a need for increased numbers of Black male faculty (Bennett, 2001; Reid, 1993). Despite this need, attrition occurs due to (a) hiring practices and (b) a lack of success (Darden et al., 1998). Flowers and Jones (2003) suggest that increased levels of retention can bring about higher levels of retention in colleges and universities. Yet “racial/ethnicity and gender are still relevant factors in admissions and employment practices” (Jackson, 2006, p. 319). While there exist an 11.22% decrease in Black male participation in academic leadership positions, and a 37.47% decrease in representation, Black males remain ahead of Hispanic and Asian males in leadership positions (Jackson, 2011). Moreover, the percentage of Black males in any position at post-secondary degree-granting institutions remains lower compared to their White male counterparts (Jackson, 2006, 2011). Table 3 demonstrates the distribution of Black males in academic roles at all institutions (NCES, 2013).

Table 3.

*Distribution of Male Academic Leadership at Degree Granting Post-Secondary Institutions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Sex, and Academic Rank</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Males</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professors</td>
<td>102,520</td>
<td>4,018</td>
<td>3,669</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Associate professors</td>
<td>65,320</td>
<td>4,321</td>
<td>3,533</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assistant professors</td>
<td>54,700</td>
<td>4,169</td>
<td>3,506</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instructors</td>
<td>32,014</td>
<td>2,714</td>
<td>2,888</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lectures</td>
<td>12,464</td>
<td>760</td>
<td>834</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other faculty</td>
<td>49,894</td>
<td>29,23</td>
<td>2,768</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once hired by colleges and universities, Black males contend with staying, which makes up the 43% of college faculty (Harvey and Anderson, 2005). Thus, in the situations of
undergraduate and graduate programs, IHEs can discuss how to retain Black men with doctorates by creating a warm and friendly environment (Jackson, 2003; Lumpkin, 2011). Whereas Black males may feel the reality that they may be seen at times as unimportant, IHEs can modify the culture, creating a more welcoming environment in the institution by nurturing them and treating them as valued colleagues and providing an atmosphere that is conducive for success (Lumpkin, 2011). IHE can (a) give more attention to credentials, as opposed to color or ethnicity; (b) provide support for research surrounding minority issues; (c) not expect Black males to handle minority affairs simply due to their ethnicity; and; (d) hire more minorities on campus, thus, working in higher education can be a remarkable benefit, particularly for Black males who hold doctorates (Turner & Myers, 2000). Nevertheless, observing an anti-deficit approach, doctoral attainment and post college success of working in an IHE can be achieved more readily for Black males (Harper, 2012).

Summary

Although not much research exists in the pre and post-graduate work and professorship of Black males, research has shown that Black males continue to strive despite obstacles. From K-12 through working in an institution of higher education, many Black males have had similar occurrences as it pertains to their lived experiences. Chapter III summarizes the techniques for the methodological procedures, such as the collection of data. Chapter IV provides experiences and themes from the stories told by the participants’ personal points of view. Chapter V provides a thematic analysis from all the participant’s stories. Chapter VI provides a summary, a discussion, the researcher’s perspective, a review of implications, and recommendations for future studies.
Chapter III: Methodology

Introduction

Every individual is different; participants experience a phenomenon in different ways (Merriam, 2002). Therefore, to explore the lived experiences of Black males who earned doctorates, qualitative method phenomenology was used. A qualitative methodology was used for expressing and identifying important situations that, at points, go unnoticed (Merriman, 1998), It is one that focused on descriptions of what people experience and how it is that they experience what they experience. One can employ a general phenomenological perspective to elucidate the importance of using methods that capture people's experience of the world without conducting a phenomenological study that focuses on the essence of shared experience. (Patton, 1990, p. 71)

This approach enabled me to move into the participant’s world so that I, as the research instrument, was able to extract meaning, interpret the meaning, and analyze data gathered. As the researcher, I gathered data using sampling strategies, and data collected from recorded interviews and from the stories told by Black males (Guion, Diehl, & McDonald, 2011; Golafshani, 2003; Merriam, 2002; Patton, 2002; Thurmond, 2001; Seale, 1999b). This methodological procedure explored the experiences of Black males’ post-graduate and professional practices. The following probe directed this study:

Describe the lived experiences of Black males who earned doctorates

Research Design

Phenomenology is grounded in the literature of Edmund Husserl (Thevenaz, 1962). Husserl (1931), believed that phenomenology describes how knowledge comes into being and how the participant’s knowledge is based (Moustakas,1994). Husserl rejected the notion that objects exist independently and that the objects were reliable. Individuals are certain about how
they perceive things in consciousness and that the nature of consciousness is intentional (Fouche, 1993; Holloway, 1997). This phenomenological study described data in order to understand the lived experiences of an individual (Babbie, 2007). The technique of phenomenology involved the researcher deeply committed to understanding theory, language, and techniques phenomenology conveys (Munhall, 2007). Phenomenology involves the suspension of natural assumptions to see the pure state of consciousness, identifying the human experiences (Husserl, 1931; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005; Mertens, 2005). Identifying those experiences involved the *epoche*.

Moustakas (1994) suggested that, “I, as a conscious person, am not set aside” and ‘with an open, transcendental consciousness, I carry out the *epoché*” (p. 87). Per Patton (1990), the *epoche* involved the researcher clarifying and eliminating any preconceptions, biases, and/or assumptions about the phenomenon being studied. For example, when I began the epoche, I was conscious of my assumptions and prejudices that accompanied my experiences with other Black males. Before I gained knowledge into the lived experiences of the selected participants, I cleared my mind of my personal beliefs and assumptions, such as:

- Black males having a long history of not being recognized for their academic ability as opposed to other abilities, such as the physical competence the social environment recognizes them for;
- the inability of Black males, with doctorates to break through the glass ceiling in academe, to a greater degree, without being cast into cultural and ethnic studied positions; and
- Black males being compared to their White male counterparts or being judged based on their race opposed to their intellect when seeking a position in an IHE.
This methodology enabled me to have an ongoing awareness of my preconceptions prior to, during, and after the interviews and data collection/dissemination process had been conducted (Williams, 2008). I kept a record of these beliefs and assumptions in a journal so that I was reflective during the process.

**Research Paradigm**

Good qualitative research explores the meaning that attributes to the understanding of social and human problems (Creswell, 2009). A good phenomenological study begins with a good research topic, an area of interest, and a paradigm (Creswell, 1994). The paradigm is the basic set of beliefs that guides the action of the research process (Dinzen & Lincoln, 2000). The researcher’s goal for this study was to separate belief from opinion and how well he can define the study (Creswell, 1994; Meyrick, 2006). Therefore, this study is characterized by the idea that data are held within the perspectives of Black males who hold doctorates and work in an institution of HE; I interviewed these participants in order to collect data. In the qualitative process, the participants provided rich and detailed descriptions to the questions asked by the researcher. Asking the central research question describe the lived experiences of Black males who earned doctorates, provided raw data for a structured inductive approach. An inductive style approach assisted in analyzing the raw contextual data and disseminating it into a summary of findings from the data that focused on the meaning the participants provide in the situation (Creswell, 2009). Furthermore, an inductive approach enabled me to use the interviews to build on meaning in order to describe the phenomenon accurately (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010).
Sampling

In qualitative research, purposeful sampling strategies are important to a phenomenological research study which often uses purposeful sampling that will increase a richer descriptive case (Patton, 2002; Seidman, 2006; Sandelowski, 2000). According to Seidman (2006), a phenomenological approach requires, at minimum, three participants (England, 2012; Giorgi, 2009). In this study, I planned to interview seven or eight participants that brought about accuracy of fit to the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Seale, 1999b; Robson, 2002). My samples were based on availability and my accessibility to the participants (Babbie 1995). I sought participants who were Black American males with doctorates; who attained their doctorate within the last five years; and whose experiences were fresh, opposed to those who have been entrenched in IHE for years. Black males who live in the Midwest, Southeast, and Northwest regions of the United States and who work in an IHE, as faculty, administration, or staff were sought after. Moreover, men of African descent/non-native Americans, Latinos, or Spanish males were not included in this study. I respected self-identification of Black males who identify as African American even though they may be of mixed race. With an interpretivist approach, I selected the pool of participants purposely by means of chain and network sampling (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009; Merriam, 2002; Patton, 2002). Referencing Patton (2002), Glesne (2011) stated that snowball, chain, or network sampling attains:

knowledge of potential cases from people who know people who meet research interests. Wright and Decker (1997) used this approach to find men and women who were active armed robbers at the time of their research. Snowball sampling is useful for getting started when you have no other way to find the participants you want. (p. 45)
Selection of Participants

Participants were selected by chain and/or network sampling (Patton, 2002). I am aware that individuals within my network knew of others, i.e., Black males with doctorates who work in IHE, who were able to connect me with them. Using purposeful sampling techniques, a brief description of the study and the defining of the perimeters was provided by means of email (see Appendix D). It is through these methods that I organized participants to be included in data collection. Data collection was derived from narratives and from face-to face, skype, and/or phone interviews. Purposeful sampling enabled me to gain access to Black males with doctorates who worked in an IHE. All participants had a PhD or an EdD.

Once participants responded, I arranged a date and time to conduct the interview. During the interview, participants were provided with a consent form so that the interviews were conducted. During this time, the participants and myself became acquainted in order to make more of a comfortable setting and the discussion we had.

To provide rich and thick descriptions from the participants’ accounts, I used semi-structured questions. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, I requested that each participant use a pseudonym during the interview process. Any person(s) the participant’s stated by name during the interview was given pseudonyms. Finally, the participants were reminded that participation was completely voluntary.

To the best of my ability, I created a safe, quiet, and comfortable space for the participants during the interview process. Whether it was conducted in my office, their office, in a private room at a library, or over the phone, the space created freedom for participants to speak freely and comfortably about their experiences. After the interviews was completed, the audio recording was transcribed. A detailed analysis of the transcriptions enabled me to identify
patterns that would later be used for a thematic analysis (Smith, 2017). After the audio tapes were transcribed, I read and listened to the recordings multiple times to retrieve the meaning of the participants’ stories; this was accomplished by understanding the way the participants described their experience, thus, enabling me to find themes and categories. Incorporating these experiences into my long-term thought process using reflexivity and bracketing, as not to twist around research data; not making biased interpretations about the data; and setting aside personal experiences and preconceived notions about the research topic enabled me to provide the best account of their stories (Munhall, 2007; Seidman, 1998). Each experience was captured in a thematic analysis which created a profile to be interpreted (Seidman, 1998).

Site Selection

Although backyard research is easy access to participants, the establishment of rapport, time and allocation of resources are limited (Glesne, 2006). Nevertheless, at university and college settings across the United States, the percentage of Black males on campus and in leadership roles does not equal their White counterparts, limiting the sample pool of participants (Harper, 2006, 2012; NCES, 2015). Thus, the site chosen was based on the respondents and their participation. This study was conducted in Midwest, Southeast, and Northwest Regions. Initially, institutions sought out included Michigan State University, University Michigan-Ann Arbor, University of Michigan-Flint, Oakland University, Wayne State University and Concordia University, among others. Even two-year institutions of HE such as Mott Community College or Washtenaw Community College were considered. However, the final number of participants were also from Midwest, Southeast, and Northwest institutions.
Interviews

Interviews created the foundation for meaning making and helped to illuminate the essence of the interviews acquiring rich, thick descriptions (Creswell, 2009). Rich and thick descriptions, reflexivity, and credibility, for example, supported my role as the researcher, enhancing a trustworthy study (Creswell, 2009; Kidd & Kral, 2005). So, to illuminate the essence of the lived experiences of Black males, the intention of this study was to conduct semi-structured interviews, with seven Black male participants, exploring what assisted them in attaining a doctorate and a job in higher education. This process was built on the responses participants provided for each question (Moustakas, 1994; Seidman, 2006).

For each interview, I followed the same procedure for accuracy, i.e., participants were asked the same questions from the same semi-structured interview guide. Although each participant were asked the same questions, I anticipated that each participant’s response would be different; this approach enabled impromptu responses and open conversation between the participant and myself, and impromptu responses and conversations, hopefully, triggered follow-up questions. Many follow-up questions were the basis for a second interview. Nevertheless, follow-up questioning was important so that each participant’s story could be accurately portrayed, bringing about “credibility” of this research study (Morse, et al., 2008).

There were two rounds of interviews per participant (Glesne, 2006; Seidman, 2006). Interview one was 60-90 minutes and focused on the experiences, and a follow-up focused on the details of the experiences told during the first interview for a deeper, rich description. When clarification was needed, a brief follow-up was conducted. As the research instrument, I used my researcher’s field notes and memoing to capture reactions, feelings, and visual responses during the interview process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). To capture a participant’s reactions, I
must sense that non-verbal language is just as significant as verbal language. Therefore, I was aware of the importance of body language, such as the nodding of their head or sounds they made. Thus, certain occurrences were to not always detected on the tape; however, I did record them in my notes and margins of the transcriptions. The researcher must be attentive and precise to record these findings and record them accurately (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls & Ormston, 2013).

Fontana and Frey (1994) integrated qualitative research in the early eighties with the purpose of using interviews as a means for the expansion of collecting data. Data, such as data collection, data interpretation, and data analysis are unique in nature and depict a diverse approach of inquiry (Creswell, 2009).

The participants were previously informed about the 60-90 minute interview (Holstein & Gubrium, 1994) and were encouraged to think of a pseudonym for anonymity purposes. Each participant was interviewed face-to-face, skype, or by phone, allowing for consistency and accuracy (Munhall, 2007). Since the interviews were conducted in face-to-face, skype, or by phone, the process of interviewing participants demonstrated precision and consistency when gathering data (Glesne, 2006; Seidman, 2006). As part of the data collection process, I began with a question that started the discussion (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). The initial question was based on the lived experiences of Black males who earned doctorates. General question, used from the interview protocol guide was “Could you tell me a little about yourself? or, “I understand from what you have told me that….Can you tell me more about that? During the interview, if there was no answer from the participant, I asked questions such as “How or why do you suppose that is?” I probed further “to achieve depth of answers in terms of penetration, exploration and explanation” (Ritchie, et al., 2013, p. 141), specifically if significant wondering occurred (Munhall, 2007) or if the answer is of “surface” level. Ritchie et al. (2013) convey that
an initial response is often at a fairly “surface” level: the interviewer will use follow-up questions to obtain a deeper and fuller understanding of the participant's meaning. The in-depth format also permits the researcher to explore fully all the factors that underpin participants' answers: reasons, feelings, opinions and beliefs. (p. 141)

Subsequently, an interview protocol guide, with questions that pertained to the issues being covered was used (Merriam, 2009).

Having an awareness of the interview process, I did my best to make the participants feel as comfortable as possible with telling their stories. After the participants shared their stories with me, the stories were transcribed. The transcriptions collected illuminated themes that supported a conceptual frame, which supported the participants’ life experiences. After a final analysis of thematic interpretations from the interviews, I was able to provide implications of the study, my contributions to this study, and my recommendation for why this study is important.

According to Schuman (1982), this format (a) enabled the context for the participant experiences, (b) recreated the facts of their experiences, and (c) aided in the reflection on the meaning of participants experiences; these assisted in laying the foundation for follow-up questions. After the transcriptions were read thoroughly, selective coding, which helped to generate themes and categories, and a thematic analysis was administered. Building trust, ethical consideration, and data management assisted the researcher in the appropriate documentation of the interview process that helped to complete the study.

**Data Collection**

Data collection involved acquiring multiple sources of data (Creswell, 2009). A qualitative study, therefore, has a different approach than a quantitative method. This study did not include surveys or instrumentation for measurements. Contrariwise, recorded audio;
observational protocol, i.e., descriptive notes, personal journals, reflective, and hand-written notes, etc.; and interview protocol, i.e., a written record of date, time, place, and number of questions etc., were used. These characteristics were dependent upon me, the researcher, and my ability to apply a theoretical lens for the purpose of interpreting holistic accounts and gathering data for data verification (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Gathering data for verification was partially dependent upon gatekeepers (Neuman, 2000). Considering that there are gatekeepers, “someone with the formal or informal authority to control access to a site” (Neuman, 2000, p. 352), I needed to gain access through persons who aided with access to other potential participants (Holloway, 1997). At points, to keep from becoming isolated from potential informants, I asked my research committee to assist me in providing names of and contact information for Black males who may want to be a part of this study. I ensured that all participants were ethically appropriated for this study (Holloway, 1997). Thus, to inform ethical research, informed consent forms were used (Holloway, 1997; Kvale, 1996). Once participants provided their approval for participation, they were provided with consent forms (see Appendix C). The informed consent form included the following:

- the purpose of the research,
- an understanding that Black males are the participants in the study,
- the procedures of this study,
- the ethical guidelines of what the researcher will follow,
- the benefit and the risk of the study,
- their voluntary right to participate in the research,
- their right to stop the research process at any time,
- the right to confidentiality,
Implications of Data, Data Analysis Procedures

Analysis of data involved making sense out of the text taken from the analysis and understanding that there is an interpretation of a larger meaning in the data (Creswell, 2009). Thus, a reflection about the data, memo writing, an analysis of seven themes and/or perspectives, and the use of a linear approach assisted the researcher in finding meaning (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). Data analysis is a specific process of technique used when analyzing data (Rossman & Rallis, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). To make sure that the data is accurate, techniques such as bracketing my initial thoughts, feelings, and assumptions, inside the transcript margins, assisted me in summarizing each interview (Moustakas, 1994; Lester, 1999).

Bracketing Themes

Bracketing, per Patton (1990), involved identifying key phrases, interpreting the themes from the phrases, locating the meaning of the themes, identifying the meaning of what it reveals about the phenomenon, and the providing a definition of reoccurring themes identified. Presented to phenomenology by Husserl (1931), Moustakas (1994), and Fouche (1993) introduced the epoche, (the bracketing out of the researchers’ preconceptions and ideas; not allowing theory and personal ideas to clutter his mind and thought process). I repeatedly listened to each recording of the participants so that I interpreted meaning of their experiences (Holloway, 1997; Hycner, 1999). Information that did not fit into themes were discarded (Moustakas, 1994). Thus, I explored bands of themes formed by clusters (groupings of meaning) (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994).

Conducting Thematic Analysis

After bracketing, I identified key themes and sub-themes from the narratives which emerged from the interviews of a summarization or thematic analysis (Hycner, 1999). Themes
are essential as it illuminates the experiences told by each participant (Van Manen, 1997). Using the thematic analysis, I made clear the findings and cited references that supported the participants’ life experiences that was confirmed in the relevant literature section of this study. Each thematic analysis was coded in a case by case basis (Gibbs, 2007).

**Isolating Thematic Statements**

To uncover thematic aspects of the stories told, the researcher was detailed, listened to the recordings, read the transcripts, and searched verbatim contextual quotes that illuminated each participant’s experiences (van Manen, 1990). To make sure that the voices of the participants were illuminated clearly and accurately, the researcher clustered minor themes with significant themes. Each cluster of minor and major themes will be separated so that there exists no misperception (van Manen, 1990).

**Essential Themes**

According to van Manen (1990), essential themes highlight the experiences of all participants’ stories in the research study. Van Manen asked two specific questions: (a) “Is this phenomenon still the same if we imaginatively change or delete this theme from the phenomenon?” and (b) “Does the phenomenon without this theme lose its fundamental meaning?” (p. 107). Following the identification of themes, a textural and structural summary was provided about the experience to validate the study and [transform] participants “everyday expressions into expressions appropriate to the scientific discourse supporting the research” (Sadala & Adorno, 2001, p. 289).

**Data Storage Methods**

With permission of the participants, each interview was taped, recorded, and transcribed, and my notes taken during each interview were edited appropriately. The participants were
notified that the recordings were taped and that the recordings and transcriptions would be stored in a locked file in the researcher’s office for the duration of the study. Each participant’s interview was coded to show the date, time, and year. If more than one participant interview took place on the same date, a character letter of the pseudonym and then the date, and year were recorded. The analysis of data was generated and collected from the responses of the participants. The participant responses were transcribed and organized (Giorgi, 1997). The gathered phrases, words, and the experiences in told responses generated themes that assisted the researcher to answer the questions for this study. The transcriptions were stored in Microsoft Word document, which was used to organize and hold the transcriptions. The documents were transferred and stored in a digital file protected by a code that only the researcher can unlock. To ensure that equipment did not fail, jeopardizing the data collected, the researcher had an understanding that equipment failure can damage the results of study (Easton, McComish, & Greenberg, 2000). More importantly, a trustworthy study includes the collection of field notes, observations, interviews, and data analysis (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003).

**Role of the Researcher**

The power that I hold as the researcher is not negotiable. As the researcher and storyteller of this phenomenon, I was aware that the prospective participants, i.e., leaders and practitioners in the field hold power. I had a duty to do due diligence to explore and reveal the stories of my participants (Baxter & Jack, 2008). My role was to bring about an awareness of the possible meaning and contexts of each participant’s experiences as told by them (Moustakas, 1994).

**Process of the Researcher and Instrumentation**

At the heart of qualitative research is the research instrument (Chenail, 2011). Before I began the interview process, as Munhall (2007) suggested, I must decenter. I cleared my mind
of all information and experiences I held as a Black male. Although the participants and I shared some similar experiences, I was aware of how my inter-subjectivity may play, especially when giving an attentive ear in understanding the phenomenon. Furthermore, it was my duty to obtain data from the participants, understanding that research is a rigorous process due to the complexity of instrumentation. Acquired training and practice is essential (Sofaer, 2002). Therefore, distinguishing between the different responses occurring at the same time was important for the researcher to recognize.

Managing Objectivity

Objectivity can be tamed but not removed from the conscious mind. Objectivity can be viewed as detached or disengaged and, at points, characterized as disinterested, unbiased, or impersonal (Lloyd, 1995). Even my own beliefs, biases, and opinions about Black males who have attained a doctorate and working in HE were recognized. On the other hand, objectivity was understood to mean available and/or accessible. As the research instrument, I existed independently becoming reflexive, available, and unbiased, thus, becoming free from objectivity working out how to deal with it consciously (Glesne, 2006).

Subjectivity

Subjectivity can be either tamed or untamed (Peshkin, 1988). Subjectivity permeates the lived experiences, seeking to discover interpretations, and meaning from the participants’ experiences. This was accomplished in this qualitative study by the researcher remaining free from bias and any preconceptions about the phenomenon from prior experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Becoming free from bias, I separated my knowledge base of being a Black male from the participants’ experiences, as their experiences are not my own; I listened attentively and was open to what the participants were describing about the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994, p. 22).
For example, subjectivity was not be used arrogantly. Subjectivity is awareness that it is present without acting on it, using it to the researcher’s advantage; it is something that is not our own while engaged in researching the phenomenon (Peshkin, 1988).

Subjectivity cannot be eliminated. However, it can be tamed; only examining it when it is important that the researcher is actively involved in the research process (Peshkin, 1988). As Holstein and Gubrium (1997) contended, I am an active part in the process. I was not simply a pipeline of information, but one who transferred the information to the reader. The researcher’s role was critical to the success of the study (Ritchie, et al., 2013, p. 180). As the researcher, I was aware of the demands and energy this study required. As this study was demanding a skill set of confidence, adaptability, and a certain amount of control, the goal was to remain non-directive, keeping the interview process on task, and keeping my subjectivity tamed.

**Protecting the Researcher**

There was a certain amount of risk involved for the researcher when conducting fieldwork, e.g., extensive travel, varying environments such as different cities and places unfamiliar to the researcher. Therefore, arrangements were made that protected the researcher from health and safety risks, i.e., informing family and/or friends of the researcher’s whereabouts, time and place to arrive, and time and place of return. Risk factors included public places, traveling, and in private settings: “Researchers should maintain an awareness of such risk to themselves and their colleagues and make every effort to diminish the dangers” (Social Research Association, 2003, p. 25). Therefore, the researcher informed family members and/or partners about the researcher’s whereabouts during the research process.
Phenomenological Writing

Writing is a significant part of a phenomenological study (Van Manen, 1997). It “brings clarity and passion to the act of living” (Cameron, 2001, p. 4). Therefore, as the researcher, I brought clarity to the study by means of good writing in order to provide a richer understanding about the phenomenon. If by chance it was not clear, then, I must re-write again and again in order to reflect upon what each participant said that reinforces the phenomenon (Van Manen, 1997). Thus, phenomenology gives room for the researcher to create his own style in this type of research while yet being truthful (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Ethical Considerations

Interacting with participants and ethical considerations are inseparable. Schram (2006) revealed four key components that establishes a rapport:

- posturing and presentation of self,
- disclosing and exchanging,
- making public the private,
- disengaging and staying in touch

Cannella and Lincoln (2007) conveyed that the researcher’s ethical conduct is constantly emerging surrounding research process that the researcher incorporates for the protection of human subjects. In the final portion of the negotiation of the research, semi-structured interviewing in qualitative research has the potential to raise issues that are not anticipated, and ethical considerations were ready to be addressed. Before the interviews begin, participants were informed on and about the study. Every participant was provided with a consent form to sign that outlines the name and contact information of the researcher, the name of the researcher’s educational institution, purpose, risk, and the benefit in their participation. Participants were
informed that, at any time, they had the right to stop interviews or withdraw from the research study. All participants’ interviews were confidential. Only the researcher had access to the participants’ stories and/or recordings. When interviews were conducted over the phone, the consent form was signed and returned to the researcher before the telephone interview.

Other than the four key components of ethical consideration mentioned, there were also five accompaniments that helped to ground the study. The accompaniments were: truth, validity, reliability, confidentiality and anonymity, and doing no harm.

**Truth**

Is this study truthful in reflecting on the phenomenon of the study as perceived by the participants? (Hammersley, 1992). The validity and reliability of a qualitative study has a criterion that highlights the truthfulness of qualitative research (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Schurink, Schurink, & Poggenpoel, 1998). Not minimizing, but making significant the purpose of phenomenology, helps to describe in detail the phenomenon being conducted. The interpretation of the phenomenon, therefore, must have a basis. Therefore, the lived experiences of Black males who have earned doctorates was the focus of this research study. It begins without myths or biases but still, it was the participant’s firsthand accounts. Seale (1999b) stated that “trustworthiness of a research report lies at the heart of issues conventionally discussed as validity and reliability” (p. 266). The significance, then, is relevant to validity and reliability (Schurink, et al., 1998).

**Credibility**

One procedure used for validity was to create a detailed case of protocol, called, member checking (Creswell, 2009; Kretting, 1990). Member checking involves checking for accuracy. This process means sharing a portion of the final product with the participant to account for the
correctness of themes (Creswell, 2009; Krefting, 1990). Taking unpolished data back to participants will not be a consideration, because as Lincoln and Guba (1985) puts it, it “establishes truth value” (p. 215). It creates credibility and gives importance to participants stories. Furthermore, sharing the findings with each participant helps with the validity of the study, ensuring that the depth and breadth of their stories were told accurately (Moustakas, 1995; van Manen, 1990). Therefore, polished and accurate data were provided to the participants.

Validity

Validity is a term and process commonly used in quantitative studies for checks and balances; some research has referred to it as truth-value (Schurink, et al.,1998). Qualitative studies use this concept to demonstrate measure and accuracy. Many terms used to describe validity are quality, rigor, and trustworthiness (Davies & Dodd, 2002; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Seale, 1999b; Stenbacka, 2001). Validity or trustworthiness references whether the findings of a qualitative study can be true and/or certain (Guion, Diehl, & McDonald, 2011). There are two ways to validate a qualitative study; internal and external validity (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Ritchie, et al., 2003).

Internal validity deals with a constant comparative method (Silverman, 2000), or what Glaser and Strauss (1967) calls, a checking accuracy of fit. Accuracy of fit, enables the study to make sense (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested that internal validity contains five measures: (a) How rich and thick are the context descriptions? (b) Does the account ring true or enable a vicarious presence for the reader? (c) Are the data linked to the categories of prior theory? (d) Are areas of uncertainty identified? and (e) Are the conclusions considered accurate by the participants? (p. 279).
External validity refers to transferability (Golafshani, 2003). Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested measures such as (a) Are the characteristics of the original sample fully described enough to permit adequate comparison with other samples? (b) Does the report examine possible threats to generalization? (c) Does the researcher define the scope and boundaries of the study? (d) Do the findings include a thick description for readers to assess transferability or appropriateness for their own setting? (e) Do a range of readers report the findings to be consistent with their own experience? and (f) Is the study replicable to assess robustness? (p. 279). To be certain that the findings are true, “credibility, neutrality or confirmability, consistency or dependability and applicability or transferability are to be the essential criteria for quality” (Golafshani, 2003, p. 601; Guion, Diehl, & McDonald, 2011; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002; Thurmond, 2001); the results from two or more interviews were compared to see if similar results could be found. This not only created confidence in the phenomenon, it created confidence in the credibility of the research data. Aiding in the verification of data, using of rich, thick descriptions, clarifying bias, presenting negative information, and peer debriefing built a stronger study (Creswell, 2009). Moreover, to put forth a trustworthy study of the experiences of participants, diligence and safeguards were put in place in the form of feasibility (Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2002). Feasibility, for example, can be in the form of a pilot study, i.e., a smaller version of the main research study being conducted, where the researcher provides, in advance, a warning of failure of the research study or if the planned methods are too complex (O’Cathain, et al., 2015).

Reliability

Reliability, sometimes referred to as dependability (Seale, 1999a), is concerned with the “replicability of research findings” (Ritchie, et al., 2003, p. 270), and the quality of care the
researcher has for the study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) believed that the replication of a qualitative study is immature in nature considering the complicated matter of the phenomenon studied. Thus, trustworthiness and consistency (Robson, 2002) are significant in assessing the reliability of this study. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested questions that are important to the integrity of the study, such as Are the research questions clear? Therefore, credibility is used in qualitative studies to comprehend the phenomenon, obtain knowledge, and understand the phenomena (Morse, et al., 2008). Peer review or debriefing audits ensured dependability and constancy (Seale, 1999a). To maintain credibility, not only was the researcher enabled to be aware of “possible disharmonies of the research studies (Thurmond, 2001), but peer review added value and added to the reliability of this study.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

Confidentiality and anonymity was made clear to the participants of this study before the interview was conducted. The research involved the collection of personal information; therefore, ethical considerations were provided for the protection of all participants. The participants were encouraged to think of a pseudonym for anonymity purposes. Sensitive information was addressed directly so that participants were not surprised by unexpected questions. Both direct (being linked to a certain position or person) and indirect attribution (referencing characteristics that could lead to the identification of a certain individual) was avoided (Ritchie, et al., 2013). To safeguard this anonymity, the taped recordings and transcriptions from the interviews are stored in a locked file in the researcher’s office desk until the study concluded. After the conclusion of the study, all paper copies, notes, and copies of data were shredded. Electronic data such as audio recordings were erased with sanitizing software.
Doing No Harm

Doing harm can be an unexpected consequence of qualitative research, and there are issues to consider (Magolda & Weems, 2002; Social Research Association, 2003). The way in which the researcher conducted the study ethically, gives significance to the way the process is carried out and the manner in which human subjects are protected in the process (Cannella & Lincoln, 2007).

Summary

This chapter summarized the techniques I used for the methodological procedures for this research study regarding the lived experiences of Black males who earned doctorates. Moreover, this chapter highlighted the collection of data that consisted of interviews of Black males, which were recorded, analyzed, and coded. The issues of credibility, trustworthiness, reliability, and validity, just to name a few, were addressed to avoid biases and drawbacks. This research contributed to existing research so that there is a better understanding of the experiences Black males had during their career, which may help other individuals, such as Black male leaders in the field of education. Chapter IV provides experiences and themes from the stories told by the participants. Chapter V provides a thematic analysis from all the participant’s stories. Chapter VI provides a summary, a discussion, the researcher’s perspective, a review of implications, and recommendations for future studies.
Chapter IV: The Lived Experiences of Black Males with Doctorates

Introduction

This study explored the lived experiences of Black males who earned doctorates. A void in the research and literature surrounding this phenomenon compelled me in describing the factors that enabled Black men to accomplish post-graduate/doctoral attainment. In this chapter, I placed together the lived experiences of Black males using a qualitative phenomenological method. Methods associated with phenomenology and the conceptual framework guided me in the collection of narratives and analysis. I conducted an audio and a written narrative of the interviews to accurately provide the information of the participants accounts accurately. Chapter IV provides a personal insight to their lives and the constructs that will build on chapter V. In the construction of these experiences, I attempted to capture what transpired between their post-graduate and doctoral attainment and the present time encapsulating mini themes that may not be relative to all participants but were relative to their lives. Based on the lived experiences of Black males, this chapter illuminates their stories and provides a more intimate look into who these men are. Thus, the illumination of the narratives was organized by the primary topic: The lived experiences of Black males who earned doctorates.

Purposeful sampling, a brief description of the study, and the defining of the perimeters was provided to participants by means of email. It is through these methods that I organized participants and their stories. I arranged a date and time to conduct the interview. During the interview, participants were provided with the consent form and interview was conducted. During this time, the participants and I became acquainted which made the environment more comfortable for conversation.
In order to provide rich and thick descriptions from the participants’ accounts, I used the semi-structured interview guide, so to maintain accuracy of questions and content. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, I requested that each participant use a pseudonym during the interview process. Participants used a pseudonym, and I used an alias for names of persons mentioned in their stories.

To the best of my ability, I created a safe, quiet, and comfortable space for the participants during the interviews. After the interview was complete, the audio recording was transcribed and stored safely in a locked file in my office until I returned to do the analysis.

**Summary of Seven**

The results were developed by means of collecting narratives from face-to-face, skype, and/or phone interviews of the participants. The participants were from colleges and universities, and some, from research one institutions Midwest, Southeast, and Northwest regions of the United States. Purposeful sampling enabled me to gain access to Black males with doctorates who work in any capacity in an IHE. Furthermore, the sampling of the participants’ ages ranged from 34, to 45. All participants were either a PhD or an EdD.

**Participant Narratives**

These interviews allowed me the opportunity to get to know these participants, on a semi-personal level, concerning their lived experiences as they journeyed through post-graduate and professional career. Through their told experiences, I gained an essence of the phenomenon and told of their experiences the way the participants view them to illuminate their truth value (their voiced accounts; Sandelowski, 1991). The following narratives provide insight to the personal lived experiences of Tyrone, Paul, Mark, Baldwin, Gordon, Robert, and Chip.
Narratives

Dr. Tyrone’s Story

Dr. Tyrone, a former student athlete, is now a father and a husband, first, and a professor and administrator at a Midwest HE university, second. This thoughtful, decisive, and very knowledgeable participant is all about his scholarship, passion for his “niche” (his research), and quest to help others. He is a first-generation college student and the child of a single mother, who, in his own words, “struggled at times” to find his way to the professorship.

Tyrone’s quest for the professorship began because of three factors. First, some years ago he made a promise to his mother that he would go as far as he could go to educate himself. Witnessing how hard his mother worked, not finishing high school to raise him, he told her that he would become some type of doctor, either a lawyer or a medical doctor (MD). Secondly, he wanted to work in “higher Ed, in some capacity, and be a representation for African American males who are coming through.” Third, because he did not have many professors that were Black, he passionately states, “It was also the need of me (at that point where I decided to pursue it) going through both undergrad and graduate school and literally only having…two African American male professors throughout all that schooling.” At this set time, however, Tyrone “struggled” to some degree. Having a 2.2 GPA in high school, he journeyed through undergraduate, then later, graduate school, raising his GPA from a 2.2, to a 3.918 during his graduate programs. Tyrone admits he struggled academically, and part of that struggle was the pull between being academically suitable and being a student athlete. He mentions that he struggled so much academically trying to balance my life as a student athlete and as an athlete. So, when I stopped playing basketball…I then, got a chance to live, what I call, a
normal life, and graduated with a 2.9, and it was a cool experience not to be tied to athletics all the time.

Because of this perspective, he began to think, not about being a lawyer, or an MD, but a professor. He had the support of his mom, plus the support of his mentor from his graduate program at (Western) Michigan University. At Western, he had become acquainted with his mentor, who helped him tremendously. So, “four or five months before” he was to graduate with his master’s in organizational communications, he contacted this mentor and told him that he was interested in teaching:

I contacted my mentor from undergrad at Western. Told him that I was interested in teaching, and he said he would put me on the waiting list because it takes a year or two and then you see if you can get in. Luckily enough, I had a call from him sixty days later, and he had an opening, and when I finish my masters, I was able to start teaching in the communications department full-time. I was teaching 12 credit hours.

Tyrone began to excel in the teaching area. As his teaching flourished, so did leadership qualities. When the opportunity was presented to become an academic advisor, he applied for the position. Tyrone voices how he came about attaining this leadership position and how this experience helped in developing leadership skills. This is how he puts it:

While teaching…at Western…, I had an opportunity to get an administrative position and be an interim to see if I can be over the academics for other student athletes. So, at that time… it was academic advisor, which was then changed to coordinator over all four hundred student athletes. So, I was in charge of helping them choose classes, helping them choose majors, making sure they were going to study tables; talked to all the parents of potential recruits and created computer programming to make sure that they are
monitoring them correctly… While there, I decided that I wanted to go further, so, I applied for the Educational Specialist program.

Because of the new position in leadership, Tyrone had the opportunity to thrive, not only as a lecturer with a master’s degree but as an educational specialist, which would link him into the doctorate. Knowing how he liked to teach and knowing that he liked the “administrative aspect,” Tyrone advanced toward a doctoral degree. Nevertheless, this degree would come with certain challenges.

Dr. Tyrone will avidly state that one of his strengths is his research. He is a good researcher and he “did not mind researching, spending hours looking at different things, reading different research journals…dissertations.” Although he would face some challenges with quantitative courses during his doctoral studies (as he loves the qualitative methods), he will admit that one of his “biggest” challenges was scholarly writing. His wife would assist him in editing during his graduate programs, and as he moved further into the doctoral program, he would have to “find someone of a higher skill level to…edit” because the “writing is just so objective” he proclaims. As Dr. Tyrone expresses this thought, he hints at a definite sense of frustration with, not only the writing, but the process:

Writing…is such an objective type of thing, you know. I can send an article in for publication to a publisher and they absolutely love it. Then, I can write the same way to another-one, and it’s just not the style they are looking for, and they can rip it up; your papers and your articles gets criticized at all levels. And so, it is such an objective thing. So, it’s always that constant adjusting and learning and finding different editors to work with in research and how detailed they want it is always a constant adjusting for me. And, I think the ones that you see, like those prolific writers, they kind of find their niche in
one or two areas or articles and they funnel their stuff through there. I just haven't found
that niche yet, being a newer professor.

Dr. Tyrone has always had support. During graduate school, he would find support by
means of mentors that assisted him to garner the tools necessary for becoming a PhD graduate.
For example, he had the opportunity to attend a symposium and one of the presenters he had
known was presenting. Being in the right place at the right time, the presenter became his
mentor, and this mentor would help steer him in areas that would be beneficial to him as a future
leader in education such as researching and analyzing research articles. His mentor would also
provide him with suggestions on how his dissertation would change and the how that would
affect his choice of committee chairpersons he would have. Nevertheless, it was the support of
his cohorts and his department chairpersons who were crucial in completing his doctorate.

Writing was one of Dr. Tyrone’s “biggest challenges,” and sometimes those challenges
created a sense of isolation. Thus, having a support group, a cohort, was crucial in his doctoral
accomplishments. Again, as a former athlete, he was “competitive” and loved “the teamwork
atmosphere.” Working in groups, discussing issues, topics, and styles of writing and research
with other cohort members was needful, particularly when he faced difficulty with the
quantitative courses in the program. This is how he puts it:

Working on research ideas with them, meeting at the library, and working in teams, you
learn different things. When we got to quantitative and qualitative courses, which I was
really worried about, and it was pretty cool to work together with them…. I was worried
about the quantitative portion. I thought myself to be a qualitative researcher, so I was
worried about the quantitative. But, working in a cohort, it was really, really good to
bounce ideas off one another and we are able to say to one another “I didn't understand
this part and now what do you think?” So, it was cool to…work together, but it was also
cool to set a target or a competitive nature within myself without having to see who
would get the highest grade…. So that sort of helped me have that competitiveness to
keep me with a drive.

Once Tyrone finished his coursework, his cohort of 10 dwindled to six candidates, so they were
“just hanging out there” in this doctoral space with the need of more support.

During the time Dr. Tyrone was at Western, he had a “superhuman chair” that organized
meeting groups on Saturday mornings. Knowing that the challenges of being a doctoral student
and doctoral candidate have the same type of hurdles to cross, he was appreciative that their
group had this type of leadership support. Tyrone describes his committee chair:

My chair would offer these Saturday morning type writing groups…. We would come in
from 10 to 12 or 10 to1 o'clock and she would either have a topic that we would talk
about; “quantitative today or qualitative today,” or it would just be a roundtable
discussion of all the people she was chairing…where you could…ask questions… And, I
can remember going to those and it was pretty good because it became a support group
for me and it helped get the things that I skipped that I was missing.

Dr. Tyrone completes this thought, pointing out,

Some people there were really good writers, so, she would connect them together, so they
could do some editing or writing. She just did a really good job at creating a really good
resource. So, I would not necessarily say that the university created it, but, I will say that
my chair created it.

Now, in a tenure track position, his newly acquired PhD has provided him with experiences, both
“good” and “bad,” that have shaped him into the leader he is today. Briefly, after receiving his
PhD, he stated that he had a brief “honeymoon period.” He felt like he had made it. He had professional prospects, a great professional record of accomplishment, and a drive to further his scholarship. However, he would be reminded very soon that he would have to struggle to find his way, even with a PhD.

Dr. Tyrone regrettably stated, “When I got that doctorate degree, in my mind, I thought that was it. I am through struggling!” He had worked hard for years, writing papers, attending conferences, “publishing,” and “pushing” through post-graduate and doctoral work, and then to find that he had to continue to work was discouraging. With a pause, he reflected on a point in time the difficulty he faced being a Black male in HE. This is how he puts it:

I was mostly stuck…the challenge is very tough as an African American male to get certain positions especially in higher Ed. So, I found it a little easier to get jobs in K-12… for lack of better words, at mostly urban at risk, turn around schools, type of positions…. If I were to apply for certain suburban type jobs, I just didn't get the look. So, I noticed that I was starting to get pigeonholed in certain areas and when I wanted to get different experiences in my career to see if I can work in a suburban and then come back to an urban… it was really, really difficult for an African American male to get different positions.

Dr. Tyrone would, of course, find certain positions in K-12 as an administrator, but, trying not to become “pigeonholed,” he would seek a position in HE. It may not have been exactly how he planned it would be, but he states:

I had this timeline of what I wanted to do in K-12 as administrator and then move to higher Ed as administrator…. When the faculty positions came up, it was one of those
things where you kind of, have to take it when it comes, because you just don't know how long it's going to be before it comes open again.

This was “a battle” and it was real. So real that he almost gave up. Not satisfied with where he was professionally, he began to reflect, telling from a utopia stance:

I am through fighting, I am through trying, to feel like I must work ten times as hard. I am through trying to prove to everyone that, you know, “don't listen to the stereotypes.” We’re amazing just like everyone else, and we can do this. “Tyrone has a PhD. Tyrone: African American male; first-generation graduate has a PhD. Getting his PhD is going to inspire others to come behind.” I've always taken a bigger view, or I've always had a bigger vision of what I've accomplished because I know, I know that's needed, and I know what’s needed for my community, for my people. So, when I got the HE…I wanted to be that face; I wanted to be viewed as an equal; I wanted to cut through the tape…. So, when I got there, I realized that it was still… it was just still… still a struggle.

This took a personal and professional toll on Dr. Tyrone. Although hopeful to some extent, he is surprised of how “much he is still dealing with…racial barriers and stereotypes that makes it very hard” to move through an IHE.

One-way Dr. Tyrone worked through this experience in his career was to reflect and garner self-help. For him, knowing that other African Americans have experienced the same type of experiences, helped him understand that the battle is not only his, but it may be a shared experience. Take the example he gives of a “Tyrell Strayhorn” who works at Ohio State University, “A well-known scholar…prolific writer, and a great speaker.” Dr. Tyrone tells how this individual is dynamic due to his speaking engagements, being the youngest Black male
tenured professor at Ohio State, and the rewards of earning over “$250,000 dollar in consulting work alone.” Dr. Tyrone states:

Rubbed people the wrong way…. He was fired as the director, and he just recently resigned as a faculty member. He wrote this open letter, where he stated the policies that he did nothing wrong. And it kind of came down to a lot of his white counterparts were doing the same thing, using consulting work; using their doctorate to present their data; and doing speaking engagements, and workshops; and he was doing nothing any different than anyone else. But, they found so many technicalities to get rid of him.

Dr. Tyrone continued to provide other examples which surrounds his experiences, telling how he believes race played a part in African Americans publications, tenure, and advancement in the field of HE. Nevertheless, after he shared many stories of inequities, and after a short and distant pause, Dr. Tyrone quietly states:

I don't know… I mean… I just …over the years, it hurts. It’s so funny, you know? The way this system works is, you get in, that honeymoon phase can sometimes let you draw down your guards. You get in there, and you go through there, and you just feel like ‘this is what I've been looking for! I don’t have to be this type of person, or be this type of person, I can be myself!’ And then, when it comes reality, it smashes you, it hurts you over and over again. And when it first happens, it’s tough to move on. So, the things that I've dealt with, I become unproductive, I really do, I become unproductive for a while.

Dr. Tyrone stated that he became unproductive. However, he “bounces back.”

Dr. Tyrone instinctively is aware “that a person really works hard to find themselves and find out where their passion is and what they love to do.” He believes that in HE, there will be many challenges and obstacles to overcome, and this is what he did. Despite not getting the job
he truly desired right away, or facing “inequalities” as a Black male, he knows that he must fight to be where he is. He admits that his journey was “stressful, going through the first part of the tenure-track.” Yet, once he began to go through, he began to find his passion, despite the challenges. Therefore, his challenges became the catalyst for helping others, specifically “minority male students…students of color.”

Part of bouncing back and setting his own agenda is helping those who may not have a voice, the skills, or the knowledge to maneuver the hurdles he experienced. That is why one of his aims that he enjoys is to assist “African American males… and first-generation college students…especially the undergrad class.” Dr. Tyrone has the power to give feedback and advice to students, work with them, provide student workshops that speaks to being first-generation college students. He enjoys the coupling of first-generation college students and the curriculum to how it applies to their lives. He enjoys it. This is how he explains it:

I really enjoy teaching undergrad students. And so, I really like the classes I teach. I like helping my students build skills…. Now, that I am not just solely a professor…and not just solely an administrator, I'm doing them both, I can see how they both work together and how it can be something that I like to do on a different level. So, for example I have a project I’m working on, on campus, which focuses on getting African American males into teaching and thinking about their next steps…. I enjoy the interaction of the freshmen and sophomores and even, sometimes, the graduate students. I really enjoy tying my curriculum to more practical things that my students would encounter in the next steps in life, I really enjoy it.

Because of these experiences with this current position and the relationship he has with his students, this enables Dr. Tyrone to make a difference in HE. Because of this insight and
position, it has impacted his scholarship tremendously, providing contributions to the field as an administrator and an instructor. He defines it better by stating the following:

And so, putting those two worlds together can be really impactful. So, not only do you get the students in class, then, you can go back and put your other hat on and you can take the research and the data that you have collected and be an innovator, as a director or as an administrator, then, you can publish that, so that, other people in those similar positions can then read about it and make changes and help you contribute to the field, in the classroom, and as administrator. So, I really see a positive, if it's done right. I can really see how impactful it is for a professor to be in a classroom; hear my students, hear their complaints, and hear what they like. And then, when it's time for the next cohort to come, I make those adjustments as administrator.

Dr. Paul’s Story

Dr. Paul is a 36-year-old Black man. He is a father, a husband, and a son. Dr. Paul is the first in his family to graduate from college with an undergraduate degree as well as the first in his family to earn advanced degrees. He has strived to meet his academic goals overcoming any challenges or obstacles he encountered. As Paul tells his story, I could understand, clearly, the confidence he has regardless of being “really an introvert.” He stated that in his “world, if it was populated with nothing but dogs and cats, I'd be set.” Many individuals may convey confidence at certain points and times, yet Paul conveys confidence all the time. He tells how he learned to be confident early on in college, when one of his dearest friends came out to him as gay.

It was mid-semester and his very dear friend called him and said, “You’re the first guy I’ve told this to, but, like, I’m gay…. I just… I really need to tell somebody. There are some other close people I know, but it's really difficult for me.” Paul immediately let his dear friend
know that coming out changed nothing, and they “would always be friends.” Nevertheless, Paul realized that there would come a point where, either behind his friend’s back or in his friend’s presence, that he would have to stand up for his friend or even be accused of being gay himself. He reminisces the time when he “had a bunch of peers and friends” that would ask: “Why are you hanging out with him; hanging out with all the fags?” Knowing that he “would have to stand up to that,” he stated:

I don’t give a shit as to what you say. He’s my friend, he’s gay, it doesn’t make me gay and that doesn’t make me anything but who I am…. you know, I don't get the whole machismo thing anyway! If I’m confident enough in who I am to say, “You know what? I’m confident in my sexuality, I don’t give a shit as to what you say.”

Knowing that this was a visceral topic, Dr. Paul continued to explain why:

But it was a split second where I really had to make the decision, you know, do I…do I stand by my colleague who is a good friend? Or…do I stand by him in public or in person/private…No!…Screw that! He’s a good person and that's just how it is! But, that was a real turning point for me as a person and realizing that I could be… you know… it really didn’t matter what anybody else thought or said…. and I think that’s where the confidence came from.

Dr. Paul mentions that he has “always been good at interacting with other people” and that he always had “decent study skills,” skills that helped him to this point in life. However, his college experiences, specifically, did not always go as planned: “Acclimating into the college environment was the biggest challenge.” For example, thinking he could come from home, “a structured environment,” then, for example, moving into an “unstructured environment” where he would watch, Jerry Springer continuously. Or, when he discovered that his professors were
not going to remind him when there would be tests, they were not going to remind him of when to study for the tests; and they were not going to remind him of the readings. Even more, Paul found out that living in a residence hall, with other guys, of different races, would be a challenge within itself.

Dr. Paul “had no issues when it came to race.” However, he could not ignore that some instances he witnessed early in his academic career. He speaks to a time when he had to recognize, internalize and then make the experiences he had of race a non-factor. He mentions:

One of the things that really bothered me was I noticed on our floor all the suites were broken up by race…. So, they said they randomly assign people to suites, but my roommate and our two suit mates were Black, and then, the suit next to me were Black; and then the one next to that were all white guys. As much as they could, that was the demographic. And we all got along well on the floor and it wasn’t until, like, me and another guy noticed, why is this the case... it's like you know.... all but two suites. And we asked...I was on housing staff and I asked one of the guys why that was, and he said that “it was random.” We’re were like…naugh…it’s not random.

Dr. Paul stated that there were “no racial tensions on campus.” Yet, he stated that race was “still, very present.” Making the connection of then and now, as an assistant professor, he acknowledges how race may appear only as a secondary factor. He only confronts the subject of race on his terms. And, when he confronts it, in any form, he handles it on his own terms. He mentions facetiously, “I'm Black male, right? I'm not going to introduce race into the conversation until somebody else does. Because now…and because it turns some people off…. I’m going to talk about everything around the sun, until you bring up race.” It is obvious that Dr.
Paul will not become entangled in conversations of race when it is subtle or covertly presented. Yet it does not mean that he is “not interested in those issues.”

Although race may be a minimal factor in his life, Dr. Paul decided some years ago that he would meet his goal despite any circumstance he encountered. In his words, he “mapped it out.” After graduating with his master’s degree in criminal justice (CJ), he “had already been accepted to UCS.” After this occurred, he thought to himself quite earnestly about how he would map it out. He states:

I think I want to get an MBA…. So, I went to my graduate director and said, ‘you know, I want to get an MBA with you guys, will you pay for it?’ They said, “yes, if it fits with your research, then we’ll pay for it.” So, I finished my MBA in 2013…. a year later, I finished my PhD. So, I was one of those rare people who did a doctorate in four years in and out.

One important motto Dr. Paul has is “You don’t have to be smart to get through graduate school, you just have to be persistent.” His persistence toward PhD completion provided him with many options when seeking a path toward higher education as a faculty member. Being “able to think at two levels” enabled him to maneuver the constructs of the job market which led him to finding a position. On one level, for example, he is purposeful when choosing an institution; there were two to three things he mentioned that an institution had to have if he were to work there: “One, it had to be doctoral granting institution…; two, it had to be a research one institution… and three, it had to be a Criminal Justice Program granting institution.” As he puts it:

So, there were two things that I knew for certain I wanted at my first institution. I wanted to be at doctoral granting institution, which in criminal justice, there is only about forty-five-to-fifty of them. Then you talk about the one in the south,
there were more concentration wise, but still…I wanted to be at an R1, because not every doctor granting institution for criminal justice is at an R1. But I knew I wanted to be at an R1 and I knew I wanted to be at one that had a doctor’s program, so that really narrowed down the list. Then, I threw a third one on there and said, “You know what? It would be really nice if I get into a top 10 CJ programs.”

On another level, he had to figure out where to go and, at points, how to overcome that challenge.

Being persistent also meant that Dr. Paul knew that whatever challenges he faced, he had the confidence and the determination to get through it. Dr. Paul expressively stated that figuring out where to seek employment was a challenge. He explains:

It was very difficult for me…. very difficult for me to step back and see what was happening. I knew I wanted to be at a research one institution, but, I didn't know exactly where…I could go because in my field with my discipline, there are not a lot of slots open. Most places have one white-collar person and they see no need to have two, irrespective of size of university, no need to have two people…so, I’m like, what are my challenges? Where am I limited? So, I started looking at business schools.

He recognized that finding a job became a multifaced problem, what he references it as a “shit show.” He begins thinking things through again. Thinking to himself, he says:

Where am I going to apply and how selective can I be within the choices I have? Do I take it at a regional institution or whatever? Working that out was difficult from the perspective that I like to have a plan and sort of follow through on that plan, and there
was a lot of stuff that I couldn’t plan. Then the academic job market was just a shit show…. hiring doesn't happen all at once, right? You have some universities that will post for jobs in August and they will start their search in September and want to have a candidate chosen by October. Our big conference is in November, where we have a big job fair, still, some places don't post until October and they don’t close the posting until December and then bring candidates on campus.

So Dr. Paul continued to stress what the challenges were of knowing that, if, he does not approach this the right way, he could possibly miss an opportunity. Therefore, he continued to be persistent in moving forward. He asserts:

I knew I wanted to go to a particular place. But, if I don’t get one of those positions, and I hadn’t applied for another position, then, I’m done. You don't know which way you're going, and you can be really good candidate, but, if you don’t fit, specifically with what they’re looking for…. it’s not going to happen!

Once he gained a position in an IHE as an assistant professor, he forced himself to think about how to deal with some of the challenges of his new job. Being the new person on the block can be “one of the biggest challenges.” He remembered a time when he was attempting to conclude what his role was at his new-found university, not over-extending himself. He states:

As new faculty, probably one of the biggest challenges is understanding exactly what your role is….and being comfortable saying [no] to things…. So, particularly, at a place like the university, and my teaching matters, but not really, it's really what I publish and where I publish. Teaching evaluations kind-of matter, but as long as you're not really, really screwing up in the classroom, all they care about is my research productivity.

Dr. Paul continued to talk about the challenges and overcoming the pressure of being one of
three Black males at his institution. Feeling the need to not commit to [diversity] committees simply because he may be viewed as a representative for his race was a strong presence he felt to act on. Dr. Paul mentioned that the university has “issues with Latinos… we have an issue with Blacks, we’ve got an issue with Native Americans and there's not enough to go around.” He mentions:

It's a ton of males, or a ton of white females, or a ton of Asians…. but…. very few Black males in institutions like the university. We have the highest proportion of Black faculty; there are three Blacks: two Black males, one Black female. No other top 10 CJ program has more than two, most have one… most have none. So, when you are in that environment because universities are pushing for diversity and inclusion, they want diversity on all their committees. And so, you get pulled on all of these service requirements, but you still have the same research requirements. And saying “no” can be a difficult thing to do.

Dr. Paul was obviously struggling, somewhat, with not feeling the need to represent his race, yet, he had a seat at the table. Although he is “the only one that does not study race,” in his words, “it doesn't mean that I'm not interested in those issues.” He goes on to say:

You feel like you want to have a voice at the table…. I really don't have time to do community service….am I saying ‘no’ to a committee that could be your beneficial in elevating our work in bringing more Black doctoral students there? That tension is palpable, right? And it's very difficult to figure out what I do, what do I not do. But I still think there should be a point where I have a voice to say “no.”

Currently, Dr. Paul has gained enough time on the job to “have a solid voice in the conversation” without being cast into becoming the Black representative on a committee. Now that he has a
solid voice, however, he can be a positive influence for other Black men, or women, and students who are coming “up the pipeline.”

Dr. Paul loves helping students, particularly graduate, and doctoral students. He takes them under his wing and he helps to guide them. What Dr. Paul elaborates on the most, however, is the problem of, or a lack of Black males entering the programs that he can mentor. During a recent human resources organizational leadership labor relations program, he explained the lack of representation of Black males entering doctoral and graduate programs:

The problem is a pipeline problem…. so…that's a problem. So, we get a decent amount of Black males in undergraduate criminal justice. We don’t transition enough of them to graduate school: one, because they don't have the academic credentials to get there, but two: they don’t see graduate education as a legitimate career path. I think there is a lack of mentors and a lack of role models there. Once we do get them into graduate programs, the really good ones, they go to other graduate programs. So, they get sucked up by engineering or management, you know, computer science, where the pay is much higher and things like that….or they go to law school.

As Dr. Paul continued this point, there is obviously a detection of passion and concern, and disappointment, yet, the need to assist these Black males as they “transition” into graduate or a career is priority. He passionately states:

We get them in, they just don’t finish. He’s, like, I’ve had guys living with me, I work through stats with them, but once I'm gone, it just kind of fizzles out. And they have faculty support, and what we realized is, it's not an issue with the guys we’re bringing in, it because there are plenty of other doctoral students that fizzle out….the issue is the numbers issue. We need more coming out of master’s level…. well, we need more
coming out in undergraduate…well, we need more coming out of high school…

Thus, Dr. Paul formulates a question: “Where do we attack this pipeline problem and how do we attack it?” He adamantly admits that the answer is “to attack it at the master’s level first. But even there, we don’t know…we don’t know how to address that problem.” Dr. Paul is aware that “there are plenty of good Black males out there…. how we get them into CJ without thinking that they’re going to be cop’s and only police officers.” Since the issue is a “numbers issue, Dr. Paul asks himself another question: “How many people can I mentor?” Where can he “attack the problem?” Dr. Paul speaks to relationship building, or relationships between him and the student that will enable them to be more successful. He states:

I think there's got to be some type of relationship…. where upper-classmen can build their own networks and then they can say to an under-classman, “Hey, you need to go talk to Student Support Services,” or, “You need to go talk to this office,” or “These resources are available to you, take advantage of them.”

Just like the support he has provided, someone gave support to him as well. Furthermore, if it was not for support he received through means of a mentor, he may have struggled a bit more with overcoming the challenges he faced.

Dr. Paul had very good support, support of a couple good friends in his cohort and the support of his wife and family in that regard, and he “had very good mentors… all the way through” and was blessed that he had a range of support. Yet he knows that not having “a strong mentor, who’s established” can erode some of that support. Dr. Paul has had mentors most of his academic career and positive ones. Whether it was during undergraduate school, graduate school, or even his present job, he has had the support and mentorship of others. For example, during undergraduate school, having a mentor was instrumental in helping him choose a top CJ
university for his master’s degree. During the time, as he was finishing his masters, one of his female advisors, the person who, in the end, became his thesis advisor, was instrumental in helping him navigate the higher educational politics. He describes a time when she taught him how “to think at two levels.” Dr. Paul reveals a time when she said:

You know, it's not just about picking up theory and understanding how to operationalize and how variables work and things like that, but it's thinking on a deeper level on sort of the structure of the theory, of how theory is developed and how it translates into practice, in a practical way.

This advisor was not the only mentor that assisted him, yet, it was a “network” of individuals that assisted him to arrive at this moment in time. These mentors like Frank, a mentor and a friend, who is, in Dr. Paul’s words, “a god,” helped him during his journey. Dr. Paul has “a love for research,” and part of this love for research came partially from Frank. Frank helped him gain further insight to both theory and practice, as well as the publishing arena, and participating as one of his dissertation committee members. Dr. Paul affirms that “those type of mentors, like, push you, right? They see kind of where you are and want to push you to the next level and give you opportunities to seek out support.” Even when Dr. Paul feels as if there may be rejection, he has the confidence in stepping out-side the box and confronting the possibility of rejection. He states:

As you know, rejection is…it's just life. And I found a very early on in my graduate…my doctor career that you’re going to get rejected a lot, but it's not rejection for the sake of rejection. That’s the other thing that I think was very clear about this mentorship is that, I never saw a rejection as ‘you're not good enough for this,’ because I made it clear which is interesting enough of this my transition into being a faculty member, at the graduate
level, I made it clear that if I'm doing something right, if I'm not good enough, just tell me I'm not good enough; and if I will do something else, and I know that I can't be good at everything.

It is obvious that Dr. Paul's mentors were never afraid to be honest with him. Nor was Dr. Paul afraid to seek the advice and be told that he was not doing something the correct way. In his own words, “That type of support is invaluable because, again, there’re not leading you by the hand necessarily, they're letting you go and each of those failures is a teachable moment, and the way to take advantage of it was awesome.”

**Dr. Marks Story**

Dr. Mark is a husband, father, son, and the first person “on both sides of his father and mothers’ side to earn a terminal degree.” Having earned this degree, a doctorate, he is currently working at one of the most popular universities in the Midwest region as a professor of sociology and the coordinator of countless initiatives that support young people on campus. This enabled him to self-evaluate his performance in the classroom and the research he brings to the academy.

Coming from a family where his father’s side of the family were sharecroppers from the Deep South and then, coming to Flint, Michigan, to get jobs at AC Spark Plug, General Motors, and Chrysler, Dr. Mark witnessed how hard people worked, both male and female, and the work ethic that was set for him. Although Dr. Mark’s parents were married and together for many years, he states that if it were not for his parents, specifically, his mother, he would not have been successful. Although his father was present, it was his mother that had the biggest influence on attaining a doctorate. For example, his mother earned an associate degree in social work from a leading college in Flint, Michigan, and if a college was going to hire “the best person, who really
understood sociology the best, to teach,” they would hire his “mom instead of me,” he says. Now
given, when his dad would speak, it set precedent. Dr. Mark says:

His dad believed all work is good work as long as you do your best. All work is good
work as long as you're not harming anybody, okay? As long as you work making a living,
taking care of your family, that's what men do. My dad came from that whole traditional
part of it, traditional patriarchy. But at the same time, he had the wherewithal to say,
“Okay good, if your mama said this, this is also what you're going to do. So, although dad
never said, ‘she never really pushed school, school, school,” in terms of verbally, once
mama said I was going to school, I knew that she was ready to engage symbolically with
me to make sure that I was going to go.

So, his father supported his mother in pushing him. With a sincere chuckle in his voice,
intertwined with adoration of his mom (now deceased), he recalls the time he had no choice but
to begin his collegiate journey because his mother arranged everything she could to get him to go
to college. As he states,

I completed my doctorate, because it was a promise to my mother…. I never filled out a
college application (chuckle). My mother filled out all my college applications; forged
my name; sent off the college applications; she literally broke the law; she forged my
name; signed my college applications. Not only did she sign the college application, but
when I received the acceptance letters, I thought it was a joke.

Mark, at the time, wanted to become a “rap star” and had no clue what was happening. All he
knew was that letters from colleges and universities were mailed to the home, with acceptance,
with his name on it. His mother was determined, however, to make sure her son was headed
somewhere to college and that somewhere was not “there” in “their” home. Again, this is how he puts it:

I remember, clearly, her telling me that… “I'm not trying to end your rap career, I just want to put you in the space so that you can rap to DuBois; rap to some Mark Twain; to some geographies; rap to some sociology….” My mom said, “I love you, but I'm not going to make you homeless, but you can't stay here anymore…. I have a room for you at 272 Drisler Hall at Strayer State University and that where you’re going to be staying for the next four years.

So, he says, his “mother washed all my clothes, folded all my clothes” and sent him off to college. This is where, as he says, he “fell in love with it.”

Falling in love with “it” was not difficult. For instance, he had the unique privilege to teach college, gaining experience in the classroom for a few years before he attained his PhD. He published articles; he led seminars just to name a few. Dr. Mark has always had the drive to succeed, starting during his early years. Dr. Mark proudly admits that he was a great student, admitting that he didn’t necessarily like school. Since he can recall, however, from K-12 through his doctoral studies and graduation, he has always been an exceptional student. Nevertheless, there were individuals that refused to cultivate his quest for learning. Although he never had trouble academically, he mentions that many times, specifically in high school, some educators had issues with him asking questions. He can remember being made to feel inferior or “dumb” when he was exploring knowledge. He states it more eloquently:

When I was young, I would ask certain questions. They laughed at me. I took it that there was something wrong with me. As a matter of fact, I remember being called “dumb” by one of my teachers for asking certain, types of questions. Of course, when I went to
college and asked those questions, my profs begin to get excited about me asking those questions…. I could ask questions of society. I could ask questions of race, and of sex, I could ask questions of religion, I could actually ponder the idea, [does God really exist]? I did not have that type of freedom in terms of K-12 grade, constantly being bombarded with, if, something is wrong with me for asking basic questions. They would say, “You're engaging in critical thinking.”

In retrospection, Dr. Mark realized that, there were people who could not answer his questions. He mentions, “Maybe, I put them on the spot, and they didn't understand what was actually going on.” Nevertheless, what Dr. Mark found was at his graduate and post-graduate level. He no longer had to depend on what others thought, per se; he could do it for himself. He describes:

All those questions that I have been asking that I was told I was too dumb for, all of a sudden, I can ask them and answer them for myself, and that was very much empowering. I don’t need to ask anybody else anything, I can do it for myself now. So, the whole notion of self-determination became a driving force in that passion where, while I found something, I discovered something, I can do something for myself. I just fell in love with it.

For Dr. Mark, “it's always been about self-determination.” And, if it were not for hard work and determination, he may not have been prepared for the tasks, responsibilities, and challenges he faced in his current position.

Coupled with determination, is a recognition of complete competency. Dr. Mark has earned the ability to move in, through, and out of challenging spaces, overcoming many of them. He will admit, however, that at times, individuals do not always take him at face value, and his competence is then perceived as arrogance. He admitted that from the beginning, his “own
professors seemed to have some serious issues” with his level of competence and for some reason, some colleagues, and chairpersons whom he worked with and served under as a professor and a doctoral candidate made it difficult at times. For example, he shares:

So, one of my biggest challenges was ultimately working with faculty members that I found that many of my own professors seemed to have some serious issues with my level of competence. Now when I say competence, I don't mean that I was incompetent, there were people that seem to be upset because I was too competent. I have some faculty members, for example, I remember a paper that I received back once: the entire paper saying… all throughout the paper: I don't like these ideas; I don't agree with these ideas; I like these ideas; I don't agree with these ideas, all this throughout the entire paper; no other comments nor other anything on the paper, but I got an [A] on the paper. And the next paper: I really don't like these ideas; I really don't agree with these ideas; I'm really disgusted by these ideas… but I got [A] on a paper. I never got any actual feedback. So, I never knew, okay, if I am in the right ballpark and my being constructive?

Toward the end of finishing his doctorate, Dr. Mark’s competency level continued to be challenged, as he believed there was a hidden agenda set out by others, including the chair of his dissertation committee:

I remember when I was working on my dissertation, I had a chair… my dissertation chair, I would turn in things, and I'm telling you, 3-4 months for one chapter. So, talking the other people who she was chairing for [and they were saying] “Oh no… she sent me back my chapter in a month.” And again, if it's three months, I get it, people are busy… Maybe you’re chairing five or six dissertations, I get it; or maybe you're trying to publish your own stuff, so I get that. I can't make up those excuses as to why it's taking so long.
But I found out that there was another person she was chairing, she not only sent back comments in a month, but they sent back more comments in a month. So, she would send back more comments to this particular person three or four times and wouldn’t send anything back to me for three or four months. And none of the comments were constructive. The comments were just simply: I don't like what you're saying here..... Literally, I got to the point of life and death... I was frustrated because I didn't know what was going on.

At that point in time, Dr. Mark would be introduced to new individuals in the department, one being an African American female who was able to assist him in overcoming this hurdle. She was important in locating him a new chair and committee members, a committee whom she was a part of. As Dr. Mark puts it,

Suddenly, I’m speeding through the dissertation process. So literally I was held up almost a year because people were purposely trying to prevent me from moving forward, and again, not because of my skill level, not because of my level of competence, simply was, as one of the people said, quote “well, he's one of those Black uppity ‘N’s,’ and we're going to make sure that he doesn't get through this thing.” This is what the conversations were.

Challenges came, and Dr. Mark was perceptive to what would take place in his academic and professional life. Even after receiving his doctorate, the challenges kept on coming, however. By this time, Dr. Mark had figured it out. Although he will state that “racism” exists, he coined his stance the effect of “microaggressions.”

Dr. Mark states that there have always been covert and overt forms of racism in his experiences. He states, “What you remember from graduate school, what you remember from
doctoral studies; what you remember, while working on your doctorate degree is this constant…

constant microaggressions.” For him, this was “problematic.” It was problematic in simple
relationships at work, it was problematic in the classroom, and it was problematic simply
walking by colleagues saying hello. However, as “problematic” as it was, he never allowed
covered forms of race to discourage him. When he would find himself in situations in higher
education (HE), he was “constantly having to deal with this level of ignorance and constantly, if
not wanting to be bothered with folks, but folks constantly bothering me about foolishness.” It
“fueled” him. For example, after he received his doctorate, he had a unique experience. One day
walking through the hall, he passed a few “male White colleagues” and spoke. This is how he
puts it:

I walked passed and I simply said, “Good morning gentlemen.” And only one responded.

So, the other gentleman who is speaking to me asked him, “How come you don't speak to
Mark?” He said, “You know what? He's a PhD now and you know what we call Black
folks with PhD's.” And so, the colleague that was speaking to me said we call anybody
with a PhD, doctor, right? The other guy said, “No, we call them uppity N’s with PhD's.”

Challenges with microaggressions did not happen only in the hallway among colleagues, it
occurred in the classroom in front of students as well. He recalls a time when he was teaching,
and a different colleague entered his classroom unannounced:

He walks into my classroom, turns, and talks to my students and says, “I must have been
out all night, drinking and partying because I was dressed down.” He said that I was out
all-night drinking 40s. And, of course, the 40s is loaded in terms of race…. Now don't
forget, I’m in the middle of teaching. The fact that somebody knocks on the door, you
think something is going on, right? Did I miss something important? What was going on?
Something must be happening on this campus that somebody is coming to my classroom to tell me something. So, I'm like “cool.” So, I opened the door.

His students were completely in shock. So, not to allow this circumstance to detour him, after the individual left his room, Dr. Mark did two things. First, he made this a teachable moment. His course being multicultural in nature, he explained to them the discourse of “overt racism, microaggressions, and the normalcy of racism.” Feeling as if he was the “incredible hulk,” when the hulk begins to burst at the seams, when he is angry, Dr. Mark admits that this colleague grew under his skin. So, secondly, what transpired, was to report the situation to human relations (HR). And, he states:

You already know what the problem is, right? The problem is well, he never said anything about race. So, if he didn't say race, we don't know that there was any intention of race. You already know where I'm going with this. He never said it was because of his race and of course he said, “I was just joking because he was just down, so on, and so forth. And then, of course, it was the issue that I was [too] sensitive.

Regardless if these experiences were subtle or blatantly obvious, Dr. Mark always reverts to one of his beliefs: It's always been about self-determination, and it is this mindset that had helped him to arrive at an IHE doing what he loves and supporting those who are having some of the same challenges.

Dr. Mark is open about how he feels regarding the mindset of many individuals who may not have his best interest at heart. Thus, he feels strongly about supporting his students, particularly students of color, Black males on campus. In retrospection, for example, when the colleague came into his classroom and insulted him, two of the students in his course at the time, two Black males, were appalled with how the colleague treated Dr. Mark, and they wanted to
take matters into their own hands. But, being the intellectual, confident, and evenhanded leader, he is, he demonstrated how he turns these types of learning moments in supportive moments.

This was their conversation:

“Dr. Mark, we noticed you can’t do anything about this, we’re going to go get him.” I said, “No you're not.” They said, “Oh no, we're going to go get him.” I said, “No you're not.” I said, “Hold on...I can take care of myself. I can handle this myself.” I said, “One of the things we must learn how to do is handle these things in a manner so that they don't win.” They asked, “What do you mean?” But I told these two young brothers, they will love to call in campus safety, they would love to call safety and call the police and get you kicked off campus, that you cannot finish school.

So, as he is talking to these two students, once again, Dr. Mark uses it as a learning moment, a moment to use a biased situation to empower others to learn from:

But I told those two young brothers, “If you all love me the way you say you love me, and you have my back the way you say you have my back, you will guarantee me, that the most radical thing that you can do is finish up here, go to the next place get your bachelors, go to next place get your masters; and then I told them both, and you both owe me doctorates… I need you two, to buck the system for me… But you are getting a doctorate and it chips away at dismantling the system…. And they looked at me like I was crazy… and so they kept on going.

For each one of the previous examples, Dr. Mark didn’t have to worry much about whether he asked the wrong questions, said the wrong thing, or reacted in a manner that he reacted. What he concentrated on was the power he holds that enables him to support others.
Although Dr. Mark entered HE because of the “level of freedom,” he wanted to “be that person to take students…and give them a voice, to give them a space, where they can be free, and they can develop academically, that they can develop intellectually.” Dr. Mark stated a quote by Booker T. Washington, where he confirms that, “if we can build a school, we can teach you how to build the construction work and engineering work as a part of their studies itself, and they built their own school to produce the school for the next generation to come.” This quote fueled him. Although Dr. Mark assists any and every student he can, based on the challenges and accomplishments he has experienced, he is able to use his position as a leader to help, specifically, “minority” males of color. Understanding the need of retaining students of color on campus, specifically, the work he does is “important” and “it is so necessary” to “get other people into the space who want to become doctors as well.” Take for example, the planning, effort, and value he places on helping students (a focus group of Black males) who need assistance in maneuvering in and through the college setting. Dr. Mark always has “a plan to get them to the next plan.” He contacts schools on their behalf to make sure that there are no gaps for falling through the system. He arranges college visits and acquires as many scholarships as possible for these “particular students,” and, he also “drives a bus of college bound students for college visits.” Ultimately, his goal is to get students on campus and keep them there until they graduate; he treats his students like gems. He has adopted a quote by Shawn Harper which states: “We would not have a retention problem in terms of Black student’s if we treat all students like Black athletes.” Therefore, in his words, “after my PhD, there was no, ‘what do I do, now?’ Now, I need to create spaces so that others can get the doctorates as well. I am more concerned with students being successful and having time for more pressing things.” One of the
most pressing important issues he mentions, however, is the importance of the food pantry for
his focus group of Black males, on campus, a service he is passionate about that truly saves
students from leaving college and provides hope and support when they so desperately need it.
You see, according to the culture in Black male youth, there is a “stigma” attached to
masculinity, Dr. Marks says. Thus, it is an issue he has taken on so that Black males are, at least,
not going hungry. The following is one example of Dr. Marks unwavering support toward these
young men. He passionately states an example surrounding one young man who was hungry:

The place where our food pantry is located is an administration building. For the most
part, nobody goes into the administration building unless they're in trouble. That's first,
all right? Most of the time, the administration building is locked, and you must have a
key and I need a faculty key card to get in…. Now, it's easier, particularly, for some of
our students, to say if they're hanging out with their friends, “I can't tell my friends I'm
hungry I need to go get some food.” But, it's easier, and I've heard them simply tell
everyone, “I'm going to go kick it with the doc.” There friends think they’re coming to
hang out with me and talk…. He was coming to some food…with tears in his eyes, and
he said, “Thank you so much for the food.” I said, “No brother, everything is fine.” He
said, “No doc, you don’t understand, I almost had to hit the block.” I said, “I'm sorry?”
He said, “Doc, something happened with my car. I had the money, but I had to pay for
the car. If I didn’t pay for the car, I’m not going to be able to get to school and I’m not
going to be able to get to work. Doc, I know this is wrong, but I must feed my babies.”
And I said, “Brother, I understand.” He and I went out to my car; I have some stuff in my
car I just had not brought it to the food pantry yet. And here's what I thought was so
profound. He almost had to hit the block; he had tears in his eyes. A week later, this
brother comes back with $50 and he wanted to give it to me for the food. So, people have this idea that these kids are…; there doing the best they can, they just have a challenge. Although we may not have those challenges, other folks do. And of course, I didn’t take that money. I told him, ‘brother, you hold onto that money to give to those babies,’ but that’s what we do.

Not familiar with the term, “hit the block,” I ask Dr. Mark the meaning of the term, and he says simply to “run a package of drugs, sell some drugs, or do something illegal. In some cases, hit the block means that I’m going to break into some house and steal something. It has several different meanings, but it’s all illegal stuff.”

**Dr. Baldwin’s Story**

Dr. Baldwin is a smart and intelligent 34-year-old openly gay Black male who was raised by his mother and encouraged by a loving family. He is an assistant professor of student affairs programing at a leading university in the Midwest. Dr. Baldwin is a persistent individual and a person who has “energy, passion, and drive.” Although persistent, Dr. Baldwin has had his share of difficulties but through it all, his energy, passion, and drive has enabled him to overcome the challenges he faced during graduate and post-graduate career.

Like many Black males who have attained their doctorate, Baldwin began his journey not knowing his call in higher education. He took courses and worked in different areas of interests such as Greek life and administrational areas in IHE during his undergraduate degree. However, one day the dean of students tapped him on the shoulder and asked, “Have you thought about some type of student affairs?” That is when he began the professional and academic journey toward his doctorate. He states:

The inner voice started speaking more loudly in my master’s program between the first
and second year…. a part of me was like, ‘what are my long-term career goals, and what do I like and what am I passionate about?’ … I was definitely passionate about the research side of the experience.

Hence, Baldwin began to map his future. After applying for graduate school and being accepted in the Higher Education Student Affairs Program, at Lewiston University, he began to “love the research side of student affairs” as well as assisting faculty in research projects. It was at that moment when he thought to himself, “maybe, I want to pursue a doctorate.” Knowing that he “had the energy, the passion, and the drive to do it at that moment and time,” in his words, he didn’t know if he would have “that energy, that passion, and drive, necessarily, the same way latter on in a career.” So he pursued the institution: Davenport State, in North Dakota, which, in his words,

had a strong faculty and had a focus in social justice. I could get a certificate in social justice along with my degree; social justice in higher education…. this is attractive…not a lot of programs have this…. So…. I did the program full time with the graduate assistantship, and I did the higher education administration doctoral PhD program as a graduate student in social justice.

At this institution, as a graduate assistant, he could enter the classroom and teach. Thus, while he began teaching, his scholarship began to thrive, as he “began to develop a research agenda around students of color and leadership development and research education…. teaching in our undergraduate leadership certificate” program. Dr. Baldwin finished his doctorate in four years, so he applied for positions at institutions that had a focus on leadership education. It was during this process, however, that he would needed support in “navigating the system” to help him get through many of the challenges he would face.
Although Dr. Baldwin has passion, energy, and drive, finding the support he needed was somewhat of a challenge. Yet if it was not for close cohort friends and faculty members, he may not have known how it would turn out. He stated that each “process for him was different,” yet, overcoming those challenges always depended on “a big support system.” Dr. Baldwin needed this support system, as he was, at points, not taking care of himself; he didn’t “have best practices of navigating the process.” He spoke to how his friends in his cohort truly supported him when he needed it:

For example,…. the first two years of the doctoral program was probably the most stressful and the most… I don’t think I was depressed…I won’t use the word depressed. It was very much a sad time…. I just had unhealthy ways…. I didn’t eat properly or healthy…. I didn’t have a stress reliever; a stress decompress process; I didn’t work out in a meaningful way on a regular basis. I didn’t have a hobby. I just didn’t. I thought I was living a very unhealthy lifestyle those first two years of the program. I don’t want to say it was as a result, but I think it was, definitely, a factor of what I was dealing with in trying to navigate. And I was just in that place of “I don’t have time to do this; I need to focus on this….” Really, just not making time for myself and being a healthy person.

Dr. Baldwin was aware that he could take better care of himself. Moreover, his friends were also aware. They too, sometimes “going through the same crap,” noticed his “unhealthy ways” and intervened as they saw their friend having trouble. They would intervene to make sure that he was taken care of holistically:

They were a big support system of getting me to the point of “Hey! you use to run. Why don’t you go running? Let’s think about our meals. Let’s go grocery shopping together; let’s think about crock pot meals…we can put something on and when we get home from
class it’s done.” They were very instrumental in providing some structure around my life and navigating that process. And they also brought a lot of humor to the bullshit, right? These close friends, these cohort members, helped to balance his life. Thus, visiting the winery or going to the farmers market enabled Dr. Baldwin to get through the process, and he would not “have been able to get through it” if it were not for them.

On his educational path, Dr. Baldwin not only reflected on how he overcame challenges with the support of friends, but he also reflected on overcoming the challenges he faced with faculty transitioning to other IHE and working through an “impostor syndrome.” As Dr. Baldwin sought out the support he needed, it sometimes became difficult or “frustrating.” He recalled a specific frustrating time when he had transferred to another institution. This institution was more “critical in research;” and he sought out a faculty member who he had known in the past, who worked at that institution. After “reaching out” to her and informing her that he would be coming to that institution, he was surprisingly disappointed when he found out she was leaving:

I found out the summer in August, I started, that she was moving to another leadership position at another institution. And, that information was then like a domino effect…. a number of faculty left within my first two years in the program. And that frustration….it was faculty of color, it was faculty that were critical….and it was just a very frustrating process to, like, play these musical chairs with faculty members or committees and as advisors….and it was just very frustrating to go through that process, especially in the coursework.

Nevertheless, after Dr. Baldwin arrived in August, he began to work with scholars, building professional relationships, gaining support, and becoming more acquainted with them and the academic process. Again, however, these relationships were temporary, and he found that others
that provided him with support would leave the institution also. Again, he recalls:

I went to work with this Black woman, this Black scholar, and then she leaves. So then, my next advisor, (I identify as a gay man as well), my next advisor is a gay man whose work is critical, who I admire…kind of his brilliance. And after my first year in the program, then, he leaves…. I was just really frustrated in the sense of, ‘is this the place I’m supposed to be at this time?’ Are these signs from God that this may not be…. the place for you?

What Dr. Baldwin was seeking was simply individuals to share his ideas with. He was looking for “an academic mentor or advisor, or professor, to help” him use the curriculum, and show him how to “use the course work to really focus in those one, two, three years in the doctoral program.” Dr. Baldwin was “floundering.” So as Dr. Baldwin questioned himself and dealt with the advisor and faculty issues, he began to internalize the frustration of, if he was “at the right place at the right time” and wonder if he was good enough to be at this IHE. Therefore, Dr. Baldwin reveals this as the “The Impostor Syndrome.” He states:

The frustration I was feeling was about, that, me being at the right place at the right time…. I knew about the [am I good enough] kind of thought/mental state. You know, you have the credentials, like I did. I got accepted, I got in, I’m in a doctoral program, but then this kind of constantly questioning are they going to figure out that maybe I’m not supposed to be here, or that maybe I’m not good enough to be here. So, you are constantly in the mindset of feeling like an imposter….that was a lot of that frustration…. But, I will say that, I think the frustration with the curriculum, with the faculty with all the transitions out-weighted some of those internal questionings and imposter syndrome.
This impostor was constantly present during his undergraduate and graduate career; even now, after attaining his doctorate, he could tell you that the syndrome darts its head up every now and then. But, he has a way of dealing with this. For example, he mentioned one specific individual who “was just a really blunt and a frank person.” He provides a snapshot into this conversation between himself and this female researcher:

So, Dr. Cassandra Chaurez, one of my faculty members, was just a really blunt and a frank person. And she allowed me to do some research with her to think about, ‘now you’re in this place and you want to help students of color, how do you do that? How do you do that from a research side? How do you do that as a student affair professional? How do you understand racism as a part of the developmental process, right? So, it was just an eye-opening experience in kind of a mentor taking someone under their wing and saying, “Hey! You might be going about this in a way that’s not as constructive as it could be.”

Dr. Chaurez was obviously instrumental in allowing him to think about the bigger picture, to challenge ideology, and simply supported him. He took a piece of that experience and continued to develop his own voice, especially in different “spaces.”

Dr. Baldwin shares that some faculty may view him as “radical.” At times, he states that he may come across as a little “arrogant.” However, he does not use it to describe himself as haughty or condescending; “comfortably competent” is he. Still, he uses the term to describe how he is now, performing at his job, directing students, or using the term to convey his scholarship; it enables him to move through spaces…even “White spaces.” He explains that by being confident:

Enabled me to navigate through that space…. space, in the sense that my classmates
around me were white students, the faculty was white. I wanted a little more critical perspective on some of the stuff we were learning. Like, how does this impact people of color…. and it was me really thinking about why I wasn’t getting that. I think that was like a way of me rebelling against some of the stuff we were learning…. I don’t want to come off as an arrogant…. there are just some things that happened…. One of the most frustrating things as a professional, as a faculty member, is for someone to respond that, “that’s just the way it is, or we’ve always done it that way,” it just doesn’t make sense.

Another space he has learned to navigate is while working with other faculty. Sometimes these spaces remind him that he is a 34-year-old Black man working in a “white space.” Having experienced microaggressions, Dr. Baldwin has learned to use his “arrogance” to trump certain mindsets. After arriving at a new institution, while sharing a space with and “older White Irish Catholic female colleague,” he gives an example of how he maneuvered that space when she made certain comments that received some “side-eyes.” His colleague had mentioned that she went home and told her husband that she now worked with “this nice colored man.” Then, while they are in a meeting at another point and time, she mentioned the era of “Trump” and classroom dynamics. Again, she referred to Dr. Baldwin as this “nice colored man;” another faculty member hears this. He reacts, thinking, “What the Hell?!?” Thus, he states “the dean of the school calls me in and asks ‘how do you want me to address this?’ That was frustrating to me. Like, I don’t think it’s for me to tell you how to address somebody that…I don’t…I don’t…. “

Dr. Baldwin cuts short his story and states, “I don’t think she means any harm by it.” However, he does state that this episode speaks volumes to race and microaggressions. Although he cuts short his comment, he does say the following:

So, if you’re calling me this colored man, then, what are you calling your students of
color in your class? To me, there is some dynamics there that are deeper than an inter-
colleague dynamic, right? How is she showing up in the classroom? How are student’s responding to her? This is layers of layers of layers, and I think sometimes can seem one sided.

Currently as a professor, he believes that the position he holds is important in how he “shows up in the classroom” and how his knowledge of his scholarship enables him to help others, specifically students of color.

Dr. Baldwin believes strongly how one shows up in the classroom. Additionally, how one shows up outside the walls of the university is equally important. Helping others and being able to give back is “an important part of the process.” When he moved to the institution he is currently at, for example, he made it a priority to seek out new venues and to become a part of that community. In that community was a church. He states, “I joined my church, I’m helping with my church youth group and its just trying to engage in the community around me more than just staying in the university community or the place I live.” Again, it’s the passion Dr. Baldwin has for others. What is empowering about Dr. Baldwin is his self-assessment and his introspection as he plans methodically his approach to these communities and the individuals who live in them:

- How do I engage more in the community? Do I help with the tutoring program at the church? Or, doing Big Brothers and Big Sisters, to think about how you break cycles.
- How do you go break cycles? Do you break cycles by representation? Do you break cycles by showing people there more to what they are to what they already know? And I think that’s important.

This issue is obviously important. Moreover, it’s an important process to think about due to “the
microaggressions” students of color face in the classroom. He refers to it as “systemic crap….
within higher education.” Therefore, his questions turn from “how do I,” to “how do we” type of
questions:

I worked in the school of education and we must be having conversations about who are
we preparing to be teachers? Who are we preparing to go into the classrooms; because
most of the time they don’t look like me; they don’t look like us…. So, how do we make
that attractive and really think critically about our strategies of recruitment…. So, what
does that mean to be a teacher, and choosing teacher as a major? I know in my circle of
influence, there’s probably thousands of other suggestions that we can have discussions
about. But for the interest of time, for my circle of influence, it’s really thinking about
how do I get a pipeline going within the school of education where I work. But then, that
pipeline must address the current people I work with. So, the other faculty member
teaching these classes, if there are students of color experiencing microaggressions in
their classroom, then, yea, they’re going to switch majors. So, do we have an inclusive
school of education? Do we have an inclusive faculty? All of those are things I have in
my control, in my power to make some noise about and to make some change about.

Dr. Gordon’s Story

Dr. Gordon is a 36-year-old openly Black gay male. He is the first in his family to receive
an advanced degree. Dr. Gordon works at a large flagship university in the south as an Associate
Professor in higher education. He is care-free, yet he has a seriousness about him once you
surpass his whimsical and outgoing personality. At points during the interview, the seriousness
of his journey would be coupled with a brief chuckle or a short second of laughter, periodically.

Dr. Gordon will avidly state that his “challenges were not academic”: 
They were all personal and most of them evolved around my mother's illness because I am an only child. So, I was having to navigate school with taking care of a very sick parent. So, none of my stuff was in the classroom, it was never academic because I did very well…it was all personal and familial.

It was during the time when Dr. Gordon decided that he was going to apply to the doctoral program. But, during a class session, at that very moment, he received word that his mother had a stroke and “became very, very, very, very ill.” He grabbed his bag, leaving most of his books and notes behind in the classroom, to go to his mother’s bed side. Of course, he states:

I had friends that would help me, and they knew what was going on. And my professors were very aware of all that. So, I had a very supportive environment. But, I will say this: challenges that I did come into contact with, regards to that, were in my assistantship. I had a white male boss who was… he was…he wasn't nice.

Obviously, this was a difficult time in Dr. Gordon’s life, and he needed all the support he could receive, and yet he felt as if the “White male boss” did not consider the severity of the ongoing personal situation. One day Dr. Gordon had to immediately go to the hospital again, and being respectful, he informed his boss that he had to leave. Referring to the schedule of students Gordon was to see that specific day, his boss told him to cancel all the appointments he had with the students. Not understanding how his boss did not understand his life, Gordon responded to his boss by saying, “My mother is in the ER! I don't really care about these other students right now. I'm not gonna… like, what are you talking about?! What is that to tell somebody?” And then, I had other run-ins with him, professionally.” Dr. Gordon goes on to say, “He later was rude to me and said, ‘I don't understand this connection you have with your mother, because I'm not close with mine.” This obviously troubled Dr. Gordon, and he would have to deal with this.
So he not only was caring for his very ill mother, but he was in a doctoral program and working dealing with the challenge that came with the program. This had a boomerang effect that brought him to “the breaking point.” It was this breaking point that reminded him the importance of seeking help because being “at that place” a place of turmoil and anxiety was not healthy long term:

The breaking point happened year one. So (laughter) year one, when I figured out that I could no longer do, you know the all-nighter that undergrad students do, right? I thought I could finish a final paper at the end of my first year because I was really given an opportunity…. So, I was really having the presentation and writing the academic manuscript, so you’re writing the manuscript, so I thought I could get everything done, with regards to the right-up, and the presentation done in a day, right? So, I remember staying with my cohort because that's how they operate because I was still trying to keep up and then leaving their apartment on campus and then going to my assistantship, and then going to write after working all day. And I remember in the middle of the day, I would go to my advisor and then he would say, ‘you look horrible!’ (Laughter) what have you been doing? And I would say, “Oh! I’ve just been up all night and I was just… this paper.” And he was like, “Please. That's what extensions are for.” And I thought asking for extensions were a cop-out and I felt other people were doing that. And I didn’t want to become one of “those” doc students. So, he sort of had to tell me that you are getting an extension (laughter more laughter). So, I ended up…that was the one and only extension that I ever got. But I learned something about myself. I had to get better at asking for help, you know? It's up time most definitely, you know? But I didn't ever want to be in that place again and I also had to know fully what I could do. Like even now, I
actually just had a book chapter that was due; and I knew my limitations; and I knew
that I had grading; and I knew that I had to input grades; and I just come back from ER,
right? So, there was no way I was going to have this.

Whether he is coping with the challenges of an ill mother or the issues surrounding how to get
through the program itself, to make matters worse, he also had to deal with people who, in his
words were “making homophobic statements,” placing his personal life out on the line for all to see.

Although Dr. Gordon is living his life openly as a Black gay male now, it was not the
case during undergraduate and most of his graduate experiences, when he had to figure out how
to confront and deal with the challenge of being gay and deciding how and when to come out.
Sometimes, however, he did not have a choice, the situation would choose him and soon, he
would have to confront these challenges. For example, he was “outed in class by a Black male
classmate.” This outing was caused by, in Dr. Gordon’s words, “Black heterosexual males in
class…. Black straight men that I had run-ins with. But, again, I don't think they've ever come in
contact with someone like me, because I was just different… I was not going to back down.”
They were not used to encountering “an out-spoken Black gay man who challenged them.”

After “coming out” being gay during his graduate period, he tells how his sexuality, and for the
most part, his race may have played a part in the negative manner he was treated and perceived
by some students and professionals. As he puts it,

I learned what kind of space I take up as a young Black gay man; because I would get
student complaints of me being gay. They would make comments like…. I remember
when I pushed back on my later boss when I got a complaint and I said, you know, this
isn't the first time I've had a student get mad and complain because I told them “no.” But,
I said, to a white woman, if [you] tell them no, it's taken differently. Have you ever thought about what it means for me as a young Black man to tell a student “no?” But my white female counterpart tells these kids “no” all the time and there's no pushback? And she got really quiet and she said, “Well… I would like to think that our students are more culturally competent.” And I am like, “they’re not.”

He would later get “resistance from Black Christian heterosexual men in those environments.” Nevertheless, attempting to silence his sexuality at that time, heterosexual Black males continued to challenge him in class whenever he stated something, making homophobic statements. Dr. Gordon recalls one time during an outing for the organization called the African-American Graduate Student in Education when another Black male attempted to make conversation with him and his dear friend, Dr. Hall, thinking he was surrounded by like-minded individuals. This certain Black male made a reference to Gordon, insinuating his sexuality. This took Gordon and his circle of friends by surprise. He recalls the incident by stating,

I was at the end of the year organization called the African-American Graduate Student in Education, and there was a guy who… he made a homophobic statement, because he was, like, ‘gay people’…. And, it was odd because, Mark Hall had just graduated from Purdue and he was there, and a lot of people who are just graduated from the program who were doc students were coming back. So, I met Mark Hall years ago …over 10 years ago when he was a junior professor at Temple. And he was kind of like, ‘what did you just say?’ And I guess he thought that, you know, Mark was going to be on front with him, and, Mark was like, ‘what do you mean by gay people?’ And the guy was like somebody like Gordon; someone that acts like Gordon. And Mark and the rest of these Black women, they went in deep on him! “Why are you choosing to pick on Gordon?”
This sort of took Dr. Gordon by surprise. He was not anticipating someone to intervene on his behalf in this manner. Even on the way home, he was reinforced with true ally-ship and support. He comments on something Mark said driving him home after the incident:

I remember Mark drove me back to my residence hall that night, because I was a GA in that dorm and he said, ‘just know that I'm always going to be here for you. He was always like a mentor and a friend to me. And that stood out to me that all straight Black men aren't bad people. You know? And that just never left me of what that looked like. And at that point, I looked at what real ally-ship looked like.

Subsequently, Dr. Gordon learned to look introspectively at the “space” he takes up as a “Black gay man.” Nevertheless, although he would find that the space he held in the system world would continue to be infiltrated by challenges, by means of the support he received made enabled him to become stronger; helping him to recognize “the power” he held.

Dr. Gordon believed that his PhD brings him power, the ability to change outcomes, and a certain amount of respect, as opposed to someone who may not be a person in a position of power. As a professor in the Deep South, Dr. Gordon has learned to use his title, not as subjugation or in an authoritative position, but for respect. He reflected on how he positions himself in the college arena as Dr. Gordon. He explained:

I am not one of these younger professors who believes in letting go of the power that you make in the classroom. Because, I need it for my own protection, like, I'm a Black gay male professor in the Deep South, and, if I let you call me Gordon, then they’re going to run with that. I am Dr. Gordon.

When “every fiber of your being is in the front…. I don't really need the door open for anything else.” As the conversation continued, he related these experiences to the dynamics of power, the
classroom, and previous professors who preceded him. He speaks of a time when he made sure that he would have the respect he needed to thrive in the “Deep South.” As he puts it,

The biggest struggle…. being in a classroom when you know that every fiber of your being is in the front to a lot of your students, meaning your race, your sexuality; your educational pedigree; the fact that you're an outsider and you're not from the Deep South; and you layer that with issues of social justice and diversity and multiculturalism…. Then, you sprinkle that with the fact that we are in a very tense election year… that was tough. And then I was being compared to my predecessor, who was a white gay male, who was a lot more… I would say… well, they would say he was more amicable. I don't think I am a mean person. But, you know, he allowed them to call him by his first name and that wasn’t going to happen with me. I also demand excellence and rigor. So, you have this Black body telling you about these issues and demanding excellence of you and I think it was a shock to the system.

Dr. Gordon demands excellence. Therefore, by attaining his doctorate, he brings to the educational system the ability to garner and give support to those who need it.

One of the important reasons Dr. Gordon “went back to school at the University of Minnesota” to attain his PhD was to “get some answers” to problems Black students were experiencing while he was in his assistantship and as a professor. He describes how he saw so many of his kids coming home, and he did not “understand why they were coming home”; he wanted more answers. Because he was a first-generation low-income student, he empathized with minority [Black] students seem to struggle in the college environment. Being involved in either the Upward Bound or the District of Columbia College Access Program, Dr. Gordon had a first-hand look and opportunity to be a support to Black students who were leaving the
university. He states:

I decided to go back to school because… I had a really large class of students…. they were Latino, and they were Black students…. And, they were so smart! I wanted to place all of them into college. When they graduated from high school, I placed them all into college (inaudible) Upward Bound because I just really want to get back involved with college students because I felt that if I stayed away from college students to long, that, I would not be able to transition would not be able to move really well into HE.

Thus, after moving into HE, Dr. Gordon was able to work “on the retention side” stating,

I had several state jurisdictions and all of that. But, I found myself still being able to keep up with all of my students of Upward Bound, which was really good. But, in that same vain, I saw that a lot of my students, these low income first-generation students, were coming home. And, I didn't know why they were coming home; because it wasn't that they were not smart…

At this point, it bothered Dr. Gordon why these “smart” students were leaving the campus community. They had good grades; they were “higher achieving students,” and “many of them had full ride scholarships: “They were dropping out, quitting…. Something else was going on.” Therefore, he realized that something needed to be addressed, and only he had the power and the position to support them and bring about some type of support for this minority populace.

Although he ends this part of the conversation admitting that he doesn’t have an answer, he does, however, state that “students need support systems to be successful? It's one thing if you read it, it's another thing for people who are in higher education to know it.”
Dr. Robert Story

Dr. Robert is a 44-year-old Black male with many “layers” to him. On one level, he is a “funny and outgoing guy.” On another level, he is considerate, spiritual, and serious. More importantly, he is a father and a loving son. Raised by a single mother, he grew up financially disadvantaged. Still, he did not allow any challenge to hold him back. Dr. Robert overcame any challenge that he faced to earn a doctorate, write books, and to be, currently, the dean of technology at his IHE. Nothing speaks to this more than what his mother did and said that started it all.

Dr. Robert stated that his “father was never around,” but his mother was his biggest advocate and supporter. Standing essentially at “5 feet tall,” she was instrumental in breaking through a pivotal barrier enabling him to move forward despite challenges. When he was very young, Robert, could not express, verbally, his genius; he simply “learned a little different.” However, his mother knew what she had to do, and, she knew what she must say to officials if her son, Robert, was going to succeed. He describes a time when elementary officials were preparing to place him into special education because they believed him to be “a dummy.” But, his mother was not having that! He states:

I struggled with…. a speech impediment, and so I stuttered until I was about twelve or thirteen years of age. I had individuals in the school system tell me to my face that I was a dummy; told my mom that I was a dummy; and that I needed to be in special education courses. My mom fought for me and she said “No, my son is quite bright, he learns a little different than others, and if you know, if there's a testing mechanism or something like to test his abilities to do school academic work, let's do it because I know my son is a genius.” Those were her exact words and I’ll never forget them. And so, they did a test on
me and then found out that I was gifted and talented. And so, I went from them telling me that I was a dummy to then, later…. that I was in the gifted and talented program…. that I was a genius.

When Robert graduated from high school, he continued to move forward by applying and being excepted to a university in Michigan playing football. During this time, he admitted academically, he “lost his way.” During undergraduate school, for example, he had accumulated only 69 credits and had to return to his small town at a local college due to the low GPA. However, due to the support of others akin to his mother, like Dr. Anthony, who assisted him in taking processes step by step, it helped in completing his undergraduate degree. He mentions that he was “provided encouragement,” something he “never had, especially from another African American male”:

He is a father figure to me because I really never had that strong male presence in my life. The thing I found out about him is that, while he was capable of doing his job, he was absolutely not the smartest man that ever walked the face of this earth. And he taught me then that you don't have to be the most intellectual to be able to be successful and that the most successful people are the people who are the most consistent. And so, from that experience, I was able to get my undergraduate degree.

That is why Dr. Anthony remains a positive influence in Dr. Robert life. For example, Dr. Robert provides a basic yet important testimony of what Dr. Anthony said to him. He mentions Dr. Anthony:

Taught me something that I can't…I will never be able to re-pay him…. He told me, “Robert…. the first thing you do is that you take a step; and then the next thing to do is take another step; then you take another one.” And, it sounded super basic and it sounded
almost elementary. But, the unique thing about him was that he was there with me while I was taking those steps to give me some guidance as far as the things he experiences before and after just to give me encouragement which was the thing I’ve never had, especially from another African American male. And he was a father figure to me; he is a father figure to me because I really never had that strong male presence in my life.

Although Robert stated that he “never had that strong male presence” in his life, he graciously places, in endearment, his older brother Mark, “who has a successful hardware business,” and who “cooks out for everyone in the community, and people far and wide.” He refers his brother a “hero.” After graduating from college, he thought about pursuing a doctorate. He mentions that, initially, it was a challenge from his brother. His brother challenged him so much, that, he states “the bug hit him.” It was time to peruse his doctorate. Robert and Mark talked with each other about Robert getting his doctorate:

I received my master’s degree in business administration, and then I said, ‘you know what? Why not?’ And I said, why not get that doctorate? I was talking to my older brother, he's a year and a half older than I am, and he challenged me to get a doctorate in accounting. And I said, I don't know anybody who has a doctorate in accounting, and let alone, an African American that has a doctorate in accounting. And my brother just laughed and said, “why not you.” And that became our mantra especially in our family, and it morphed into, ‘why not me?’ So, when he said, “why not you,” I said, ‘you know, you're right, why not me?’ So, I went on to get my doctorate.

He knew pursuing a doctoral degree would be challenging. However, after much thought and introspection, somehow “separating” himself from others, he described,
Once I researched it and I saw the importance of being different than everyone else and seeing a way to differentiate myself from other intelligent people…. I could make myself different than others…. Once I researched it, I knew that it would make me different. I actually fell in love with the process, because challenging yourself to the point of blood, sweat, and tears, it's something that no one can ever take away from you. And going through that process, I learned so much more about myself than anything else. I learned that any challenge that’s set-in front of me, I can achieve it, I just must have a plan, then I have to work that plan and just be consistent.

Dr. Robert learned quickly how the system worked. He learned how to maneuver in a diversified and complex system, knowing that there would be people trying to keep him “on the fringe,” preventing him in some manner to discourage him from making it in the doctoral program:

There's not a lot of African Americans in it, especially African Americans males, so, as I’m going through this program, I think it was a shock to a lot of people because I don't think they expected me to have the sense, the smarts, the personality; I don't know what it was, but I felt as if there were people trying to keep me on the fringe and not allow me into the group.

Although Dr. Robert does not describe any possible microaggressions, he did state that he felt as if he was working just as hard, if not harder, than his counterparts:

My counterparts that didn't look like me…. they wouldn't get that same level of push-back. And, I don't think I ever had a professor that was a minority. I think all my professors were white males… so, that was a shock to me. It was a challenge to me… all
white males. It was a challenge to me because sometimes it's just, we did not see eye-to-eye as far as our communication, rhythm of communication.

However, Dr. Robert would find a way to avoid “the fringe.” He admits that he would sometimes feel “as if there were people trying to keep me on the fringe and not allow me into the group and that was coming mostly from students.” Being in an environment where he “had more females than males” and sometimes “all White males,” he shared that “it was a struggle” and then became a personal challenge to overcome. Dr. Robert believed there may exist a “relationship barrier.” So how was he to break through? This is how he explains it:

I could not get through that barrier to get that relationship that I knew was necessary to get that B+ when I deserve a B minus…. I realized that you need to adapt. You need to adapt to your situation. Often-times it's not about you having this pride or ego, it's all getting accomplish what you need to accomplish. So, to build those relationships, it was on me. So, I went to the office hours religiously. I was always at their office hours and just begin to build a relationship with my professors, and really starting to understand how they think. And when I was able to understand how they think… really understand who they were as a person, I really started to understand what they were capable of, and what they wanted.

The process “became more supportive than critical.” He began to understand what it was that his professors wanted from him.

While building relationships and understanding what his professors wanted, he worked on his writing skills while attaining his doctorate. Dr. Robert states, “the biggest challenge I have is to become a better writer.” He believes the speech impediment he had as a young boy made it difficult for him to formulate his ideas on paper in his voice during his graduate schooling. He
could “write in other people’s voices.” Still, he had to learn how to write in his voice. Reading at least two books a week, he still struggled. He reflects on how he forced himself to “get through it” talking “to some people who have similar struggles.” Thus, he reaches out once again to Dr. Anthony about how he can improve his writing. Dr. Anthony asked him a simple question: “You know, what can you control and what can you do to get better at whatever you were trying to do? How can you work on writing?” Dr. Robert responds:

I said, “I guess I can journal. And so, I read books on how to be a little better writer and I said I guess I can write.” And he said, “There you go.” So, once I told him what my plan was, he kind of held me to it, and I actually became a much better writer. He has written a book, he has published many times over, and, he completed his dissertation.

While completing the doctorate, personally, he will tell how the “blood, sweat, and tears” of the doctoral process began to impact him and his family. As he states, “life happens” and life began to take its toll. Being a dean at that time, he met his wife and they began to have children. Once married with children, the pressures of life began to come to a colossal point. He remembers having a conversation with his wife, adamantly telling her,

That's it! I'm done. I just can't finish this. And I remember her grabbing me, physically, physically grabbing me and physically looking me in the face and saying, “that's not you. That's not the man I married.” And I said, ‘Wow! How do you answer that one?’ And so, she said, you know, “you're going to do it, we are going to do it. So, whatever we need to do to get through this…I know we have a little one on the way, and I know the bills are still coming, and I know that you have to work from nine in the morning to seven at night or whatever it may be, but you are going to finish this because you started it.”
Dr. Robert continued to overcome challenges, yet he found ways of adapting and getting through it.

Many times, throughout his academic career, Dr. Robert would be “the only Black person in the room.” Whether it was in his division, in meetings, or even in the entire school, he had to learn not to “be ultra-sensitive to” race. Because race is not a factor in how he perceives individuals, he tries hard to get to understand people and meet them where they are in their personal and professional lives. Many times he recognizes that he is the only Black person in the room with a doctorate, and sometimes it is sensitive for him; sometimes he knows that he is the only representation of a Black male many will encounter in these environments. This is what he says:

Often, I’m the only person that looks like me in meetings. I'm the only person in an entire department, division; entire school. When that occurs, you know you don't want to be ultra-sensitive to it, but at the same time you have to be because you are the representation because that's all people see and know. And so, that has been a challenge to me because I have to always be aware of what I am portraying and the perception that I want the world to have of me…. everybody's always watching, judging, and creating a perception…. When someone comes in contact with me, as an African American, with a doctorate, I want them to be…I want them to walk away saying 'WOW! that’s different than what is portrayed on TV.

Dr. Robert made it known that it is commendable for Black males to be an expert “in all things Black,” but what’s wrong with being an educator, a teacher, and “not just an entertainer.” Sometimes, however, being an expert and a doctor comes as a challenge with colleagues who forget that he is a doctor and that he doesn’t not always have to be the one who knows all and
who is an entertainer.” Part of Dr. Robert’s personality is upbeat and humorous at times. However, in more informal settings, he believes many in his circle, at times think, “How can this guy entertain us?” What is it about him that makes them want to be entertained by Dr. Robert? He tells how he must be careful of, maybe, reinforcing a stereotype. This is how he puts it: “It challenged me…sometimes in a negative way. I have a couple of funny jokes every once in a while. So, then, I become the funny guy. And they say ‘oh he's a funny guy,’ and I'm not a funny guy. I am Dr. Robert Jackson.”

Although an enjoyable person to be around, Dr. Robert does not want to be “an entertainer,” In meetings, for example, others will express their desire to be entertained more. He says:

Often, it goes from me being one who is an educator, an educated individual, to me being, “oh… entertain us". I have seen it so many times. Let's say you're going to have meetings in there just having a tough day and you just had a tough day; you woke up your wife has elbowed you in the side; the water: instead of it being hot, it was cold; and the kids are screaming; coffee spilled on your white shirt as you're coming in, and sometimes you're not happy…. I've seen that happen, especially as the educated Black guy with a doctorate, it's almost as if I'm a carnival show. I am not a sideshow.

Dr. Robert knows who he is and what he represents. He believes the world needs less of a “side show” and less humor and more positive representation of Black males. As he puts it, there is a “lack of representation of African American males in doctorate studies and across-the-board.” First, he mentions that more times than none, Black males are singled out in the system, especially being placed into special education classes at an early age. This is what he thinks about the situation of Black males in the education system:
I look at young African American males, especially, as they are growing up, the first thing that the world wants to do is put them into special education courses because of their energy level. They want to put them on Ritalin and all those medications… they said, “Hey, he's too hyper, he's too this, or he’s too that.” But my White counterparts… they don't seem to get that same level of stigma. But for us, it's always the negative connotation instead off, you know, things that can be responded to positively too. So, I see that in the schools; I see how a lot of elementary teachers just don’t understand our Black males. And so, the best thing to do is to either eradicate them, or, put them in the office with the principle, and then, suddenly, just reinforcing in their mind that they are different.

Because of this reality, a large portion of Dr. Roberts time is allocated to educating, the public and fathers, investing a positive impartation into them and into young Black males’ lives. He encourages students of color to give their very best and to have confidence in all that they do. Nevertheless, part of the desire on Dr. Roberts behalf resides in the fact that he “really never had that strong male presence” in his life. So, for him, it is essential that Black boys receive the assistance they need, either from their community, teachers, their fathers/parents, and/or smart educated men like him. Dr. Robert wants to make sure that “they have hope; that they have confidence; that they are empowered.

The most important element that enables Dr. Robert to give hope and assistance to others is his faith. He says “the perception I want people to have of me is first and foremost, my faith…. That’s the first thing about who I am.” He may not wear it on his sleeve, but he avidly admits that, it is how he gets through every day. Dr. Robert keeps the Bible on his desk, not for other individuals to see or read, but to provide himself with stability throughout each day.
However, he admits that there are times when some individuals do not understand why he has it, why he reads it; they say, “oh man you can't bring religion in here.” This is how Dr. Robert explains it:

I'm not telling people to believe in what I believe, I’m just saying when I need answers; this is what grounds me. And so, [if] they challenge my ability to do that, I'm going to challenge their ability right back, not, to do that. And so, you know, it's who I am. I want people to know that. I don't force it on anyone else. It's just who I am; I'm a Christian first.

There are times when some people who really do not understand why he has a Bible on his desk. However, when they learn why he has it, it tends to be a learning moment. This is how he explains it:

If someone was to come in and say, “Hey! I see you have a bible on your desk...that really makes me uncomfortable.” Then I would say…cause that’s normally how people challenge you… they don’t directly say (you Bible thumping whatever), they normally say, what are you doing with that? My response is to be full of grace: "I'm sorry you feel that way. That's absolutely not my goal is to make you feel uncomfortable. Throughout my day I have small struggles that I deal with and I'm looking for words of encouragement. I'm looking for an opportunity to be a better person. So... what I do is I have this Bible on my desk and I opened it up and I read different verses that help me stay encouraged; help me to see people as I think they should be seen. And that's why my Bible is on my desk. It's to encourage me and to inspire me. It's not here to denigrate you or to tell you that you need to do the X, Y, or Z. It's all for me." And then normally what the response is from them is, “Oh, ok… I just wondered…. Oh, that's cool.”
On the other hand, there have been individuals who, for some reason, are aggravated by his choice of the bible. For example, some continued to say, “I see you have a bible on your desk…that that makes me feel uncomfortable.” Dr. Robert, then, calmly, and graciously responds similarly stating the following:

I'm sorry you feel uncomfortable, but for me, I need that to stay grounded. And then, normally, that's where it ends. But I have had people take me to HR and say, “Hey, I feel like he's trying to convert me.” And then they do a background check and ask other people. And then other people will say, “Well, he never, gave me one verse from the book he read, nor has he told me that I'm going to heck because I don't read his book.” And then once this is all flushed out ...and there is nothing. But for me, I need it. And I think that as a Christian, that's the one thing I was supposed to be, is bold in my faith, and so, I am...and I try to be.... I'm a Christian first.... I get up in the morning and I'm full of grace and I'm full of gratitude.... I have the ability to walk in it; and that I treat people like they deserve to be treated and not how I think they should be treated but, how they deserve to be treated.

At a place and time where he serves, it may not be accepted to be a Christian in a moderate world. Nevertheless, what Dr. Robert has come to realize is that God plays a significant role in how he treats people and how they treat him. He graciously recalls:

Sometimes people sit on it... I think sometimes people wake up and they simply want to fight and argue and badger back-and-forth, but that's fine. But, you must understand who's you are and where you're at.... God loves liberals and he loves conservatives at the same time. So, my whole world and goal is to provide faith and grace. And so my faith is in something that's way bigger than me. My grace is because of who I have faith in. And
so, when someone ever challenges me on my beliefs, because I'm very open with my conservative beliefs. But at the same time, I don't denigrate or knock anyone down for having their beliefs.

Indeed, Dr. Robert’s faith helps him in the position he has as dean of technology and it also helps him during his daily life. So when he thinks about issues such as what he has experienced, and will continue to experience, he remembers that it is grace and gratitude that enables him to do everything he must do.

Dr. Chip’s Story

Dr. Chip is a 44-year-old Black male. He is a father, a leader, and a son. Dr. Chip, the Associate Vice President of Academic Advising at Northwestern University, is a go-getter, a trend-setter, and a promoter of change for anyone and in the college community. When I initially met with Dr. Chip in his office at Northwestern, he and his staff were transitioning to other parts of the campus; thus, there were few people in the general area. So he and I sat in his quiet office and began to have a conversation. He began to tell me about his lived experiences as a Black male and how he journeyed toward and receiving his doctorate. Understandably, Dr. Chip was not always the change agent and leader on a college campus, yet he would grow academically and professionally to become just that.

Dr. Chip is an only child. Born to a single mother and not knowing his father, he was privy to witnessing how hard his mother and aunts worked “seven days a week” working at manufacturing and auto plants. Being only 15 years apart in age, he and his “mom practically grew up together.” Living in his grandmother’s house with all women had an enormous impact on him, particularly, their work ethic. He explains how that experience was influential. He mentions:
The interesting dynamic of living and having a strong influence of females, predominately females (because my uncles had long moved out of state, and all of my aunts primarily stayed in Michigan), we were still raised as a man in the house. My mom and aunts carried a heavy fist, and not where it was abusive, but they took on the role and accepted the challenge as being single mothers.

Growing up in this environment, he witnessed, personally, what it was like to see individuals he loved work hard and not give in to life struggles that come along with hard work. At one point, he explains vividly his mother and aunts work schedule and how they encourage him to find an occupation that he could enjoy and not work so hard. He states:

My mom got a job working at a plant called Heat and Manufacturing…she worked hard! My mother would go to work on Saturday and Sundays…., My mom worked third shift, so I barely saw my mom. So, the one thing she always reiterated was, "you never want to work as hard as me or your aunts,” because all of my aunts are either some type of foundry/ factory, GM, Ford, or Chrysler, whatever…. "You don't ever want to work as hard as we do. You want to get a job that pays you enough money that you can work forty hours a week and have your weekends off."

It is obvious that he has great adoration and respect for his mother. Both his mom and aunts demonstrated an exemplar work ethic. He says:

They understood, somewhat, what it took to raise strong kids. Some people have the idea that a woman can’t raise a man. But I beg to differ. We really didn't miss a beat when it came to not having a father or a male figure. Our uncles were hit and miss; hidden there, our grandfathers were there, so it really didn't, you know what I mean? But, all my aunts and my mother worked at GM on the line, so they knew how it was to raise these kids
whether it be a boy or girl and nurture them in the right way for them to succeed in exactly what they did.

Dr. Chip admitted not having a father in his life did not “really impact” his life. He did, however, admit that the relationship his mother had with his father’s sister had long lasting benefits:

Before I was born, my mother and her siblings, and my father and his siblings were very close friends…. They sang in the church choir together; they hung out together; they were legitimately friends. I was the one that brought the families together…. But, I would say, his sister, which is my mom's best friend to this day probably had more of an influence on my life than anyone (and my mom second) but, my aunt for sure.

Understandably, Dr. Chip was encouraged not only by what his aunt said, but what she actively did as he grew up; she was a professional in her own right, and although Dr. Chip states “I just knew that she was a doctor,” it did not matter to him as a child that his aunt, (his father’s sister), had her PhD in Neurology. He recognized later, however, that his aunt was an awesome person. This is what he excitedly states concerning this:

My aunt received her bachelor's degree from about 1978 or 1979 when she received her pharmacy degree…. She has a PhD from the University of Michigan in Neurology. She is a neurologist. She has worked with Mohammed Ali. You go into the office in her home and she have intimate portraits of her and Mohammed, you know, having dinner or talking etc.

Furthermore, Dr. Chip briefly makes it a point to mention that “her husband was a doctor; a dermatologist who worked with Michael Jackson when he had the skin issue; and they moved to Atlanta when he was a prominent doctor… It was the perfect time to move to Atlanta.” This painted a picture of what a doctorate was “and what it can do for you,” Chip states. Nevertheless,
Chip would take it all in stride and begin to mature in age, while going to school and working at the same time. Needless did he know, his mother and aunts were paying attention to how he was molding his work life. Working at GM during the summers while out of school, they take notice of how comfortable he begins to feel working and making allot of money. This is how he puts it:

I had an opportunity to stay working at General Motors on the line. And, at that point in time, I was making about $15 an hour and my eyes were like, huge...! After taxes, I still have 6,7, $800 a week in my pocket. So, I almost got caught up in that life and, I was hesitant on going back to Western Michigan. I was listening to my aunts and them saying… “Look! Are you crazy? You need to start looking long-term and the goals you want in life.” I was a year and a half away from undergraduate degree and I decided to come back… and knowing what I know… what has transpired with the automotive industry, it was the best decision that I ever made.

For Chip, “that was a kick in the butt” that, was all it took for the “a-ha moment” to occur. Although it would take much effort on his part, Chip would begin his ascension.

Dr. Chip admitts he was a “terrible undergraduate” and “was kicked out of undergraduate twice.” Not to mention that he had to confront the familial embarrassment of his academic situation. Not only did he have to face his mother, and grandmother, aunts, and other family members, this situation placed a great deal of guilt and pressure on himself. He had to perform academically better. This, again, was an “A-ha moment.”

Upon the third time entering college, he wasted no time; he began to commit to his studies, and he began to raise his GPA from a 1.65 to a 2.5; Chip was “on it!” During his college career, he “floated through with ease,” and he ended with a 3.8 GPA. Although his GPA was getting better, he faced another obstacle: to overcome reading and writing challenges.
Dr. Chip admits that some of the same challenges in undergraduate caught up with him, particularly in his doctoral program. Understandably, he never had to read on a level such as the amount a person may read while in a doctoral program. He affirms that in the past, he “hated reading” and had “to look at things, read it, maybe, two or three times” before he would comprehend it. He remembers an emotional time in his doctoral program when he “got hammered by his committee chair”:

I remember one time…I was leaving work one day and I was at a stop-light. I was looking at some of the feedback from my chair, and I was just getting hammered on just my proposal part. And I was like, “I'm done.” And I just dropped my phone and said, “I'm done. I'm done with this...!” I hated reading. You know, I try to relate everything to what I do, which is not always the case because there are theories and you got to be able to apply and how do you grasp and how do you understand and put the sentence structure together, and all of that. But, I was like, at first, and probably why I struggled as much as I did, and why I was getting hammered because I hated reading and I was just probably going through the motions, that’s just what I did.

Reading was only one of the challenges he had to overcome. He will admit that he had to become a better writer also.

Dr. Chip admits that he never conquered writing, as he loves the business aspect of situations; he enjoys “numbers and things of that nature.” Chip loves “helping people find jobs, helping people write resumes, cover letters, helping them polish their interviewing skills,” and during graduate school that was his passion; writing was not one of his beloved past-times. Yet
if he was going to be a doctor in higher education, he was going to have to become discipline in his writing. He explains how he was forced to be a better writer:

I struggled with the writing, such as the APA style, past tense, and not always fully understanding…. Even though I worked in higher education I didn't know the K-12 things. I struggled mightily in understanding why they said certain things like this and that. And that was, probably, one of the biggest struggles.

He realized that in the doctoral program, he was on his own regarding the PhD process. This is how he puts it: “So they tell you to use the funnel concept... and, I had in my mind how to do it, but putting it into a concept and writing it and researching it were two different ideas.” Dr. Chip ponders questions he could ask, but would not, such as, “Why didn’t you tell me that there was somebody I can talk to that could tell me how to guide me, or how to put this together, or how it’s supposed to be?” He says:

Then… as you get to researching, then it becomes this retention, a model.... I mean, I was all over the place! I mean, I was all, over, the place, making no sense at all, you know… I got to this point and still wasn't just... Man! I was just getting hammered by my chair.

Hammered and hammered and hammered! I was like, ‘F’ this, you know what I mean?

Being frustrated, he mentioned that he became tired of receiving papers back from his committee chair, where, in the margins, she wrote:

"What are you talking about?" Like I was stupid, and I know I'm not stupid. So, one day I just literally… I had to, I had a deadline. So, my chair started putting deadlines on me.... I changed my environment where I was writing, and I just started staying at my office after work. That way I knew I wouldn't be bothered and it will be nobody coming to the door; it will be no phones ringing; there would be complete silence. And from that point
on, that was my A-ha moment. So, when I started reading and then started conceptualizing it and putting it on paper it was like, "great point!" And I loved it and I love seeing, "excellent point! How do we tie this into..." I love seeing that. I get it, I get it now.

This was partially the beginning of his support network.

As Dr. Chip continued to excel in his writing, he reflects how support was a crucial factor in overcoming challenges in his doctoral program. Moreover, he compares the experience to undergraduate and graduate experiences. Dr. Chip says that at that time, he “didn't know how to seek help.” He mentions that during undergraduate school, there was much support such as the writing center or tutors. However, at the doctoral level, this was not the case. In his words, “they automatically assume you know.” This is how he interpreted this specific experience. He states, “You have to think, the people that you are dealing with, your dissertation chairs; they have PhD's, they have been around they know, they’ve seen it, they have shared on teen million committees and all of that.” Dr. Chip then tells how they speak regarding his process, saying, "You should know this; and I've seen the best of the best; and you should know this." Dr. Chip says, in this case, “A lot of times you don't.” Therefore, Dr. Chip found a way to not only seek support for what he did not know, but he would conquer it with the support of his cohort.

Dr. Chips cohort was essential to his academic and doctoral achievement. Because he knew a few people who graduated from the program he was in, and he knew three others who were in his program at the time, helped to make the process of seeking some type of assistance easier. As Dr. Chip reflects on this specific experience, he explains how these relationships “motivated” him, enabling him to make it.
We would check on one another…and we would always call each other and check on each other and say, "have you been writing? Have you been doing? Have you been researching? "…so that helped a whole heck of a lot. They would say "hey, it's all right. I want you to graduate with me..." they were holding you accountable because they wanted to see you graduate because you introduced them to the program and so, yeah, that's how the motivation continued, and the fire got relit of those types of things. Like I say, I'm forever grateful to that cohort because if I was on my own from the jump, I know I would not have made it.

Here he realizes something substantial and it became an epiphany; the process was somewhat ceremonial in a way. He says:

It was like a baptism to…welcome to, you're going to have to cross this because there are certain things and certain people that don't tell you… how it's supposed to be…. So, those were some of the frustrations. But when I look back on it now, I'm a much better writer. I analyze and break things down a little bit better. I'm glad I went through it.”

Dr. Chip states he “didn’t know how to seek help” at first. However, with the help of his cohort and the committee, he was able to learn how the doctoral process worked and the impact that process would have on others through his work.

**Summary**

Not monolithic in nature, Drs.Tyrone, Paul, Mark, Baldwin, Gordon, Robert, and Chip described their experiences of being a student, an administrator, and/or faculty member differently. Black males who earned their doctorate and who now hold a position in an IHE have similar experiences. These professionals indicated that if it were not for certain experiences in their life, it would not have triggered the factors that helped them pursue and attain their
doctorate. Thus, by having insight to their stories and by understanding their experiences, this study provided insight to how Black males have accomplished graduate school, earning a doctorate, and working in an IHE.

Chapter IV presented personal stories that described the lived experiences of Black males from a personal point of view. The design of narratives was strategic to illuminate the participants lived experiences accurately. All seven participants experienced many of the same themes, only in different ways. Chapter V will provide a thematic analysis of major themes, and the connection to the literature will be provided. Chapter VI will provide a summary of the study and how codes and themes emerged in order to create themes and categories. An explanation of my learning, implications, recommendations for leaders and suggestions for future study will be provided.
Chapter V: Themes

There exist critical experiences for Black males as they move through the educational system. Based on Harper’s (2012) anti-deficit framework, I linked his post-college success framework with the lived experiences and characteristics of Black males. The conceptual framework for this study puts forth that, after enrolling in a graduate program and journeying through post-graduate degrees, the lived experiences of Black males can be explored. This study provided feedback from Black males who completed the academic process and provided insight of how they made it through graduate school attaining their doctorate and a position in an IHE. This study also suggested that, by means of the participants’ stories, may assist others to understand Black males and their accomplishments.

Harper (2006, 2009a, 2012), explored three major categories, i.e., pre-college socialization and readiness, college achievement, and post-college success. Pre-college socialization and readiness stressed the importance of how family, college prep courses, and college experiences had an impact on the Black male experience. Harper demonstrated that the educational experiences and “out of class engagement” were beneficial in how Black males persevered and balanced their experiences while in college. Referencing the conceptual framework for this study, Harper asked what enabled Black men to get through the process so that they could compete for careers in their field of study. This study demonstrated that post-graduate, doctoral, and career attainment was possible due to perseverance and support systems in the college setting (Duckworth, 2016).

At the beginning of the conversation, each participant was asked the opening interview question: If you will, tell me a little about yourself, your background, your journey? As participants began to tell their stories, they elaborated on the experiences that affected them most. They described how they were changed socially, personally, and academically. Moreover,
they described that through their experience, it encouraged them to mentor young Black males. As they would describe some of their experiences, they were asked to provide specific examples in order to provide a deeper understanding of how they made it through a doctoral program and working in an IHE.

This next section describes seven themes. As a result of this study, Van Manen (1990) suggested that major themes should focus on the experiences of all participants in a study. In order to uncover the themes accurately, a thematic analysis was conducted. First, recordings were listened to multiple times. While reviewing audio recordings, “bracketing” was performed, i.e., the identification of key phrases, interpreting the themes, locating the meaning of the themes, and the identification of reoccurring themes. Secondly, an analysis of the transcriptions revealed codes. The codes were then clustered into major themes to confirm the lived experiences. The themes were (a) race/microaggressions, (b) female role model, (c) strong identities, (d) determination, (e) mentorship, (f) support systems, and (g) academic intellectual.

One of the most important aspects of the human experience is to have meaning (Krauss, 2005). So each meaning was created then supported with headings of either the social, personal, or academic categories. These terms helped to provide perspectives, ideologies, and realities of the participants brought out by the themes (Lofland & Lofland, 1996). The terms were created and used, as Krauss (2005) states, to “share a common focus with humanly constructed ideas” (p. 762). Therefore, the three ideas are presented as significant aspects of the participants’ reality. The reality is the meaning making originating from multiple lived experiences such as the neighborhood, the college setting, or a psychological “functioning of translating it into how he or she thinks and feels” in a phenomenological world (Krauss, 2005, p. 763).
Theme 1: Race/Microaggressions

The first theme was based on how participants perceived negative actions, stereotypes, and attitudes of others toward them, and the outcomes that occurred because of those actions. The participants, however, expressed that certain challenges were an important part of their process despite, at times, feeling cumbersome to find that race was still a factor in their lives.

An examination of the data revealed that when it comes to race, it has a significant impact. Some participants faced covert and overt forms of racism, yet they had the insight and ability to deal with it. At times, microaggressions were so prevalent that it exacerbated situations that in turn, waisted time, and energy. Research demonstrated that microaggressions was experienced in three domains, i.e., the campus-social, campus-public, and campus-academic, therefore rendering a racial battle fatigue (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007; Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008). Thus, due to certain strains of microaggressions, Black males were made to feel, or they experienced, both overt and covert racism that produced, in some cases, frustration, anxiety, and anger.

Participants explained how, for example, race and microaggressions were a part of their experiences and how it ultimately helped them cope with it, enabling them to make it through graduate school and their professional career. For example, participants would not be dismissive of the aggression, but would confront it by asking the person directly what they meant or avidly telling the aggressor, in some way, that they do not appreciate, nor will accept the conditions. Moreover, sometimes the participants had friends who would counter the aggression by confronting the aggressor themselves, alleviating the participant at that moment. Dr. Baldwin was taken back by remarks a colleague had said during downtime in the office and this is how he explained it:
I have experienced some microaggressions. So, I share an office space with an older white woman, older Irish catholic white woman, probably one of the most senior faculty as far as tenure here. And she’s made some comments…she’s talked about how she went home and told her husband that she shares an office with a ‘nice colored man,’ and I think she meant to say a man of color, but I don’t know. But I thought that maybe she slipped up. Whether it’s a faculty meeting, we’re talking about Trump, we’re talking about teaching in the age of Trump, you know, classroom dynamics…she mentions nice colored man, again, in reference to me. And so now, my colleagues hear this and see this, right? What the hell…! The dean of the school calls me in and asks ‘how do you want me to address this?’ That was frustrating to me. Like, I don’t think it’s for me to tell you how to address somebody that…I don’t…I don’t…I don’t think she means any harm by it, but it just speaks to a mentality.

Although these comments take Baldwin a little by surprise, he thinks about it and then he dismisses it as, maybe, a mistake. Interestingly, although he feels the microaggression taking place, he chooses in some way, to be ultra-sensitive, providing her a way out. He experiences the situation firsthand, twice, and then, he in his own way, decides he will let go of it by deciding she “didn’t mean any harm.” However, when the dean asked him about what he should do, Dr. Baldwin obviously felt harmed by the woman’s words. More apparently, he felt even more harmed that the dean placed the responsibility of rectifying the situation on him. To Dr. Baldwin, the reaction of the dean was, in a way, weak or simply unconcerned. Dr. Baldwin dismisses her actions and decides not to ponder on it any longer.

Another participant, Dr. Paul, never stated that race/microaggressions was an issue. Still, while speaking of experiences during undergraduate and graduate school, he somehow reverted
back to a time when he was troubled by undercurrents of microaggressions. He will state that, he “never mentions race” until someone else injects it in the conversation. So when the question was asked, this response seemed to make its way to the forefront:

One of the things that really bothered me was: I noticed on our floor all the suites were broken up by race, right? So, they said they randomly assign people to suites, but my roommate and our two suite mates were Black, and then, the suite next to me were Black; and then the one next to that were all White guys. As much as they could, that was the demographic. And we all got along pretty well on the floor and it wasn’t until, like, me and another guy noticed, like, “Why is this a case...?” It's like, you know…. all but two suites. And we asked… I was on housing staff and I asked one of the guys why that was, and he said that “it was random.” We’re like, “Naugh, it’s not random.” But then saying very much, like, I don’t know if it was conscious or not, but, sort of joining a Black fraternity. I had friends who were in white fraternities and I noticed that we did very much different things. Umm and you know, seeing where people ate it the eateries and things like that; and it was…I didn't notice any racial tensions on campus. But still, it is very present, right?

Dr. Paul’s and Dr. Baldwin’s experiences are not monolithic in nature. Both Paul’s and Baldwins insight suggests that microaggressions can occur covertly having an impact on an individual. More telling, however, is that in both experiences they, in their own way, put it away and did not dwell on the issue too long; it was not something they would make an issue of. They thought about it, and it is evident that even though they were aware that something negative had taken place, it was not worth the time nor anguish to seek out why things were said and/or done.
For Dr. Tyrone, this was a constant factor in his educational experiences. He discussed how at times the struggle seemed to be more difficult because he was Black. At times, he wondered if there would ever be a time when he would be credible simply because he did the work and that he earned his PhD. However, he found that it is hardly the situation. He provided some insight inequities:

I'll be honest. One of the challenges is it’s very tough as an African American male to get certain positions especially in higher education…it was really, really difficult. Higher education is a system with a lot of racial barriers and stereotypes that makes it very hard for all groups of people to be successful…I've always had a bigger vision of what I've accomplished because I know that's needed. So, when I got the higher Ed position, one of my motivations for coming here was, I wanted to be that face; I wanted to be viewed as an equal…. So, when I got there I realized that it was still…it was just still…still a struggle.

Dr. Tyrone found out, that the microaggressions he experienced as a Black man would continue to follow him into his career. The doctorate could not change the fact that he was still Black, and discrimination was still a factor in his life. It is obvious that when Dr. Tyrone experienced this action, he lost some faith in the system to view him on the same playing field as everyone else. Whereas Dr. Tyrone’s’ experiences with race/microaggressions were more internal based on external factors, Dr. Mark’s experience was external based on external circumstances. For Dr. Mark, it was less nuanced and overtly present.

During the conversation, he provided an array of answers about how microaggressions affected him. Dr. Mark confronted these challenges with power and with wisdom so to deal with
the “foolishness” he would experience periodically. In his own way, he constantly pondered and confronted certain behaviors of others he worked with in higher HE:

If you were to ask me what you remember from graduate school or what you remember from doctoral studies; what you remember, while working on your doctorate degree is this constant white racism. It’s these constant microaggressions, constantly…. Constantly having to deal with this level of ignorance. Some of the racism that I experienced prior to the PhD…quite frankly, it’s almost in a sense that it’s become heightened now, where some people feel more threatened by me, meaning that they were already threatened, but now, somehow, the PhD makes it more threatening. Racism in no way has discouraged me. In some cases, it has fueled me. So, for me, I feel better that I can beat you intellectually. I don’t need to knock anybody out. I'm going to whip them intellectually.”

Dr. Mark experienced microaggressions on a constant basis. During the conversation, he talked about being scrutinized by a White male colleague in front of his students. The colleague began to degrade him:

I'm a professor. I remember once clearly, a white faculty member walks into my room (and I keep my door closed at all times), and locked and he knocked on the door…. He walks into my classroom, turns, and talks to my students and says, “see, the doctor must've been out all-night drinking… out all-night drinking 40s. He is dressed down and he probably just came in to class.” And, of course, the 40s is loaded in terms of race.

Dr. Mark obviously felt degraded and lessened, first as a professor and colleague and second as a human being. In a system where he has much to give, it seemed to him that some would not have the desire to take him seriously. He never stated that he ever confronted the colleague, yet, he also stated that even if he were to even go to the human relations, he “could not prove that the
colleague had ill intentions.” Dr. Mark is describing how deep and ambiguous microaggression are and how the undercurrents of prejudice is significant in his lived experiences. It seems to be the same for Dr. Robert as well. At points, Dr. Robert was not taken seriously; he sees a system that makes it difficult, especially when a person is viewed as a “side show.”

Dr. Robert expressed how a different form of microaggressions happens. He described a time when he was viewed as the only Black male professional in his division and the perception of who he was sometimes became marginalized:

I'm the only person that looks like me in meetings. I'm the only person in an entire department, division; entire school. When that occurs, you know you don't want to be ultra-sensitive to it, but at the same time you have to be, because you are the representation because that's all people see and know. I've seen that in meetings where they're like, “OK, tell a joke.” And they say, “Remember that one day you told a joke and it was really funny? Tell everybody here.” And it's just like, “OK. So, I get that.” So, I don't want to be an entertainer. And so, often times that's where it goes too…. it goes from me being one who is an educated individual to me being, “Oh… entertain us.” I have seen it so many times. And so, I've seen that happen, especially as the educated Black guy with a doctorate, it's almost as if I'm a carnival show. You know, let me introduce you to my doctorate friend". And you know it’s kind of like, “I appreciate that,” but, at the same time I am not a sideshow.

Dr. Robert took on the burden of being the “representation” for Black people. Yet, knowing that it was too much, at times, to be the professional and the entertainer, it seems that Dr. Robert would grow tired being the representation and attempting to make light of, what could have been tense settings at times. Being the only Black guy in the division, and not wanting to appear too
nervous, Dr. Robert knew that the sideshow was becoming a little too much to deal with. It seems that whether the actions of his colleagues were intentionally or unintentional, he felt he was singled out as the one to be the side show.

During Dr. Gordon’s experiences, it was more prejudicial and blatant when dealing with microaggressions. Dr. Gordon, who is openly gay, made the distinction of receiving negative kick-back from individuals who view his actions differently because he was an openly gay Black male while he was a teacher assistant on campus. He told of a time when he worked with a White female professional counterpart and the feelings he had of an undercurrent of/or a lack of academic credibility on his part. He explained it this way:

I was dealing with…and I wrote about this in my dissertation. I would say it was much more class, and then there was some…ummm…things dealing with my own sexuality. So, I didn't come out until after graduate school, and that is where I reconciled that. And that was very interesting because I found myself getting into run-ins with other Black heterosexual men in class; constantly challenging me in class whenever I say something, making homophobic statements. I would get student complaints of me when I pushed back on what I said.

When Dr. Gordon would get complaints, it wasn’t because he was a bad teacher, it was because he was gay. Coupled with that, he had “power” and authority and some did not like that, which prompted him to say, “You know, this isn't the first time I've had a student get mad and complain because I told them ‘no.’ If you tell them no, it's taken differently when said by a White woman.” Now, he is specifying the inequality between how he feels he is treated as a Black, gay, male professor in the classroom and the uncriticized excepted “typical white female professor.” Dr. Gordon believed that his sexuality was scrutinized, and he was not valued and taken as seriously
as his white counterparts. When Gordon would, in his words, “push back,” it would trouble his opponents, sometimes isolating him to a point being the only Black, gay male in this social environment.

Whether race/microaggressions were an action placed on the participants because they were Black or gay, they still experienced the phenomenon. Interestingly, the participants were not as shocked, yet somehow it was almost excepted in some way. Even when they were aware that some aggression was at play, they dealt with it or discarded it. Moreover, socially, being confronted with exclusion, toxic situations, and environments, these intensified feelings of not being treated fairly and not having a fair advantage (Harper, 2013). Demonstrated by their experiences, these circumstances had an impact on them, but it did not sway them from their goal. At times they stated that it felt as if it “was a constant battle to overcome certain stigmas and expectations and stereotypes,” and at points, it was a “struggle.” Moreover, many of the participants felt as if they were singled out at times or made to feel devalued. The participants believe that the temperament and the expectations for them were different imposing a negative influence. Findings support research that demonstrates that race or microaggressions continue to be a factor the lives of minorities (Feagin, 2014). Nevertheless, despite the aforementioned, the goal was to “fight against the system” to overcome certain stereotypes and microaggressions.

**Theme 2: Female Role Model**

Reflecting on the past, the participants were able to reflect on the importance of their relationship with their moms. All participants, except for one, identified their mother as significant individuals who influenced them greatly. Participants stated that they love their mothers and highly respected their opinion throughout their lives.
During Dr. Roberts interview, for example, he described the influence of such a small statured woman who had a significant presence in his life:

My mom was the most instrumental and continues to be… My mom raised me and my two brothers, and it was a privilege, because she taught us some things about life that helped at this very point in my career. My mom was the most instrumental and continues to be. She's 5-feet-tall and just full of vigor and it's amazing that someone was 5-foot-tall could have sons that are 6’two, 6 ‘seven, and 6 ‘five, and we are all in fear of her…. My mom fought for me… And that's the one thing I can never ever, ever, pay her back! Because had she not fought for me, there's no telling where I would be.

Absolutely… I had individuals in the school system tell me to my face that I was a dummy; told my mom that I was a dummy; and that I needed to be in special education courses. My mom fought for me and she said “no, my son is quite bright, he learns a little different than others, and if you know of a testing mechanism or something like, to test his abilities to do school academic work, let's do it because I know my son is a genius.” Those were her exact words and I’ll never forget them.

When other participants were asked the same question, the answers were similar in nature surrounding their affection for their mom. Dr. Chip spoke more to the disciplinary type of mother he had, a “mom” who was firm and adamant about her son succeeding despite the absence of a father, so this is how he responded:

My mom and aunts carried a heavy fist, and not where it was abusive, but they took on the role and accepted the challenge as being single mothers. So, they understood, somewhat, what it took to raise strong kids. Some people sometimes have the idea that a woman can’t raise a man. But I beg to differ. So, we really didn't miss a beat when it
Participants were unyielding regarding how they felt about their mothers and the manner in which their mother “pushed” them. Dr. Mark’s discussion emphasizes what all participants voiced during the discussion. He stated,

There is no way on earth that I’m supposed to be here; no way am I supposed to be doctor, or anything; not supposed to be teaching anything. It was a promise to my mother, and that is why I am a doctor right now. That’s the only answer.

Like Dr. Mark, many of the participants are doctors today because of their mother. Due to their mother’s guidance, the participants of this study were able to “push” their way through many circumstances. Whether it was in the early stages of their academics, undergraduate, or graduate school, they appreciated their mother’s encouragement.

Repeatedly, participants discussed their love and guidance of their mother. Without them, their lives may have turned out differently. Not disappointing their mother was also evident. None of the participants voiced dissatisfaction or regret, yet they embraced it and used the experience to reinforce their reason for attaining their doctorate. In lieu of the participants discussion, their mothers inherently molded, to some extent, their personality, character, and identity. In the next section, I will discuss further the personal aspect, with regards to how participants strong identities played a significant role in their attainment of a doctorate.

**Theme 3: Strong Identities**

The identities of who the participants were became significant during experiences of undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate studies. During doctoral and career attainment, Black males who had strong identities were able to attain their degree. Who the participants are
personally and what they expressed in the interview process determined how they dealt with their graduate, post-graduate, and professional experience.

An examination of the data revealed that, as it pertains to identities, the participants identities were strong. The participants described their identities in the following ways: (a) spirituality, (b) being gay and proud, (c) knowing who they are and not being swayed of that fact, and (d) being self-empowered.

Identities among Black males are important, and sometimes their identities are misunderstood or maybe challenged in the college setting (Whiting, 2009). On the other hand, many Black males’ identities are solid and a stronghold that enables them to get through the difficult times because they formed relationships with others (Taylor & Howard-Hamilton, 1995). The participants in this study had significant identities, and many times, it was who they identified as that assisted them in earning their degree and moving into a career in HE. Furthermore, not any of the participants was confused about who they were and the importance they bring to the doctoral process and the profession. Participants encountered obstacles, yet because of their stability, they were able to succeed. Therefore, their succession was an inherent resolve.

Regarding the spiritual aspect, Dr. Robert reiterates the point of how spirituality is an important part in his daily life. Although he works in a “liberal” environment, where spirituality is not a common talking point, he makes no quarrels that he is very open with his “conservative beliefs.” He uses his belief in God to strengthen him which helps him get through each day:

Throughout my day I have small struggles that I deal with and I'm looking for words of encouragement. I'm looking for an opportunity to be a better person. So, what I do is, I have this Bible on my desk and I opened it up and I read different verses that help me
stay encouraged; helps me to see people as I think they should be seen… It's to encourage me and to inspire me.

There are many times when Dr. Jackson needs nothing more, than to be able to read his Bible so that he will have grace for others. Thus, his faith provides the grace to deal with everyday life and people, who may not have grace for him even when he is sometimes challenged about his faith. He provided a little insight to what this means to him:

God loves liberals and he loves conservatives at the same time. So, my whole world and goal is to provide faith and grace. And so, my faith is something that's bigger than me. My grace is because of who I have faith in. I'm very open with my conservative beliefs. But at the same time, I don't denigrate or knock anyone down for having their beliefs.

When situations became a little tense and people did not understand his spirituality, they would create some difficulty. He spoke briefly about a Human Relations (HR) incident:

I have had people take me to HR and say, “Hey, I feel like he's trying to convert me.” And then they do a background check and ask other people. And then other people will say, “Well he never, ever gave me one verse from the book, nor has he told me that I'm going to hell because I don't read his book.” I've had friends who have challenged me who say that they do not believe in the Bible. And I say "that's great! And they are, like' whoa! “You're not going to fight back? Why aren't you going to fight back?” Then I say, “Because we’re not fighting.” I think sometimes people wake up and they simply want to fight and argue and badger back-and-forth, but that's fine. But, you just have to understand who's you are and where you're at. And you have to.... It's just grace, grace, grace.
Dr. Gordon, who is openly gay, expressed how, at first, his identity as a Black gay man was feeble as he was finding his way through undergrad and graduate school. He would encounter situations of bigotry that challenged his sexuality and “silenced” his identity:

So, I was dealing with… dealing with my own sexuality, and I wrote about this in my dissertation… So, I didn't come out until after graduate school, and that is where I reconciled that…. It was very interesting. I was outing in class by a Black male classmate, which was a very interesting experience…that was at Prairie University…. that is where I was silenced. That was a part of my identity…. But, I will say this though, I did advising when I was at Maryland University, and I would say that at Maryland, I learned what kind of space I take up as a young Black gay man.

When he became “Doctor Gordon Gartrell,” he began to be strong and not silenced; he began to attain his own power, when, he was challenged because of his sexual orientation:

I am not one of these younger professors who believes in letting go of the power that you make in the classroom, because I need it for my own protection. I'm a Black gay male professor in the Deep South. I am Dr. [Gordon] Gartrell… and you are not going to challenge me. I don't really need the door open for anything else.

Dr. Tyrone expressed his identity in a different vein, as he has always been associated with his lifelong competitiveness and drive.

As a former athlete, he learned how the art of competition in games translated into successful outcomes. To explain, Tyrone discusses briefly what his competitive nature looks like when moving between an academic perspective and a sportsman perspective:

The thing that worked toward my characteristics was that I am competitive. So, it was cool to have friends and work together, but it was also cool to set a target or a
competitive nature within myself without having shared it with them to see who would get the highest grade or to want to finish my proposal. So that sort of helped me have that competitiveness to keep me with a drive.

Dr. Baldwin’s identity is his pride and confidence in who he is and what he can do. At times during the discussion, Dr. Baldwin and several other participants expressed their abilities, not from a position of haughtiness, but from a position of sureness. When discussing this phenomenon, Dr. Baldwin began to talk about having a certain type of self-assurance during his graduate period and how he was, to some extent, arrogant:

I remember when my professor called me out. I had said something to the effect of that “we are all at different stages of development, and we just need to keep that in mind.” And the professor was just…I could tell like…but he checked me in the sense of, he said, “Me hearing you say that makes it sounds like that you think you’re further along in the course than other people.” And there is some arrogance that comes along with that, right? It was an Ah-ha moment for me, really thinking about myself and how I show up in a space. And I think looking back on that experience and reflecting on it; it was in some ways a coping mechanism or defense mechanism of navigating the space. I had some professional experience in thinking that I couldn’t learn, you know, from other people, so now I look back on that, you know, I think I was a little bit arrogant.

Dr. Baldwin was not the only one to have a certain poise surrounding his identity. Dr. Paul was not shy views about himself and theory. At times, he voiced an extraordinary part of his identity, when discussing his scholarship as a Black professor. Through his undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate career, he was able to get through circumstances because he had a level of
confidence that could not be defied. He began this part of the discussion from his perspective of a Black confident male working in an IHE:

I am a rare commodity in the field because everybody wants diversity and inclusion. I’m a productive faculty member. So aside from being a Black male…I’m a damn good scholar. So being a Black male is really, really good, and it makes me marketable. So, how do I establish myself first and foremost as a scholar so that when someone reads an article written by me, the first thing that comes to mind is not an image of me as a Black male, but they say, Paul writes some really good stuff. And when they see me, and I’ve had this happen, they’ll see me… they kind of get that look and say to themselves, [I didn’t expect you to be Black]. Which is great, because I’ve established myself as a scholar, but now, I can speak to you about things that are relevant to the Black experience without you saying, “Well you know it’s just a Black guy.”

Dr. Paul also had no problem in voicing his opinion about who he is and what he is capable of. As a Black male professor, he uses his position to establish credibility.

Repeatedly, participants discussed in some way how they were empowered because they knew who they were intrinsically. How they described themselves, their abilities, and their confidence, encapsulates their strong identities. Without the intrapersonal knowledge of who they are and their abilities, it is possible they would not have been as determined, or, even made it to doctorate completion.

**Theme 4: Determination**

Participants were aware that seeking their doctorate would be challenging. Regardless of any discouraging moments, obstacles, or disappointments, they never lost focus on attaining their goal as a doctor working in an IHE.
Participants in this study did not show any contempt, regrets, or antipathy toward, or about individuals or the doctoral program they were in. An examination of the data revealed that (a) getting their EdD or PhD was a priority, (b) they would have to do the “hard work” in order to achieve it, and (c) determination was the factor in seeking new opportunities, whether for a job, program, or even a certain HE institution.

Although the literature has placed determination in the context of an academic attribute (Wood, 2014), there has been research that provides insight as to how the personal views and beliefs of the participants gave precedent to their resolve. According to Deci and Ryan (2000), a self-motivation theory is at play. Deci and Ryan believe that determination is driven by the psychological need for relatedness, competence, and autonomy, and the pursuit of any goal is sought after due to the strong need of reward. The participants in this study embody this theory. The participants were focused on attaining their doctorate, and they did so by confronting and dealing with institutional agents that hindered self-persistence during their doctoral studies.

Participants in this study are goal oriented and determined to succeed at whatever they were confronted with. Participants knew that the attainment of the doctorate was, maybe, the only way they would be able to teach, conduct the research they wanted, and work in some capacity that brought them relatedness, competence, and autonomy; they knew it would be a demanding task. Dr. Baldwin and other participants shared their thoughts about how determination was an intricate part of their doctoral completion and job attainment. Witnessing other “African Americans receive their doctorate” inspired Dr. Baldwin greatly:

I wanted a doctorate eventually. I also knew at that time that I wanted to do it full time. And the reason how I knew this is, because of my master’s program…. So, Lewiston University has a large…I won’t say a large number, but, at one time they had a
significant number of African American PhD students…. And to see some of them do it full time and to see some of them do it part time, at that moment, I knew that I was going to do it full time, just because of the time, the commitment, the stress of all of that. And I will say this…. I had the energy, the passion, and the drive to do it at that moment and time, and I didn’t know if I would have that energy, that passion, and drive, necessarily, the same way later on in a career.

He then spoke to what the PhD can possibly do as he ventures out into his career:

I love being in the classroom. I think I’m good at it. Teaching evaluations are fine, but that’s not all I want to do in the faculty role. I want to do what you’re doing right now. I want to do research, I want to do some interviews, and there’s a lot of projects that I’m interested in doing. I enjoy conferences. I enjoy presenting at conferences. I’m learning at conferences… I have to really work hard to really seek out the resources to really do those things.

During the discussion, Dr. Chip reverberated this phenomenon by stating,

It is very similar from undergrad into this doctoral process. It takes a lot of discipline and it takes a lot of commitment and it's not easy…. Sometimes if it means staying up to two or 3 o'clock at night and I have to be at work at 8 o'clock, then that's what it takes. But, I would not be sitting here in front of you today, man, if I did not have that experience.

Some participants like Dr. Mark looked forward to the challenge, as he knew he could easily get through it. Teaching at a small college before he attained his doctorate, he was able to understand the dynamics of higher education which enabled him to have the capacity of total autonomy. For example, when asked to describe any challenges he encountered while
completing his doctoral degree, he reflected to earlier years during his education and how his thinking inspired his self-determination:

> You know, the whole notion of space, the social structure of space, it provided me with the intellectual space where I could grow, and I could do my own thing without being challenged. When I was young, I would ask certain questions and they laughed at me. I took it that there was something wrong with me. In fact, I remember being called “dumb.” But, when I got to college, and I'm listening to lectures, and I began to realize that, ‘wait a second,’ there are other people who had the same questions, who were grappling with society the way I was. And these people are looked at as being intelligent. So… I could ask questions of society. I could ask questions of race, and of sex. I could ask questions of religion, I could actually ponder the idea: does God really exist? I was told, I was too dumb. All of a sudden, I can ask them and answer them for myself, and that was very much empowering. I don’t need to ask anybody else anything, I can do it for myself now. So, the whole notion of self-determination became a driving force in that passion where I found something, I discovered something.

This study revealed that Black males not only set a goal on attaining their doctorate, they knew that by “doing the hard work,” it would enable them to seek out new opportunities, whether in the classroom or workplace. The findings revealed that there were several important decisions participants made in order to attempt to move closer to a doctoral degree.

**Theme 5: Mentorship**

Research demonstrated that Black males who had the assistance of a mentor performed better in life, whether they were attending grade school or secondary and college settings (Watson, Washington & Stepteau-Watson, 2015; Wood & Ireland, 2014). Furthermore, they
appreciated the fact that someone assisted them in their personal and academic decisions (Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007). In certain cases, the presence of a mentor made the difference between academic accomplishment and failure. Research suggests that some Black males grew up in circumstances that could become a major barrier, such as an impoverished neighborhood surrounded by violence, and some encountered the juvenile justice system, sometimes making situations difficult (Bittman, Dickson & Coddington, 2009); none of the participants ever expressed that they had those barriers. Yet, because mentoring was established in their lives, it provided a greater capacity for getting through difficult and personal times, including academic accomplishment (Kelly & Dixon, 2014). Research suggests that in order for mentoring to be successful, there ought to be frequent contact and interactive time spent together that forms bonding and trusting relationships (Cohen & Galbraith, 1995). Cohen and Galbraith (1995) suggested that there are certain functions that mentorship provides between the mentor and the mentee: (a) emphasis on the relationship, (b) emphasis on information exchange, (c) focus on facilitation, (d) attention to their role as a model for the mentee, and (e) attention to the vision that the mentee brings to the relationship. Although there is minimal data that speaks to administrators or professors who are mentors, Cohen (1994) stated that the mentor mentee relationship between the professor and the student was a significant factor in promoting and cultivating the personal accomplishments. Furthermore, any one-on-one established relationships was viewed as a positive intervention. Thus, individuals who care about Black males’ social, personal, and academic lives were genuinely interested in their holistic accomplishments, assisting in changing a universally held deficit perspective into an anti-deficit reality surrounding how Black males can succeed even more (Harper, 2010; Watson, Sealey-Ruiz & Jackson, 2016; Valencia, 2010). All seven participants in this study were actively
involved in either, mentoring Black males, or constructing a program that mentored Black youth and students of color. Mainly, because the participants, personally, had the support of a mentor while in school, these men felt an obligation “to give back.”

When the question was asked “What led them to work in HE,” participants seemed eager and quick to respond. Dr. Mark explained it best in his story when he stated,

The inspiration was the level of freedom I saw in higher ed that you could not have in K-12… I wanted to be that person to take students…and give them a voice, to give them a space, where they can be free, and they can develop academically, so that they can develop intellectually.

Dr. Mark believed passionately in his role of supporting students because he was aware of the difference it could make in a mentee’s life. He believes what he does “fuels him” because he believes in his heart that “it is necessary.” As a necessity, Dr. Mark created a plan. He stated, “I take it step-by-step when they are at my school…. We have a plan to get them to the next plan.” He developed this plan into a program that supports the holistic student, and he works hard at what he does to get minority students, specifically Black males, to see their brightest potential. During the conversation, he mentioned how he takes students “step-by-step” in the program. He provided an example of how he assisted a female student of color:

There was one young lady who wanted to go to Ferris State. I contacted the school on her behalf. I looked for scholarships and formations; I connected with faculty. In fact, set it up for her to go visit. Got scholarships for her, the whole nine yards. When I presented it, she fell in love with Ferris State; she got the money for it; she's at Ferris State right now.

Dr. Mark works in higher education specifically for the purpose of helping to make students successful. He is “more concerned with students being successful and having time for more
pressing things” such as creating a food pantry for students. Dr. Mark discussed how he created a food pantry in his administration building, in the office space, and in his car; the reason he has a small pantry in the office space is because of the “stigma, particularly in terms of Black male’s masculinity can be fragile at times.” Dr. Mark explained a certain issue a young Black male had while in college and how he clandestinely came to him seeking help:

I had a young man… with tears in his eyes… come to the office to get some food…. He said, “Thank you, so much for the food.” I said, “No brother, everything is fine.” He said, “No doc, you don't understand, I almost had to hit the block.” I said, “I'm sorry?” He said, “Doc, something happened with my car. I had the money, but I had to pay for the car. If I didn’t pay for the car, I’m not going to be able to get to school and I’m not going to be able to get to work. Doc, I know this is wrong, but I must feed my babies.” And I said, “Brother, I understand.” He and I went out to my car; I have some stuff in my car I just had not brought it to the food pantry yet. And here’s what I thought was so profound. He almost had to hit the block. A week later, this brother comes back with $50 and he wanted to give it to me for the food. So, people have this idea that these kids are…. they doing the best they can they just have a challenge…. and of course, I didn’t take that money. I told him, ‘brother, you hold onto that money for those babies.

If it were not for the support of Dr. Mark and his pantry, the student would have had to “hit the block”, he would have had to do something illegal to gain extra cash in order to survive so that he could continue in school, support his family, and have transportation. It was obvious that Dr. Mark was an instrumental source student could come to. They had trusted him; he was their friend and mentor.
The pantry was an important aspect of giving back for Dr. Mark. It was selfless and compassionate in nature. For Dr. Gordon one factor that led him to work in higher education surrounded the empowerment of Black males and the concern of intersectionality and retention. He talked about the concern of Black males not staying in school and the categorization of race and its disadvantage:

I worked on the college retention side. So, I had several state jurisdictions and all of that…and… I found myself still being able to keep up with all of my students of Upward Bound, which was really good. But, in that same vain, I saw that a lot of my students, these low-income first-generation students, were coming home. And, I didn't know why they were coming home; because it wasn't that they were not smart, you know. They were all higher achieving high school students, you know? And it wasn't because of finances, because many of them had full rides, right? So, something else was going on there. And I said, I can't answer these questions, so I need to go back to school. I just wanted more answers.

Dr. Gordon did not feel as if he had the power to figure out why his students were not graduating and coming home. He knew that they had the financial and supportive resources, yet he knew, as he worked in student affairs during his undergraduate, that something else more serious was occurring. Therefore, he knew that he had to go back to school and attain his PhD to “get some answers” and “combat the situation.” Dr. Paul, even, had similar experiences. Speaking about the scarcity of Black males in his programming, he summed it up:

Once we do get them into graduate programs, the really good ones, they go to other graduate programs. They get sucked up by engineering or management. The few that we get into doctoral level programs, at the university…. they go to law school… where the
pay is much higher. They have faculty support, and what we realized is, it's not an issue with the guys we’re bringing in, it’s because there are plenty of other doctoral students that fizzle out. White males, white females, Black females don't tend to have a problem, they get through. The issue is the numbers issue. We need more coming in because the attrition rate…we just have so low of a number, so we’ve got to boost the numbers! We need more coming out of master’s level…, we need more coming out of undergraduate…well, we need more coming out of high school…. we need to fix the problem!

Although Dr. Paul and Dr. Gordon were speaking more form a retention aspect, Dr. Tyrone spoke more from a tactical perspective.

What led Dr. Tyrone to enter higher ED was his love for teaching and instruction. Bringing some of that experience to his PhD status, he had a focus on helping Black males and, moreover, “getting African American males into teaching.” Dr. Tyrone talked about, to a certain extent, how he relished the contact he had with college students and what he could bring to their academic experiences:

I enjoyed the interaction of the freshmen and sophomores and even sometimes, the graduate students, and I really enjoyed tying my curriculum to the more practical things that my students would encounter in the next steps in life, I really enjoyed it.

Besides aiding college students, expanding on curriculum, and instructing, etc., he was in a unique position as an administrator. Dr. Tyrone believed that by combining the “two worlds,” being a professor and an administrator, had its rewards. He discussed how each area provided more of a, holistic perspective of students:
I enjoy them both… It has taught me how to go out and collect data and how to use that research to make it as an administrator. And so, putting those two worlds together can be really impactful. Not only do you get the students in class, then, you can go back and put your other hat on and take the research and the data you have collected; create ideas to be an innovator, as a director or as an administrator. Then, you can publish, so that other people in those similar positions can then read about it and make changes and help you to contribute to the field, in the classroom, and as an administrator. So, I really see a positive.

Even before Dr. Chip became a doctor, he too wanted to help students in college. At the time, as an advisor working in the Multicultural and Minority Student Services area, he helped students. It was simply a part of who he was; it was a part of his job:

As an academic adviser… it was basically getting our minority students on campus into advising and trying to help, you know, them, graduate and keep them on the straight and narrow… helping them find jobs, helping them write resumes, cover letters, helping them polish their interviewing skills, and keeping them on the path to graduation in a timely fashion.

From the time he was in undergraduate and graduate school, he was being groomed to help students. More specifically, he became more strategic in helping minority students. This is what he added:

I had been trained and groomed when I was doing my master’s program. I was like, ‘this is the same thing I was doing when I was at Western!’ So, I was like, cool! From there, as an academic adviser, it was basically getting our minority students on campus into advising and trying to help, you know, them graduate and keep them on the straight and
narrow, and on the path to graduation in a timely fashion. So, that was what really broadened my horizon and perspective in higher education, especially in the student service area.

Dr. Chip had the position and the ability to make a difference. He had learned from his educational and professional journey, that when helping students make decisions that will affect their lives forever, it brings about a certain level of satisfaction that he had some input in empowering their lives. Dr. Paul reverberated this thought also by expanding on this point:

You have the ability to set someone up to be very successful in their own right, which is huge. It’s not only intrinsically fulfilling, but from a fields perspective, those people who are really the good key mentors are seen as superstars; they are great. It’s like anywhere else, successful people who help other successful people are considered to be the most successful.

All participants had their share of experiences as it pertained to mentorship. They shared how they took their own personal experiences, coupled with the experiences they acquired working at an IHE, to help minority students. The participants expressed a selfless attitude, as they were available, willing, and able to help in any capacity they could. During the end of the conversation, however, all participants demonstrated how their position was influential and why they believed their position in an IHE was important to the populace they serve. The responses participants gave regarding this question varied. Yet what all of them had in common was their connection with students, the power of their position, and their insight to the importance of Black males’ educational success. All participants expressed their own personal view, providing advice. Their advice gave some understanding of what they believed mattered to Black males.
Dr. Robert placed emphasis on determination and some goals students should have. He spoke about their goals and how they can be successful despite their circumstance. He expressed some of his experiences that could have set him back when he was younger; he used this conversation with them in order to get them to understand that success was attainable, regardless of their circumstances:

I try to understand where they're coming from because you have to relate to these kids.

And so, you have to stay up to what's going on now; the contemporary stuff. But, those are the type of conversations I have with kids.

He believes it is important to connect with them by being honest. By being honest, he can insist that they “duplicate” what successful people have done and not duplicate “stupid” actions or decisions that can hold a person back. Once, while speaking to students in a large auditorium, students noticed some scarring on his arm. This opened a door for further communication:

I have a couple of knife wounds…. on my arm…. when I was young and stupid, trying to fight people….and I always show the kids that, if they're close enough depending on how big the auditorium or the room is. I try to share with them those different things, you know, because I want them to understand that that's not the lifestyle they want. It's not something to be idolized. I always tell them that…. “you can do better.” The key is rip off and duplicate.

Dr. Tyrone also expressed his personal insight. He talked about the positions he may work in, in the future, where he could be more of an assistance to students. He stated,

I'm going to give it to you in general terms… If I were doing that as a director, as a department, or also teaching in a tenure-track position, it would be really ideal…. I probably would be happy and excited with that because one: I would get to work and
touch students and learn from them, and then, also have it tied to my research and publish it and use that in order to push the agenda; and to make sure that that department grows in service, and touch students who need it the most, those that don’t have a voice on campus. Making sure that I’m getting the right resources for them and just making sure that we can get retention increased; to make sure that in ten or fifteen years from now, that we’re not having so many programs about first-generation graduates.

As the conversation continued, he began to discuss what a Black male may expect as they acquire a position in an IHE. He provided some insight when entering a doctoral program, specifically, the stress that comes along during the first year after receiving the doctorate and working in an IHE.

A person that gets into higher education needs to understand that it's going to be bigger than just that job. I think they have to understand that it takes a challenge to get outside the classroom, outside the director or assistant director chair, and go out and work and touch the community more. I found it very difficult my first couple of years, because, it was so stressful going through the first part of the tenure-track. What I mean by that is, I can't just be a faculty member; I just can't be an administration… Higher education is a system with a lot of racial barriers and stereotypes… Until there is a little more equality on HE campuses, I think they have to understand that it takes a challenge. I think that it is very important that even through these obstacles and challenges, that a person can really work hard to find themselves and figure out where their passion is and what they love to do.

As difficult as it was, Dr. Tyrone did not allow his circumstance to befall him, he continued to evolve and not fall into a “negative stereotype” about Black males. Dr. Gordon spoke to this
point discussing his concern that studies about Black males which typically tell experiences from a deficit perspective. This is how he explained it:

I don't know what your data is going to tell you… but, I would kind of admonish you to …if you can… be holistic in your telling, but resist the narrative of the tragic Black graduate student, right? And, there is not enough out there on the successes of Black males.

He also added,

I would say that intersectionality is very important because I don’t know what my experience would've been like if I were straight, or female, or, you know? When I was part of the master’s program, I thought I was going to stay in student affairs, and, I was like, “no,” I think I'm going to get a PhD, right? So then, when I did go back to get my PhD, I thought I was going to go back and do, maybe, policy or administration and I resisted the faculty role. But I knew I had a responsibility to my people to be a role model, because I don’t think we have enough representation. I think that the academy can get kind of blinded…. So, we're still in the vast minority because 1% of the nation gets a PhD and I often wonder how many of them are Black people, you know? It doesn’t escape me. Thinking about those little nuances can't be important. I never would have thought that I would've been a faculty when I was a Black student.

When asked the same question, Dr. Baldwin also talked about Black males and their experiences during the doctoral process. However, his insight was more about being cognizant of not making some of the assumptions that have been made about Black males and their HE experiences. This was his brief reply:
I’m speaking from experience of relationships of Black men and, doing research of Black men and thinking about the doctoral process. What I will say is that, it took me a while to understand that Black men in the Black doctoral process is not monolithic. All of us are navigating and experiencing the process in very, very different ways. Some of us are being supported very well and our work is being recognized. Some of us are navigating this process with a life jacket with a hole in it. And, it took me a while to think about, not everybody is having the same experience as me. Being in it and reading literature, and you hear Black men in general are Black gifted men, or men with grit, navigating higher education, and not all of them are having all the same monolithic experience. It took me a while to understand that and to name that through the process.

Not being “monolithic” was a significant highlight of these participants experiences. Dr. Paul’s familiarity of his doctoral or HE administrative experiences, that occurred during his doctoral degree, was unique as well. Out of all the participants, his response to the question was more of a self-reflective nature:

I am a rare commodity in the field because everybody wants diversity and inclusion. I’m a productive faculty member. So, aside from being a Black male, I'm a damn good scholar. So being a Black male is really, really good, and it makes me marketable. So, how do I establish myself first and foremost as a scholar? So that’s when someone reads an article written by me, the first thing that comes to mind is not an image of me as a Black male, but they say, Paul writes some really good stuff. And when they see me, and I’ve had this happen, they’ll see me… they kind of get that look and say to themselves, ‘I didn’t expect you to be Black,’ which is great, because I’ve established myself as a scholar, but now, I can speak to you about things that are relevant to the Black experience
without you saying, ‘well you know it’s just a Black guy,’ it’s because I’ve established my credibility up front. And that starts from the way that I view myself. So, yes, I'm a Black male, right? However, the way that I went into my graduate education, and the way that I go into anything is: you know what? I can bring something to the table that substantive, and I’m going to talk about it from an informed perspective and I'm not going to introduce race into the conversation until somebody else does. Because now…and because it turns some people off.

It is obvious that Dr. Paul wants to make the statement that he is exceptional without the underpinning of being a Black male. First, he is a scholar and that is important that readers know that. However, if, someone discovers that he is a Black male, to him, that becomes a bonus. Yet, he never wants to be valued on his accomplishment, as simply a Black male, but a scholar, who happens to be Black. Because this is twofold, he is credible and taken seriously in the field on matters he is presented with.

**Theme 6: Support Systems**

Participants were asked to reflect on what affected them during their doctoral experiences. An examination of the data revealed that (a) having friends and family/a support system, (b) being able to have a mentor, and (c) being assisted through graduate and post-graduate programs by cohort members were factors that underline the success of Black males who earned doctorates and now hold a position in an IHE.

Research has also established that the support of family, faculty, counselors were an important aspect of student success (Tovar, 2015; Wood & Ireland, 2014). Wood and Ireland (2014) specifically gives credibility to the positive outcomes of a purposeful and supportive relationship between Black males in college and the support they received from faculty. Brooms
and Davis, (2017) mentioned that the mentorship between peer-to-peer and student-faculty mentorships were just as powerful for the academic accomplishments of Black males. Although not all participants in this study had the same experiences regarding parental, faculty and/or peer support, their common thread was the significance of the relationship. Many of the participants talked about the importance of having relationships that helped them to get through the doctoral process; a few participants expressed this collective idea. For example, during Dr. Tyrone’s time in his doctoral studies, he talked about how he was trying the “finish the process” of his doctoral program and how it was his cohort that helped him to make it through:

I really enjoyed going through the process taking all those courses with the ten group of people. And the ten group of people really worked in the strengths of my characteristics…. I really like the teamwork atmosphere, so I enjoyed working on research ideas with them, meeting at the library, and working in teams, learning different things. When we got to quantitative and qualitative courses, which I was really worried about, it was pretty cool to work together with them.

Dr. Baldwin also had the support of a cohort. Like Dr Tyrone, it was a certain group of individuals that helped him during some difficult times. He recognized what support looked like and he recognized that his cohort community had some of the same experiences in common. He told of the similarities:

I also had a cohort and community that, I know it’s not a luxury of all graduate students, all Black men, all people going through this process. And my cohort and my community were one of the decisions why I decided to go there. These people would be in the same program, going through this full time. So, there were seven of us, and of the seven, four
of us were Black students…Black PhD students. And they, in some ways, were going through the same crap I was, but also, they were a big support system.

Dr. Baldwin needed this type of support because he found himself at times, not taking good care of himself and his cohort community cared enough to help him. They would do things for him, and help him with suggestions such as eating properly, encouraging him, helping him out with meal planning, or even running to elevate stress, because he had forgotten to take good care of himself. In his words,

We would do things in communities together to get through the process. I’m not sure I would have been able to get through it, just me, by myself, trying to navigate or trying to find healthy coping mechanisms if, I didn’t have those people to support me through that.

It was definitely “a coping mechanism” for all the participants. Each one had to find out what theirs was. For Dr. Chip, it was not as easy to find support. For example, he discussed having a difficult time finding support from mentors or faculty when he needed it because, he believed that some individuals were so advanced that he would never be, in their mind, that would need support. He stated,

You have to think, the people that you are dealing with, your dissertation chairs; they have PhD's they have been around, they know, they've seen it, they have shared on ten million committees and all of that. You are just another person…You're on your own and there is no..., I didn't know how to seek help; I didn't know how to seek help.

Although he couldn’t directly find the help at that moment, support came in a different form; his friends and cohort.
During the conversation, Dr. Chip discussed how he found support through three great friends who had completed the doctoral process. He spoke of the relationship and the connection they made that helped him through the process.

We would check on one another. Now mind you, three other people in my cohort I had previous relationships with because two of their husbands had graduated from the program. I have worked with both of them at Lake Orion Valley College together…and we would always call each other and check on each other and say, "have you been writing? Have you been doing this…? Have you been researching?" Then, I'm getting some ideas bounced off of their husbands at the same time, so that helped a whole heck of a lot, you know what I mean? They would say "hey, it's all right. I want you to graduate with me. Look, I want you there with me….” So, it was a lot of accountability. They were holding you accountable because they wanted to see you graduate because you introduced them to the program. I'm forever grateful to that cohort because if I was on my own from the jump, I know I would not have made it.

Obviously, many of the participants felt “grateful” to their cohort members for their help as they worked through their doctoral process. All participants voiced their appreciation for the mentors they had.

Collectively, participants discussed how a mentor was significant in their doctoral completion. By having a mentor, participants were able to maneuver areas of the program that some may not have had without one. They were able to receive advice, that, in some cases, opened opportunities. Also, their mentors would “push” them and open up networking opportunities. Dr. Paul talked about the value of his mentor and how that relationship fostered
his curiosity and growth as a doctoral student and a researcher. Because of his mentor, Dr. Paul was able to make connections valuable to his academic success. This is what he said:

I had very good mentors… all the way through, from my master’s even here, I had really good mentors. They introduced me to a bunch of people, mostly, UC people because I was crew, but, all those faculty were very willing to answer questions, but they also pushed, right? So, for instance, there are big conferences in November, and the November before I applied to UC, I was at the UC gathering and we’re talking and I was meeting a bunch of people who talked about theory and all this stuff; having the nerdy academic conversations. And I was talking to a gentleman named Frank, who is one of my mentors… he is a god.

Dr. Paul discussed how this mentor, who was a notable academic in research, would give him articles to read to see what his point of view would be. Dr. Paul had a significant experience because his mentor was helping him to understand part of the doctoral process of an academic researcher. In addition, although he realized there would be disappointments, he had the support that would help him learn about the process and he appreciated that opportunity. He continued the conversation by saying,

Those type of mentors, like, push you, right? They see kind of where you are and want to push you to the next level and also give you opportunities to seek out support. That type of support is invaluable because…they're not leading you by the hand necessarily, they're letting you go, and each of those failures is a teachable moment, and the way to take advantage of it was awesome.

Jointly, participants voiced how a cohort, mentor, or friends helped them along the way. When they needed assistance, someone was able to provide support in some manner. However, the
participants would proclaim that there were certain barriers and expectations, good and bad, that they had to deal with, embrace, and overcome.

**Theme 7: Academic (Intellectual)**

Most of the participants in some form did not express any challenges being first-generation college students. Although they mentioned it diminutively, it was interesting to note that they did not make it relative. What was relative, however, was that, as a first-generation college student, they experienced periods of difficulty in overcoming aspects of the doctoral process. Although participants recognized that they were first in their family to attain an EdD or PhD, they expressed also expressed how unprepared they were in confronting certain challenges. One of the challenges was confronting and overcoming their writing skills; because they realized that to succeed in growing academically and professionally, they would have to conquer it.

Many of the participants expressed how they were underprepared for certain aspects of a doctoral program. In many instances that under-preparedness of writing began during the undergraduate process. For some, the writing was more time consuming, as it seemed to take the participants by surprise, unlike their undergraduate experiences. At other times, however, the writing was simply “the biggest challenge.” Participants were not ready for the type of, and style of writing in their doctoral programs. For example, Dr. Tyrone encapsulates this reality of most participants when he summarized why there may have been an under-preparedness in writing:

> I think that was one of the things: understanding the difference between graduate level and doctorate level type of writing and understanding the AP inside and out. Also, just the overall expectation of, that you should come in at a certain level, and I don't think, in a lot of programs there are resources to help you as it is in the undergrad/graduate program.
Dr. Chip, for example, discussed what being under-prepared looked like. Although he would make it through graduate school, he was not prepared for what a doctoral writing process would bring. During his master’s program, Dr. Chip was very interested in business and that is where he excelled; he was a “numbers person,” he like the “business side of things.” So, when he decided to seek a doctorate, it was a challenge. He discussed how frustrated he was with himself and the process because he was not prepared:

So, I struggled with the writing, such as the APA style, past tense, and not always fully understanding it. I had in my mind how to do it, but putting it into a concept and writing it and researching it… I was all over the place, making no sense at all, you know, missing every point. Man, I was just getting hammered by my chair. Hammered and hammered and hammered. And until, probably, a year or two before I graduated, I was, like, F this! You know what I mean? You go through things and… I get it, but it was kind of like a baptism, too, “Welcome to, you're going to have to cross this because there are certain things and certain people that don't tell you. Why didn't you tell me that four months ago? Why didn't you tell me that there was somebody I can talk to that could tell me how to guide me, or how to put this together…or how it's supposed to be? You could've told me this. So those were some of the frustrations.”

Obviously, Dr. Chip was frustrated because he felt that he was not personally prepared for the task of writing at that time. Even when he sought to become better at writing, he felt somewhat on his own, and the questions that he posed to himself demonstrated a deeper frustration in his process. However, when he realized that it was a process he could get through, he soon realized that the effort and frustration was worth it, and he admits that, “I am a much better writer now.”
Other participants struggled with writing in some form. For Dr. Tyrone, his challenge was, and still is, more of an academic style of writing. He discussed how frustrating it is at times to know you are writing well and to, then, seek publications, then to be rejected. For him, it is a constant re-organizing, rearranging, and adjusting to fit the scope of what a publisher wants. This is how he replied:

Writing is just so objective. It is such an objective type of thing, you know. I can send an article in for publication to a publisher and they absolutely love it. Then, I can write the same way to another-one, and it’s just not the style they are looking for, and they can rip it up; your papers and your articles gets criticized at all levels. And so is such an objective thing. So, it’s always that constant adjusting and learning and finding different editors to work with in a different research and how detailed they want is always a constant adjusting for me. And, I think the ones that you see, like those prolific writers, they kind of find their niche in one or two areas or articles and they kind of funnel their stuff through there.

For some participants like Dr. Tyrone, the challenge of writing did not always take on structural components. At times, it was more challenging to have the time and commitment, which at points affected them personally. For example, Dr. Gordon discussed how “intense” it was being in a doctoral program. He stated that he would fall “off the radar” when he would write.

Unlike undergraduate school, where he could pull “all-nighters” and finish a document or manuscript, doctoral level writing would take enormous effort and time. When asked to describe a specific example of those challenges of writing, he described what it was like and how a certain experience affected him:
The breaking point happened one year writing the academic manuscript. I remember staying with my cohort… and then leaving her apartment on campus and then going to my assistant ship…. and I remember in the middle of the day, I would go to my advisor and then he would say, “You look horrible!” And I would say, “Oh… I’ve just been up all night and I was just… this paper. And he was like, “Please. That's what extensions are for.” And I thought asking for extensions were a cop-out and I felt other people were doing that. And I didn’t want to become one of “those” doc students…. So, he had to tell me that you are getting an extension. But I learned something about myself. I had to get better at asking for help, you know?

Writing academically was not always mainly about time and commitment either. For Dr. Robert, his reading was excellent, he would “read two or three books a week when he was younger. However, his writing was affected by, in his words, his “speech impediment” he had when he was younger, which made it even more difficult to formulate ideas on paper. He discussed what this was like for him:

The biggest challenge I have is to become a better writer. Actually, I have a book that I wrote a chapter four. I also have a bunch of different articles that I've written. Obviously, I've written my dissertation, and I've been working on two books right now on leadership, especially leadership of African American males… But, it was hard for me to write in my own voice because I still remember myself as that stuttering boy from a small city.

I can remember it was really hard for me to have my own voice…and the way I force myself to get to that is…I talk to my mentor. He always says, “you know what you can control, and you know what you can do to get better at whatever you are trying to do.”
Dr. Robert discussed how he worked to overcome his writing challenges. To a great degree, he overcame this challenge because of a mentor.

**Summary**

Chapter five described the lived experiences of Drs Tyrone, Paul, Mark, Baldwin, Gordon, Robert, and Chip, while attending college, a doctoral program, or while working in an IHE. These experiences enabled the researcher to organize themes that identified the challenges and accomplishments of participants. Themes of race, female role model, strong identities, determination, mentorship, support systems, and academic intellectual emerged. To bring about validity and a deeper meaning, an analysis of each theme clarified codes, which in turn, shed significant insight into the participant’s lives. Chapter VI will conclude with a demonstration of how the seven themes were placed into three major categories: the social, personal, and the academic. Chapter VI will encapsulate a summary of the study, my learning, implications, and recommendations.
Chapter VI: Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe the lived experiences of Black males who earned doctorates. The first three chapters represented, first, the introduction to the purpose of the study, its significance, and the problem. Secondly, a review of the literature was presented and the third chapter outlined the methodological procedures for the study. Chapter IV provided insight into the lived experiences of the participants from their personal point of view (Smith, 2008). Chapter V presented findings that emerged from the collection of data. The synthesizing of data collection was also linked with theoretical literature. This chapter summarizes the study and its findings.

This qualitative study obtained the data by means of interviews, transcriptions, and gathering of notes (Creswell, 1994). Data collection employed an inductive style so that the data can be condensed, established, and developed (Creswell, 2009; Thomas, 2006). Thus, the primary purpose of the inductive approach was “to allow research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant, or significant themes inherent in raw data, without the restraints imposed by structured methodologies” (Thomas, 2006, p. 238). The findings were categorized by the order of the thematic analysis and discussed to answer the questions related to the purpose and conceptual framework of this study (Glesne, 2011). The presentation were categorized according to how the participants responded. Thus, the findings are presented to answer the research question for this study:

- What are the lived experiences of Black males who earned doctorates?

Seven Black males who work in an IHE volunteered to participate in this research study. The participants were faculty, administrators, and sometimes both. Participants created pseudonyms for the purpose of protecting them from any harm, providing anonymity. Each
participant was interviewed so that the stories of their lived experiences could bring about insight to the experiences of Black males. For each interview, I followed the same procedure for replicability, i.e., all participants were asked the same questions from the same semi-structured interview guide. Although each participant was asked the same questions, their responses were different which enabled impromptu responses and open conversation between the participant and myself. It was these impromptu responses and conversations that triggered follow-up questions. Many of the follow-up questions were given during a second interview. Nevertheless, it was important that each participant’s story be accurately portrayed so to bring about “credibility” of this research study (Morse et al., 2008).

This study used an interpretivist approach to explore the lived experiences of Black males who earned doctorates. The theory of knowledge and the assumptions and beliefs the research has about the nature of knowledge helped define the scope of the study. The interpretivist approach provided me with the insight and the ability to rely substantially on the data collection procedures such as interviews, field notes, and my personal journal. This approach provided me with accuracy of fit with data collection and enabled me to have an open and honest dialogue with the participants in this study, creating a truthful reality, which in turn provided me with my own reality.

**Summary of the Findings**

Findings from this study suggested that the lived experiences of Black males do not have to be explored from a deficit perspective. There are Black males who had positive and negative experiences, yet they completed a doctoral degree and work in a professional practice. Many times, prior research focused on what prevented Black males from achieving their social, personal, academic and professional goals (Jackson, 2006: Noguera, 2003). This study provided
insight into their lived experiences, enabling them to graduate with their doctorate and attain a job in an IHE. This chapter defined and answered the central research question: What are the lived experiences of Black males who earned doctorates?

The narratives conveyed the meaning of Black males as they made their way through graduate and doctoral completion. By introducing the central research question, and after reviewing the transcriptions, notes, and codes, the seven themes emerged:

- race/micro-aggressions,
- female role model,
- strong identities,
- determination,
- mentorship,
- support systems, and
- academic (Intellectual).

Each response revealed a code that, in turn, identified a theme. Some codes that emerged such as “false competitiveness,” “being gifted,” or the types of doctoral programs participants attended were not used due to a lack of re-emergence and significance, and less than half of participants spoke about it. Thus, the codes were (a) being the only African American male, fighting and overcoming stereotypes, always a struggle to overcome a system, not being treated on or at the same level, and a sense of covert racism; (b) being raised by a single mother, strong women in the family; (c) my spirituality helped me to know who I am, being gay and proud, knowing who you are and what you can do, self-empowerment; (d) getting the PhD as a priority, doing the hard work, seeking out new opportunities & self-actualization; (e) being able to have a mentor, being assisted through graduate and post-graduate programs by cohort members, having a mentor and a role model, assisting Black males in college; (f) having friends and family support system; and (g) first generation college student, struggling and overcoming writing, first in
family to attain a PhD or EdD. The codes were assigned to a theme, which are divided into three major categories. The categories were from Moore, Madison-Colmore, and Smith (2003), who suggested similar categories: (a) the social, (b) the personal, and (c) the academic.

**Discussion of the Findings**

The seven themes were arranged into three major categories: social, personal, and academic. These three categories support the findings from Moore et al., (2003), who applied the three concepts. The following has each theme supported with research evidence that demonstrated how these seven characteristics are related to and support the lived experiences of Black males who earned doctorates.

**The Social Experiences**

The literature supporting Black males’ social experiences demonstrates that there exist many facets that create types of social climates such as extracurricular activities, social activism, and the participation in groups on campus (Cuyjet, 2006; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Strayhorn, 2012). Social experiences entail the involvement and interaction with the system worlds, such as environments outside the home and familial settings. Also, social experiences entail the interaction between family, friends, and relationships with the outside community. Oliver (2006) found that Black male socialization involves the church, family, and other community-based institutions. Furthermore, social experiences are defined as specific circumstances that produce advantages and limitations. For example, Schwitzer, Griffin, Ancis and Thomas (1999), posit that a sense of under-representedness, perceptions of racism, approaching faculty, and familiarity with professors and administrators are part of the social experiences of Black males. Participants in this study experienced this similar social situation.
Socially, participants made it through circumstance, first, by confronting, dealing with, and overcoming microaggressions. All participants voiced that they experienced firsthand either overt or covert racism, bias, or a stereotype. Given, that substantial decades have passed when race and racism was a sore and a contentious element in the United States, participants were not surprised that they still experienced race/microaggressions in their lives. Like Black and Men (2015) and Franklin (1999) suggested, Black males will experience racism like no other male, female, or race. Regardless of their degree, status, and their intellect, Black males continued and expected to continue to face discrimination. As participants expressed, they were, at times discouraged from what was told to them by their white counterparts. They were troubled that in an institution of higher education that race still played a part in their lives, and, that racism is something they will have to experience for the rest of their lives (Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011). The results of this study supported that race/microaggressions is a legitimate experience that Black males continue to face in American society and on college campuses (Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008). It is likely that all participants in some way may have had some insight on race/microaggressions because they were raised in Black households where race has been a conversation Black Americans discuss regularly. Thus, participants did express that when they experienced a microaggression first hand, they didn’t get mad or angry, but were shocked that it was happening to them. So, finally, all participants, except for one, either implied or avidly stated how race/microaggressions affected their lived experiences. Only one participant stated that he “never talks about race,” yet during the interview, he talked briefly about how race may have been an issue, while living on campus. Nevertheless, six participants discussed how they encountered and dealt with, sometimes, overt and covert forms of racism, biases, and stereotypes.
The Personal Experiences

Personal experiences can be defined as interaction and familiarity with family, friends, and even relationships between people in the life and system worlds. Personal experiences are what a person may perceive as specific, intrinsic, intimate, or purposeful, bringing about some type of significant importance for a certain reason (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994). Most literature surrounding personal experiences of Black males originate from either a deficit perspective of the system world or academia. There is limited research, however, that describes the personal accomplishments of Black males. Studies do show that some positive literature exists about Black males, yet again, it surrounds the academic (Strayhorn, 2015; Toldson, 2013). For example, supportive and close relationships were seen to be fluid in creating higher levels of satisfaction in Black males (Strayhorn, 2008). When there was a strong positive relationship active in their lives, Black males were able to navigate better because they were nurtured in some capacity (Ross, 1998). Whether it was a relationship between a mother and her son, between a professor and his or her student, or relationships between peers, the participants expressed this experience. Nevertheless, it was the participants ‘relationship with their mother that was often reported.

For many years, research found that children do better when raised in a two-parent home (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; McLanahan & Sandefur, 2009). Two-parent homes are beneficial, and children do better socially and academically when both parents are in the home (Pong, Dronkers & Hampden-Thompson, 2003). One participant stated that he was raised by a father and a mother in the home, yet it was his mother that carried the weight of imparting motivation and discipline and his father was, for example, reinforcement. Nevertheless, this study found that Black males do well when they are raised in a supportive single parent female household. In
this study, the participants who were raised by a single mother fared well in graduate and doctoral programs. They fared well because their mother was a significant support system in their life (James, 2015). African American female led households have been on the rise for more than 20 years (Nichols-Casebolt, 1988). During this time, their sons are being raised in homes that are different financially and educationally (Elliott, Powell & Brenton, 2015). Thus, being a single mom who may be poor or middle class, these mothers do their best in raising their sons. Studies have shown that a low SES is coupled with attrition, low test scores, and lack of retention (Matthews-Whetstone & Scott, 2015; Shah, Atta, Qureshi & Shah, 2012). In this study, however, participants did not express that their mothers had any financial difficulty. Moreover, because their mother worked, they were able to provide a stable and economically sound upbringing for their sons. Research also suggested that when Black parents had a stable and substantial income, it had an influence on the accomplishments of their sons (Sirin, 2005). Therefore, there is importance to maternal influence in this study (Lu et al., 2010; Washington, 2017). It was the mother who was influential in their son’s accomplishment (Elliott et al., 2015; Hunter, 1997). Research found that although a parental role was significant in the lives of their children, for African American single mothers, who are the head of households, were resilient (Murry, Bynum, Brody, Willert & Stephens, 2001). From the beginning of the participants childhood through their post-graduate degree, it was their mother who was mostly the encourager and supporter. Participants expressed how influential their mothers were in the completion of their doctorate. They expressed a strong solitude, love, and adoration for their mothers. All participants expressed that it was their mother that pushed them and, in some instances, still pushes them today as grown professional men. Many times, participants indicated that when they had no thought of attaining a degree, let alone a graduate degree, it was their mother who
was influential in their decision-making process. Mothers of the participants demonstrated their purpose for their sons making it into and through college in a few ways: (a) intercepted college entry documents, (b) giving stringent ultimatums, (c) encouraging them that they can do better than their parent did, (d) being an advocate for their son, (e) being a loving mother. Two of the participants mothers have passed away, yet these two men expressed that they still can hear their mothers voice and they are encouraged by their mom, still.

During the discussions, a few participants narrated stories their mothers would describe to them about the Deep South and how they made it north to have a better future. Others expressed that no matter what, their sons were going to go to college. All participants are grateful for that. It was the presence of a strong mother who guided their sons to acquire a college education.

Part of the participants experience was recognizing how their individuality was strengthened through personal beliefs, identification, and a strong self-confidence. All seven participants expressed in some form or another how better equipped they were because of this belief. Participants expressed certain factors that played a part in their individuality. For example, spirituality was an important factor for Black males in graduate school (Voisin, Corbin & Jones, 2016), and while working in an IHE. The importance of how God and spirituality strengthened them in times of need, enabling them to have a solid foundation when the pressures of a doctoral program or their career embodied stress or concerns. For example, some participants openly identified as Black gay men. Research has established that Black gay men who are in graduate programs encounter both racial and sexual tensions beyond the Black experience (Means & Jaeger, 2015). Two of the participants in this study, were able to bypass any encounter of racial or homophobic discrimination to complete their degree (Means et al.,
During their graduate and post-graduate program, participants encountered certain behaviors that held stereotypical views and people who would make homophobic statements. Moreover, as they moved forward, they also discovered that other individuals, who they may not have known well, or even were close to, would help them and defend them. Because these men were assisted by these individuals in their life and system worlds, they became enabled and more determined to not only make it through doctoral school but make it to attaining a position in an IHE.

Participants in this study have grit; they worked under certain circumstances that many individuals working on a doctorate did not in order to attain their doctorate. Strayhorn (2013) theorizes that grit is encouragingly related to academic outcomes for Black males. Part of grit is already having attained the knowledge, mostly from professors, teachers, and the college community (Strayhorn, 2014). Coupled with personal know-how, grit thrives in an individual and the individual can push further than the norm. In order to obtain and exercise grit, an individual must set important issues aside and focus on the most important issues and work simultaneously and anxiously between the two in order to attain a goal (Duckworth & Duckworth, 2016). They were determined. Although they felt at times the strenuous circumstance, they did not give up. Duckworth and Duckworth (2016) posit that there are personal skill sets that encompass grit, such as having potential, resilient, and never giving up: “They knew in a very deep way what it was they wanted” (p. 2), and nothing was going to hinder them from their goal. These were just a few attributes to consider. So, the participants understood that doing the “hard work” was essentially needed, and they understand, still, that it is needed. Some participants considered a doctorate during both their undergraduate and graduate studies. For certain participants, they sought out a program specific to their journey, whether it was
student affairs, advising, or administration. They would have to consider the time it would take to make it through the program. Some participants made it through the program in three years and some four-to-five years. Participants understood, however, that if they could make it through, it would present opportunities that they never had before, enabling them to assist, teach, and lead in a new capacity, and maybe providing a need for others who come by means of the same path they came.

Participants in this study have a personal understanding that what they learned from all the years of hard work paid off; they were determined. The self-determination theory (Deci, & Ryan, 1985) asserts there are three components: (a) people are fundamentally motivated to internalize the basic production of unimportant materials, (b) there are different processes that occurs as a result of internalization, and (c) context influences internalization processes therefore creating capital. Therefore, Black male capital (Harper, 2012), assisted Black males to be successful in their graduate and post-graduate work, enabling them to become college graduates and productive members of an American society (Harper & Davis, 2012). The participants’ narratives in this study demonstrated that by providing their insight to what they needed to do to attain their EdD or PhD, they were able to “navigate their way to and through higher education and onward to rewarding post-college options,” including doctoral attainment (Harper, 2012, p. 5). Participants remarked that they now are able to give back to their community, specifically to young Black males, so that young Black males may not have the same difficulty they experienced, or that they may have a better support system that will strengthen them personally as they complete their own college and university experience.

However, an overarching premise that resonated throughout the conversations was the participants desire to help young Black males. Part of the personal experience for the participants
was their desire to assist African American youth. They expressed that seeing Black males not having adequate support motivated them to become a mentor. For example, the participants would conduct seminars or talk to youth at informal gatherings. They are role models and they desire to see young Black men do well in life and in school (Maylor, 2009). As participants continue to support young Black males, not only do they offer their knowledge about life, but sometimes they provided monetarily and food for undergraduates.

**Academic Experiences**

The National Center for Education Statistics (2015) provides data that centralizes the academic setting, grades, and the educational environment. Because this study describes the lived experiences of Black males, a deeper, more personal understanding can be derived (Harper, 2005). For example, the topic of academic success for Black males has had periods of decline and growth for many years (Harper, 2015; Cuyjet, 2006), and that perspective is mostly a quantitative view. However, there is little qualitative research demonstrating the explanation of why there was decline or growth of attrition, college test score rates, and, even more, factors that affected Black men in graduate and post-graduate programs and professional settings in IHE. Thus, the participants in this study described their accounts of academic factors that affected their ability to make it through graduate and post-graduate degrees attaining a position in an IHE. Nevertheless, because of the support systems they found during the program, it enabled them to succeed academically.

All participants expressed they navigated the doctoral degree by having special individuals in their life who helped them. Whether it was a parent, a friend, or a mentor, it was an important factor in doctoral accomplishment; and much of that consisted of support from their cohort as well. Support systems are necessary for Black males in college (Harper, 2007). Support was also
a factor in Black males doing better academically in graduate programs (Wood & Ireland, 2014). For example, many of the participants experienced working in an IHE before they achieved a doctorate, either as a teaching assistant, graduate assistant, or research assistant. However, some participants expressed that they were not academically prepared for the rigor of a doctoral degree. They expressed, for instance, how underprepared they were for the type of writing and reading workload during the doctoral program. Being the first in their family to attain an EdD or PhD brought about indecision at times of what was to come. Although many participants thought that they were not prepared academically in certain areas, they faced this obstacle and overcame it.

**Implications for Educational Leaders**

A lack of research with an anti-deficit framework regarding Black males who earned doctorates and worked in higher education was the focus of this study. Findings suggested that the lived experiences of Black males do not have to be explored from a deficit perspective. Many times, prior research focused on what prevented Black males from achieving their social, personal, academic, and professional goals (Jackson, 2006; Noguera, 2003). This study provided insight into their lived experiences, enabling them to graduate with their doctorate and attain a job in an IHE. Like this study, Harper (2012) found that Black males are career-driven graduates and productive members of American society.

This study’s findings may assist educational leaders through improving graduate education and diversity programs.

All participants experienced race/microaggressions in graduate and post-graduate programs. Moreover, they continued to face these issues while working in an IHE. Harper (2012) stated that race and racial politics are pitfalls for Black males. Whether within graduate
education programs or diversity initiatives, the experience of race/microaggressions by the participants require higher education to address these issues. Thus, to reduce microaggressions in IHE’s, graduate schools should implement a purposeful, and systematic approach, using best practices as a guide.

Further, this study supported improving graduate education through mentorship and personal/academic support. In this study, mentorship was sought after by the participants. Often, they commented on the impact that the mentorship had on their successful completion of the doctoral program. Brunsma Embrick and Shien (2017) found good mentoring is important to academic success. It was interesting to note that the mentorship program was not from an organized mentorship program. It emerged organically. The participants sought out a mentor. In fact, the findings in this study support McCallum’s (2012) research, which found the “quality of the student/faculty relationships” was important to have a caring relationship in order to succeed (p. 168). McCallum also stated that “campus administrator, counselors, and staff can assist by educating students and faculty on how to develop successful mentoring relationships” (p. 169). In fact, Brown (2011) found that Black males “require communities of men who can ensure their safe passage and celebrate through ritual and ceremony, fellowship and membership their ascension to manhood” (p. 2) and that mentorship at PWIs is just as important to the personal and academic accomplishments of Black males (Dahlvig, 2010). Thus, graduate education programs should consider how they can support mentoring and stronger student/faculty relationships, especially Black male to Black male as expressed by the participants.

Regarding personal and academic support, participants expressed interest in understanding the process and academic rigor of graduate and doctoral schools. Cain et al. (2007) found that it was support services that had an important role in graduate degree
completion. Several participants discussed the barriers of academic unpreparedness. Yet they successfully navigated and persisted knowing these factors. Another area that graduate education programs could consider improving.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

After summarizing the results of this study, I suggest the following recommendations for future research.

Unfortunately, race, racism, and racial politics are still an issue for Black males in graduate school and working in an IHE. All participants expressed dealing with racial barriers. Future research could explore ways to alleviate and eradicate race/microaggressions in IHE.

This study found that mentorship was essential for Black males who pursued a doctorate. This study recommends future research exploring how mentoring or mentoring programs assist Black males. How does mentoring impact both personal and academic support? How do gender-specific mentors’ impact Black male doctorate attainment?

Although this study applied Harper’s anti-deficit framework and organized the results using Moore, et al.’s (2003) study, future research could explore in more depth the impact of resilience theories and how self-efficacy was a factor with the Black male experience in graduate, doctoral, and IHE work. As Black males in this study were self-motivated to earn a doctorate, future research could explore beliefs, goals, and difficult undertakings experienced for Black males’ purpose for graduate degree completion.

Lastly, all participants were either administrators or professors at PWIs and HBCUs. Future research could explore the experiences of Black males in doctoral programs at PWIs and HBCUs. How do Black males navigate differently at PWIs and HBCUs in order to achieve their
academic and professional goals? How do mentorship programs and student faculty relationships at HBCUs compare to PWIs when assisting Black males in doctoral completion?

**Limitations**

Despite the research method used in this study, there are limitations and strengths. This research used subjective responses, definition of terms, responses of participants so that the reader of this study can comprehend.

I expanded my research to the geographical areas of the Midwest, Southeast, and Northwest regions of the United States. Even then, responses to my request to be a part of the study was low. Nevertheless, I was able to acquire seven valuable participants.

I was limited in nature as the research instrument. For example, I did not have the latest transcription machine; it was simply me, researching, interviewing, transcribing, decoding, and writing. Furthermore, as this process continued, I became better at placing my biases in a closet, i.e., in the back of my mind, only to retrieve it later in the writings and in my personal journal. Although my insider and outsider status at times was limiting, it was also beneficial, enabling access to gatekeepers and the institutions the participants worked at. Even with this in mind, I believe I remained objective. As the research instrument, I accepted the participants experience was theirs and not part of my own; I strived to remain neutral. Johnson-Baily (1999) suggested that if the researcher and the participant were of the same race and/or gender, their views, beliefs, and personal experiences may be similar. To a degree, my subjectivity and bias was affected. Because these experiences are complex and similar, I could not apply, nor could I generalize in order to apply findings to every single individual (Seidman, 2013; Yin, 2012); they all had their own personal experience.
My Learning

As a novice researcher, I have recognized a personal view, a view that could only be seen through the lens of a doctoral student and PhD candidate. This lens enabled me to understand (a) myself as a better educator and researcher, (b) the perspective of my doctoral process, and (c) my personal awareness of what I learned through it all.

**Better educator and researcher.** This was the most difficult project I have undertaken in my life. The process was long and arduous. I did not know what to expect, and truthfully, I was not prepared. The time, energy, and state of mind it took to complete the research study was nothing I could have ever imagined. Countless hours of losing sleep and not eating took its toll socially and personally. However, once I began the process, i.e., interviews, conducting thematic analysis, etc., I knew that this study was worth it. Conducting my research and beginning to understand and listen to the experiences of Black males who earned their EdD or PhD was a good experience. I have come to an understanding within me that some events can change, personal ideologies, and emotions can change. I understand that as an educator, circumstances may change, but whatever the factors are must change within me.

I found this study inspiring. I learned how to extract meaning from individual stories, I learned how to be objective and silent at the same time, and I learned how to provide truth value to the shared experiences without being biased or injecting myself into the participants experiences. Although I am a Black male, I can never truly understand what the participants experienced. However, due to my own encounters with some of the same situations, I can empathize with what the participants expressed.

**Research journey.** Working as an educator for 20 years prepared me for many experiences and for the most part, it was autonomous. This doctoral process, however, changed
my personal and professional perspective. For example, this journey has been long, and mostly, a lonely one to say the least. I have, however, concluded that if I were not lonely, I may not have had the ability to see beyond my own imaginations, views, and ideologies about Black males who earned doctorates and work in an IHE. This experience has provided me with more hope about Black males in education. Because of having countless hours to myself, I had no other choice but to define, refine, and cultivate the researcher’s skill set so that someday I can become better at the qualitative process. And the experience enabled me to become comfortable with the process, e.g., organizing a study, conducting the study, interviewing individuals, and growing “thick skin,” all while tending to personal familial needs. Compared to four years ago, I am better at what I do. I know that in order to perfect my skill set, I will have to do more studies about the experiences of individuals and the phenomenon that interest me.

**Personal awareness.** To this present day, I have never repeated or proclaimed the phrase, “as a Black man in America,” because I have never placed race as precedent that defines me. At times a certain segment of the U.S. population does not feel as passionate about this demographic population. Still, I have personally experienced many of the same circumstances and secretly verified the participants’ experiences as real, and that is in some way therapeutic. I understand that the attainment of a doctorate does by no means make me special, and there may be others who could care less. However, I am aware that a PhD can help me create change, something a master’s degree or an education specialist cannot. Nevertheless, this study has made me view people differently, it has opened my eyes to possibilities of what could be. Yet, in some way, it underscores the reality that Black males will continue dealing with negative assumptions or some type of bias or stereotype. Some participants in this study thought about throwing in the towel because it became too much of a challenge. In my life, I experienced discrimination,
alienation, or marginalization as it seemed to happen every day and every week. Moreover, even in the school, the classroom, or in meetings, I dealt with it. Whether it was in a clothing store, on my job, or even in my subdivision, I deal with it and I continue to overcome these circumstances. My own experiences enabled me to have a better awareness of what the participants experienced. Because of this self-awareness, I will continue onward to make a difference in some capacity in higher education.

**Conclusion**

This qualitative study described the lived experiences of Black males who earned doctorates. Probing into the challenges and the accomplishments of Black males with doctorates was the central question that guided this study. A research questionnaire was used to explore and extract meaning from the lived experiences. These questions were administered during one-on-one, face-to-face interviews. The participants’ responses, therefore, was congregated into three categories: the social, personal, and academic. The categories entailed seven themes: race/microaggressions, female role model, strong identities, determination, mentorship, support systems, and academic (intellectual). The analysis and synthesis of the participants narratives put forth the challenges and the accomplishments that supported Black male motivation that empowered them in their post-graduate and doctoral accomplishment. So to provide closure and to end this dissertation, limitations, implications for practice, and future research recommendations were provided.
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APPENDIX A: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

As you know, this study is exploring the lived experiences of Black males who earned doctorates. To capture your experiences accurately, do I have permission to record this interview? Okay, good. This interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes.

1. If you will, tell me a little about yourself, your background, your journey?
   a. Probe: ...tell me more?
   b. Probe: …can you recall a specific example?

2. What made you choose to pursue a doctoral degree?
   a. Probe: …tell me more?

3. Can you describe any challenges that you encountered while completing your doctoral degree?
   a. Probe: …tell me more, describe an example
   b. Was that challenge or challenges similar to your experience while an undergrad?
   c. And, how about as an HE administrator?

4. What were some of your experiences as you worked toward your doctorate?
   a. How did these experiences affect you?
   b. Looking back on your graduate experiences, and doctorate experiences, can you tell me any differences that affected you?
   c. Probe: (socially, politically, academically)

5. Currently, you are a Black male with a doctorate working in HE. What led you to work in HE?
   a. Probe: …can you provide specific examples?
6. Is there anything else you would like to add about your doctoral or HE administrative experiences that occurred during your doctoral degree and presently in HE?
APPENDIX B: Eastern Michigan University IRB Approval to Conduct Research

Date: July 10, 2017

To: Boris Turner
Eastern Michigan University

Re: UHSRC: # T20170619-1
Category: Exempt category 2
Approval Date: July 10, 2017

Title: What are the Lived Experiences of Black males who Earned Doctorates and now hold Professional Positions in an Institution of Higher Education?

Your research project, entitled What are the Lived Experiences of Black males who Earned Doctorates and now hold Professional Positions in an Institution of Higher Education has been determined Exempt in accordance with federal regulation 45 CFR 46.102. UHSRC policy states that you, as the Principal Investigator, are responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of your research subjects and conducting your research as described in your protocol.

Renewals: Exempt protocols do not need to be renewed. When the project is completed, please submit the Human Subjects Study Completion Form (access through IRBNet on the UHSRC website).

Modifications: You may make minor changes (e.g., study staff changes, sample size changes, contact information changes, etc.) without submitting for review. However, if you plan to make changes that alter study design or any study instruments, you must submit a Human Subjects Approval Request Form and obtain approval prior to implementation. The form is available through IRBNet on the UHSRC website.

Problems: All major deviations from the reviewed protocol, unanticipated problems, adverse events, subject complaints, or other problems that may increase the risk to human subjects or change the category of review must be reported to the UHSRC via an Event Report form, available through IRBNet on the UHSRC website.

Follow-up: If your Exempt project is not completed and closed after three years, the UHSRC office will contact you regarding the status of the project.

Please use the UHSRC number listed above on any forms submitted that relate to this project, or on any correspondence with the UHSRC office.

Good luck in your research. If we can be of further assistance, please contact us at 734-487-3090 or via e-mail at human.subjects@emich.edu. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,
April M Gravitt, MS
Research Compliance Analyst
University Human Subjects Review Committee

University Human Subjects Review Committee
Eastern Michigan University
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Ypsilanti, Michigan 48197
Phone: 734.487.3090
E-mail: human.subjects@emich.edu
www.emich.edu/ord (see Research Compliance)

The EMU UHSRC complies with the Title 45 Code of Federal Regulations part 46 (45 CFR 46) under FWA00000050.
APPENDIX C: Informed Consent Form

Title: The Lived Experiences of Black males who Earned Doctorates

Purpose: The purpose of this research study is to describe the lived experiences of Black males who earned doctorates. Due to the low numbers of Black males in education with doctorates (Fisher, 2015), this study will seek to understand how the Black male experiences had an effect on Black males’ post-graduate completion.

Study Procedures: This consent form seeks your permission to participate in this research study about Black males who earned doctorates. After you have reviewed the study and given your permission for consent, you will be contacted by me, either by email, or by phone, so that I may set up the interviews for dates and times with you. During the interview process, you will be asked questions about your lived experiences which brought you to this point of working in higher education. The initial interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes. A second interview, a brief follow-up, will be conducted for clarification purposes based on the first interview. During the interview process, I would like to audio record you for this study. If you are audio recorded, it will be possible to identify you through your voice, yet, there is no anticipated physical or psychological risks to participation. If you agree to be audio recorded, sign the appropriate line at the bottom of this form.

Confidentiality and Risks: There are no anticipated physical or psychological risks to participation. The primary risk of participation in this study is a potential loss of confidentiality. However, your confidentiality will be protected by means of a pseudonym that you will create. Some of the interview questions may be personal in nature and may make you feel uncomfortable. You do not have to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable or that you do not want to answer. After the interviews are completed, the audio transcripts will be assigned a numerical code, stored in a password protected file, on a password protected computer. At any time during, or, after the interview is over, and you decide that you do not wish to participate in this study, your audio and transcripts will be destroyed and no material will be used in the study.

Benefits: You will not directly benefit from participating in this research. Benefits to society may be more of an awareness for educators, policymakers, educators, and institutions of higher education about Black males who earned doctorates.

Contact Information: If you have any questions about the research, you can contact the Principal Investigator, Boris Turner at bturner5@emich.edu or by phone at 810-610-6035. You can also contact Boris’s advisor, Dr. Elizabeth Broughton, at ebroughto@emich.edu. For questions about your rights as a research subject, you can contact the Eastern Michigan
University Office of Research Compliance at human.subjects@emich.edu or by phone at 734-487-3090.

**Voluntary participation**

Participation in the study is completely voluntary and you have a choice not to answer certain questions, or you may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time with no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

**Statement of Consent**

I have read this form. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and am satisfied with the answers I received. I give my consent to participate in this research study.

**Signatures**

______________________________________
Name of Subject

______________________________________  ___________ _________
Signature of Subject  Date

I have explained the research to the subject and answered all his questions. I will give a copy of the signed consent form to the subject.

________________________________________
Name of Person Obtaining Consent

________________________________________  _________ ______________
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent  Date
Greetings,

**Brief Information**
My name is Boris D. Turner, and I am a doctoral student at Eastern Michigan University Educational Leadership program. I am seeking participation in a study focused on Black males who earned doctorates and now hold a position in an institution of higher education (IHE).

You have received this email because you have been identified as a Black male with a doctorate working in higher education. Therefore, I am inviting you to participate in an interview. Participation in this study will consist of an audio recorded, 60-90-minute interview, and a follow-up. While the information you provide will be included in the study, for confidentiality purposes, you will only be identified by a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality. Furthermore, any identifiable information will be shredded, erased, and/or sanitized once the study has been concluded/dissemnated.

**Benefits of the Project**
This research project will provide me with the opportunity to understand your experiences and how it relates to other Black males with doctorates who work in HE. Also, as a participant, you may reflect on your own perceptions about, and experiences of, being a Black male, with a doctorate, working in higher education. Benefits to society may be more of an awareness for educators, policymakers, educators, and institutions of higher education about Black males who earned doctorates.

**Dissemination of Results**
Findings from the research project will be shared with my doctoral committee at Eastern Michigan University, as part of the requirements of the doctoral degree.

**Your Consent**
Participation in the study is completely voluntary. If interested in participating in this study focused on the lived experiences of Black males who earned doctorates, please read and sign the consent form. I am more than willing to answer any questions or address any concerns that you might have regarding this study. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Thank you,
Boris D. Turner
Doctoral Candidate, Educational Leadership
Eastern Michigan University
bturner5@emich.edu

Dr. Elizabeth Broughton, Doctoral Chairperson,
Professor
Eastern Michigan University
ebroughto@emich.edu