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A Study to Determine African-American PhDs' perspective on Factors Affecting Academic Achievement: Selected Case Studies

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**A STUDY TO DETERMINE AFRICAN-AMERICAN Ph.D.'S
PERSPECTIVE ON FACTORS AFFECTING
ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT: SELECTED CASE STUDIES**

**A Research Paper
Presented to
The Faculty of the College of Education
Old Dominion University**

**In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science in Education**

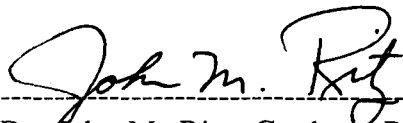
by

**Faye Brock Wade
October 1994**

Signature Page

This project was prepared by Faye Brock Wade under the direction of Dr. John M. Ritz in OTED 636. It was submitted to the Graduate Program Director as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Science in Adult Education.

Approved by:



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10-25-94

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Education plays an important role in the mobility of African-Americans. Nathan Hare (1992), director of Black Studies at San Francisco State College posits that a college education has been viewed as a tool for the collective elevation of a people. Cheek (1989) reports, "One of the most replicated, central findings from research on stratification and occupational mobility is that the number of years of education completed is the primary determinant of occupational success--more important than family background, measured intelligence, or school grade point average" (p. 20).

However, there has been a downward trend in the number of African-American graduate students (Willie, et. al., 1991). In 1986 only 820 of the 32,000 Ph.D.'s awarded went to African-Americans, less than half of that 820 planned a college career (Black Scholar, 1991, p. 4).

Rose (1978) reveals that there have been few studies that have concentrated upon black Ph.D's in the market place. Most data deals with the decline in enrollment and failure to complete graduate studies by the African-American population.

This study focuses on success by accessing a population that has successfully completed graduate studies. This study examined factors that impact the ability of the African-American student to complete graduate studies as reported by six African-Americans who have attained doctoral degrees and reside in the Hampton Roads, Virginia

area. The researcher investigated the academic preparation, academic and psychological support systems, and motivational factors that contributed to academic success as identified by the study population. Their collective experiences permitted insights and helped form the conclusion of this report.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The problem of this study was to determine common variables considered most important to academic achievement for African-American graduate students as identified by six African-American Ph.D.'s who live and work in the Hampton Roads area of Virginia.

RESEARCH GOALS

To answer the research problem the researcher sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are some of the intellectual, social, economic, and family background characteristics of the African-American Ph.D.'s?
2. What factors influenced their decision to attain an advanced degree?
3. What factors do they identify as positive contributors to their educational and professional development?

4. What factors do they identify as supporting/impeding successful completion of studies?

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

Education is a lever for class mobility in the United States. A college education has always had special significance for African-Americans for it allowed entry into the middle class. The Higher Education Act of 1965 was passed to advance equal opportunity in higher education.

Demographic trends show a decrease in college enrollment among African-Americans in the 20-24 year old and 25-34 year old age cohort (1980). In reporting on eroding status of African-Americans in higher education Carter-Williams (1989) writes:

The growing depression in black education does not augur well for the nation's future. The creation of a broadly educated black citizenry in the United States is vital to the national interest, because demographic trends suggest that larger numbers of blacks and other minorities will be needed in future years to meet the national demand for new skilled workers (p. 123).

This study sheds light on the professional characteristics, education and development of African-American scholars. It also identifies the systems necessary for establishing and sustaining academic achievement. Data from this study can provide helpful information to educators, administrators, and students. This study generates data which sensitizes educators and administrators to the needs and problems of the African-American student. Further, the findings of this investigation expose the student to the

opportunities and self-reinforcing systems as perceived by the six African-American Ph.D. s.

LIMITATIONS

The scope of this research was limited to six African-Americans who have attained doctorates and who work and live in the Hampton Roads area of Virginia.

ASSUMPTIONS

This research was based on the assumption that there is a downward trend in the number of African-Americans completing graduate studies. The study population has encountered many of the same obstacles and barriers that impede success and have achieved academic success in spite of these difficulties. There is a commonality of experience and an analysis of this commonality could identify factors that contribute to success.

PROCEDURES

The case study method was used for this project. A broad, open-ended, semi-structured interview technique was used to allow for a wide range of unanticipated answers.

According to Yin (1984) this is the preferred strategy when the researcher has little control over the events or when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real life context. Simon (1968) suggests that case study descriptive research is the method to choose when you want to obtain a wealth of detail about a subject and to reveal insights and feelings. He advocates it as the appropriate method to find clues and ideas.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

The following is a list of terms special to the understanding of this research study.

HEA refers to the 1965 Higher Education Act.

HBC refers to Historically Black Colleges.

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

In Chapter I the reader has been introduced to the notion of higher education as a vehicle of class mobility for African-Americans and the concerns about the decline in African-American participation in higher education. The reader was made aware of the problem of the study, the research goals, limitations, and assumptions.

Chapter II will examine various reports highlighting the status of African-Americans in higher education. Chapter III will address the methods used for this study and Chapter IV will discuss the findings. Chapter V will summarize the research and

offer recommendations for students, educators, and administrators regarding ways to optimize educational opportunity and student development for the African-American scholar.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of literature which follows provides the background for a theoretical context for this study. There are five sections to the review: (1) Historical Perspective of Higher Educational Opportunities for African-Americans, (2) Role of Historically Black Colleges (HBCs), (3) Effects of Financial Aid for African-American Students in Higher Education, (4) Relationship of Mentoring to Academic Achievement, (5) Variables for Student Success.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF HIGHER EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR AFRICAN-AMERICANS

Willie, Grady and Hope (1991) write:

Obtaining the doctorate by black scholars has always been heralded as a major and singular achievement, because it marks three important events. First, it represents personal success, working against significant odds such as poverty, racism, and competing pressures to accept lesser career opportunities and training to satisfy more immediate needs. Second, the attainment of the doctorate has symbolized for the African-American community in general group attainment within the larger society. Third, a doctoral degree can be viewed as a barometer or index of national strength (p. 19).

Hoskins (1978) reports the first recorded Ph.D. awarded to a black person in the United States dates back to Edward Bouchet in 1876 (Ph.D. in physics, Yale University) and the next two blacks awarded the degree were J.W.E. Bowen in 1887 (Ph.D. in

religion, Boston University) and Alfred O. Coffin in 1889 (Ph.D. in biological science, Illinois Wesleyan University).

Cheek (1989) points out a persistent theme in black America has been that education and self-improvement can equalize the status of blacks and whites in American society. He reports that in 1884 the great Frederick Douglas wrote that "full citizenship" would be enjoyed by blacks if only they developed "industry, sobriety, honesty, and intelligence" (p. 19). Only 2,079 blacks were recorded as having graduated from college before the beginning of the twentieth century according to W.E.B. DuBois. DuBois, the son of free northern blacks, received a doctoral degree from Harvard University in 1895 (Willie, et. al., 1991).

Willie, et. al. (1991) research indicates that prior to the Emancipation Proclamation the experience of African-Americans in higher education was limited to the North. Twenty-eight blacks graduated from northern colleges prior to the Civil War. Their studies show that only Harvard, the University of Wisconsin, Yale, and a few other historically white universities offered graduate and professional training to blacks.

Hoskins (1978) cites studies by Harold Rose which concluded that most blacks in higher education preferred to remain in the "closed system" of the South where they might help raise the level of black education. He maintained that many institutions of higher education have discriminated against blacks in hiring faculty and only recently began to show concern about this reality. Rose's studies further show that only 139 black academicians had served on faculties outside the South during the 1940's -- only 54 of that number had been employed on a continuous basis and only 3 of the 54 had

been employed prior to 1940; only 65 blacks were employed in higher education outside the south in 1960. Most blacks were employed by urban universities because of the growing number of black students. Rose's concluded: "The nation's colleges and universities have not taken a position of leadership in the expansion of employment opportunities for black educators" (p. 9).

Hoskins (1978) cites studies conducted by Huyck which found there were no Ph.D.s conferred by black colleges and universities between 1947 and 1954. Between 1954 and 1964 no more than four Ph.D.s were conferred by black colleges. During this period of time there was a national average of four black Ph.D.s produced annually. Most black Ph.D.s were employed by black colleges (p. 10).

Morris (1979) cites studies conducted by the National Research Council showing that the percentage of black male Ph.D. recipients rose from 2.6 percent in 1973 to 3.4 percent in 1976. The proportion of black female Ph.D.s increased more than that of black male Ph.D.s from 3.8 percent in 1973 to 6.8 percent in 1976. Women constitute a relatively higher proportion of the undergraduate population of blacks available for graduate work.

Blacks received 3.6 percent of all Ph.D.s in 1976, 4.7 percent of J.D.s and 5.2 percent of M.D.s (Morris, 1979, p. 219). During this same time period the proportion of black men to black women at the masters' degree level replicated that at the doctorate level- 4.7 percent men and 8.7 percent women. Morris further reports that more Ph.D.s were awarded to blacks between 1974 and 1977 than in the entire American history (p.2).

Willie, et. al. (1991) describe the mid 1970's as "the apex of racial inclusiveness in higher education for this country" (p. 3). In citing studies conducted by Carter and Wilson (1989), the researchers reported that between 1976 and 1987 the number of African-Americans earning master's degrees decreased by 31.8 percent; and the number earning Ph.D. degrees between 1977 and 1988 declined 21 percent (p. 3).

ROLE OF HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES

Following the Civil War a few black colleges were founded by Christian missionaries in the North. These colleges were supported by the efforts and philanthropy of these northern missionaries, however, the mission of the colleges was constrained by the political and educational leadership of the South (Willie, et. al., 1991).

By 1890 several black colleges began to focus more on vocational education. In 1890 the Morrill Act required state higher education systems to establish separate institutions for blacks or allow blacks access to white universities. The Southern state legislatures, which were dominated by segregationists, opted for separate facilities for black college students (Willie, et. al., 1991). Fleming (1984) describes the school created as "teacher training schools for black women; ...the majority of black public colleges, then evolved out of states' desires to avoid admitting blacks to existing white institutions and facilities provided were accordingly inferior" (p. 5).

Alternatives to the vocational training centers began to emerge in the early twentieth century. Popularly coined the Black Ivy League, schools such

as Morehouse, Spelman, and Fisk restored liberal arts as the central focus of academic program at black colleges (Willie, et., al., p.9).

Surveys conducted in the 1920s were the first serious attempt to document "the quality of education in black colleges." The surveys found "many of them, and especially the private liberal arts colleges, worthy of accreditation along mainstream American colleges" (Willie, et. al., p. 9).

Cheek (1989) posits:

Collectively, HBCs enroll only one-fifth of all blacks enrolled in higher educational institutions, yet they graduate thirty-eight percent of the baccalaureates awarded to blacks by degree granting institutions. Moreover, they contribute a disproportionately higher percentage of blacks who go on to earn Ph.D.s while such degree granting by HBCs is an impressive achievement, it is not enough because the total number of black graduates with first as well as higher degrees is well below parity. Increasingly, the number of college educated blacks should be a number-one priority of black leaders in higher education (p. 19).

Roosevelt Johnson stresses that blacks "who succeed in higher education should not forget their origin or let a subsurface self-hate syndrome impair their sense of responsibility to other blacks" (Hoskins, 1978, p. 7). According to Willie, et. al. (1991) until the midpoint of the twentieth century black educational institutions offered the best chance for blacks to receive professional education. As late as 1968, 80 percent of black physicians and dentists were graduates of Meharry Medical College and Howard University, two historically black schools. In 1974 studies by Butler Jones attested the fact of the importance of black colleges in developing the black community. He reported that 75 percent of all black Ph.D.s, 75 percent of black army officers, 80 percent of

black federal judges, and 85 percent of black physicians were graduates of black colleges (Willie, et al., 1991, p. 10).

Fleming (1975) cites Benjamin Mays' belief that "virtually all of the leaders instrumental in solving the problems of race relations in America trace their roots to black institutions" (p. 9). Willie, et. al. (1991) point out the capacity of HBCs to foster persistence by noting that in 1975 when 85 HBCs enrolled 42 percent of the undergraduates, but granted 70 percent of college degrees conferred to black candidates. In 1965 Earl McGrath found that strong psychological and social factors cause many African-Americans to gravitate toward black colleges (Willie, et. al. 1991).

Willie, et. al. (1991) cite Fleming's explanation that "black colleges afford more opportunities for black students to assume leadership roles thereby providing them with a rehearsal for the roles they are expecting to assume in society. Such opportunities are likely to be frustrating on predominately white campuses" (p. 10).

EFFECTS OF FINANCIAL AID FOR AFRICAN-AMERICANS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The effect of the Higher Education Act (HEA) was to put more money into student financial aid. More federal dollars were made available for the National Direct Student Loan (NDSL) and the Guaranteed Student Loan Program (GSLP). In 1972 the HEA Amendments initiated the Basic Educational Opportunity Grants (BEOG) program. The BEOG program aid increased student enrollment in 1974 and 1975. Title III money available to HBCs and disadvantaged students was significant. The American Council

on Education reports that student aid had a good deal to do with the upswing in college participation for minorities during the 1970s.

Willie, et. al. (1991) cite Reginald Wilson's analysis of this phenomenon:

1. College enrollment for minority groups is related to family status.
2. The poverty of black people limit their capacity to educate their children.
3. When resources external to family finances are available to them, more blacks go to college (p. 4).

In 1978 Public Law 95-566 modified the provision for student financial aid to allow more middle income students to qualify for federal educational assistance. This was viewed as a "pull back" by the federal government from "exclusive concern" for disadvantaged populations (Willie, et. al., 1991). In 1983, Title III of the HEA was amended in a way that encouraged educational institutions to seek alternative sources of funding. These sources were not readily available to HBCs. The government policies resulted in a shift in student aid from grants to loans. Grants favored low income students and loans were targeted at students from middle income families (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1988). There was a higher income eligibility without addition appropriations to service the larger pool of eligibles.

Willie, et. al. (1991) observe that:

When a group-specific program was broadened to accommodate the more advantaged groups of all races and class backgrounds it may have gained support from a wider population, but also drew support away from the disadvantaged...the declining number of African-Americans awarded doctorates has been an unfortunate outcome of this universal, non-race specific, nonclass-specific policy (p. 4).

The modifications of the federal student aid policies that began in 1978 impacted the trend of more than 1000 blacks annually receiving Ph.D. degrees. The numbers were less than 1000 annually for the remainder of the 1980s (Willie, et. al. 1991).

Carter and Wilson (1989) report that 805 African-Americans were awarded Ph.D. degrees in 1988 as compared to 1,033 African-Americans who received Ph.D. degrees in 1978. The studies concluded that broad income ranges of student eligibility was harmful to those from lower income groups who were dependent on federal government help and had no other source of support.

RELATIONSHIP OF MENTORING TO ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Willie, et. al. (1991) point out that there needs to be further study on mentoring for minorities. Studies conducted by Levinson in 1978 demonstrate women and minorities experience difficulty in finding mentors. Other studies have shown that mentors may be the key to career advancement of their proteges. Levinson (1978) describes the function of the mentor as one who provides sponsorship, guidance, support, and council for the proteges.

The availability of mentoring is an important component in the quality of campus life for blacks and other minorities. The mentor provides the link of trust between individuals and institutions and nurtures both until they embrace each other. The mentor does this by accepting his or her protege as worthy of esteem and insisting that institutions be fair (Willie, et. al., 1991, p. 72).

The researchers point out that though their data suggest "same-race or same-gender" tendency in mentoring, there is evidence that "whites may be mentors to blacks and males may be mentors to females." Moreover, in their study 61 percent of mentors were white, 70 percent were male whereas the majority of the faculty scholars in the study population were black female (Willie et al. 1991, p. 70).

VARIABLES FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

Many variables determine the success of minority students. According to Stikes (1984), eight variables are especially important. He lists the following variables:

- Development of a positive self-concept and self-confidence is critical. Students need strength of character, determination, and independence to succeed.
- Realistic self-appraisal. Students need to recognize and accept any deficiencies and to work hard at self development in order to correct these.
- Capacity to understand and deal with racism, requiring a realistic perspective based upon personal experiences of racism. Such a perspective allows students to be committed to fighting for the improvement of the existing system, but does not allow them to be submissive in the face of existing wrongs or hostile to society. Nor does it allow students to use

the system as a cop-out. They must be able to handle the racist system and assert themselves to fight racism.

- Persistence. Students able to defer immediate gratification will tend to be more successful and can sustain efforts to work toward long range goals.
- Availability of a strong support person to whom the student can turn in crisis.
- Successful leadership experiences.
- Community service.
- Knowledge acquired in any specialized field is an important factor in success.

These variables along with academic background and preparation provide the best predictors of a black student's success in the college environment (p. 119).

SUMMARY

This review of literature has identified several factors that contribute to or impede African-American participation in higher education. The researcher has presented a historical background and its relationship to the educational opportunities offered to African-Americans in this country. Further the researcher has highlighted the role of the Historically Black Colleges and the effects of financial aid programs on the minority student. Chapter II has provided information relevant to the context of this study. In

subsequent chapters the instrument design will be described and resultant findings displayed and analyzed.

CHAPTER III

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this chapter is to report the methods and procedures used to generate data for this problem study. This chapter will describe the population, instrument design, administration of the instrument, statistical analysis, and summary.

POPULATION

To obtain the data the researcher selected six local African-Americans who had obtained doctoral degrees. These graduate scholars were known personally by the researcher prior to this study.

INSTRUMENT DESIGN

The researcher employed the case study research method. According to Isaac and Michael (1982) the purpose of case study research is to study intensively the background, current status, and environmental interactions of a given social unit such as an individual, group, institution, or community. Case studies are in-depth investigations of a given social unit resulting in a complete, well-organized picture of that unit. Best (1981) describes the case study as a way of organizing social data for the purpose of viewing

social reality. Yin (1984) finds that the case study allows an investigator to "retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events" (p.14). He further provides a technical definition of case study as follows:

- investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when
- the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which
- multiple sources of evidence are used (p. 23).

A broad, open-ended, semi-structured interview technique was employed. This allowed for a range of unanticipated answers. Yin (1984) indicates that this method will generate facts, opinions, and insights about events. Gordon (1975) finds the interview technique to be superior to other collection techniques when gathering data on beliefs, attitudes, values, knowledge, or any other subjective orientations or mental content. Data collection was done using the unstructured open-ended interview. An interview guide sheet was used to insure that uniform data was collected. The form and order of the questions was not rigid. The Interview Guide Sheet is included as Appendix A.

INSTRUMENT ADMINISTRATION

The researcher contacted the study population and explained the purpose and method of the study. Each of the scholars readily agreed to participate in this study. The interviews required one to two hours. Three of the interviews were held in the homes of the scholars, one interview was held in the researcher's home, one interview was held at the researcher's office, and one interview was conducted by telephone.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

A pattern-matching logic and explanation building was employed for this case study analysis. Yin (1984) points out for case-study analysis, one of the most desirable strategies is the use of a pattern-matching logic. This logic compares an empirically based pattern with a predicted one. If the patterns coincide, the results can help a case study to strengthen its internal validity. Explanation-building is a special type of pattern-matching. Here, the goal is to analyze the case study data by building an explanation about the case. Yin states that to explain a phenomenon is to stipulate a set of causal links about it. In most studies, the links may be complex and difficult to measure in any precise manner. Explanation-building occurs in narrative form. Because such narratives cannot be precise, the case study must provide some explanation which reflects some theoretically significant proposition.

Yin contends that the analysis of case study evidence is one of the least developed and most difficult aspects of doing case studies. Unless one has some notion about how the evidence is to be analyzed the investigation will be stalled at the analytic stage. Unlike statistical analysis, there are few fixed formulas to guide the novice researcher. He recommends applying replication logic when the study involves multiple cases. In a multiple-case study, one goal is to build a general explanation that fits each of the individual cases, even though the cases will vary in their details. The objective is similar to multiple experiments.

SUMMARY

This chapter describes the instrument design and implementation which allowed the researcher to obtain the data necessary to complete the problem study and the method of case study analysis. Chapter IV of this paper will present the findings of the study. Conclusions and recommendations will be reported in Chapter V.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to determine common variables considered most important to academic achievement for African-American graduate students as identified by six African-Americans who have attained their doctoral degrees and live and work in the Hampton Roads area of Virginia.

The study was designed to answer the following questions:

1. What are some of the intellectual, social, economic, and family background characteristics of the African-American Ph.D.s?
2. What factors influenced their decision to attain an advanced degree?
3. What factors do they identify as positive contributors to their educational and professional development?
4. What factors do they identify as supporting/impeding successful completion of studies?

To obtain this data the researcher interviewed a non-random sample of six highly motivated African-American scholars. The remainder of this chapter will deal with the participant's profiles and question summary.

PARTICIPANT PROFILE SUMMARY

The sample population consisted of three female and three male African-American scholars ranging in age from 45 years to 55 years. Data was collected using the focused, semi-structured interview method.

The study revealed that the six scholars (100%) in this study received undergraduate degrees from Historically Black Colleges. Three scholars (50%) received masters degree from HBCs, although two of the three scholars also received subsequent masters degree from predominately white institutions. All six scholars (100%) received their doctoral degree from predominately white institutions. Five (83%) of the scholars are employed in higher education, while the sixth scholar is a government employee. One female scholar was married while completing her doctoral studies, whereas the other two female scholars were both divorcees. Two of the male scholars were married during their course of study for the doctoral degree and the third male scholar was single. Financial aid through the form of grants, fellowships, and research assistantships were utilized by five (83%) of the six scholars. These same five scholars were also enrolled as full - time students while pursuing doctoral studies. The sixth scholar was a part-time student and reported that financial aid was not available to her because of her part-time status.

Each of the six scholars noted that their parents were not college graduates, however, education was valued and the importance of educational achievement was stressed. None of these families were affluent in the sense of having material wealth.

PERSONAL PROFILES OF PARTICIPANTS

This section will provide a personal profile of each of the six participants involved in this study.

SCHOLAR A

FEMALE (Ph.D. Education)

Scholar A is an only child. Her father was deceased when she was eight years old. She was raised in the Tidewater area. She grew up in a single parent household. Her mother stressed the value of education. Education beyond high school was a given in her community. This scholar describes a close and supportive community. The question she and her peers had to answer was not if they would attend college; but one of where they would attend college. Her high school principal was a close family friend and offered support and encouragement for her educational efforts. After completing her undergraduate degree she worked in the field of social work. She later completed her masters degree and served as an instructor in a four year university. This scholar admits that she was motivated to attain the doctoral degree because job advancement required a terminal degree. She was able to obtain financial assistance and a year's leave of absence from the university to pursue her doctoral studies. This scholar was married with an eight year old child at the time she began her doctoral studies. Her spouse had earned his Ph.D. and so was understanding, supportive, and encouraging of her efforts. Scholar A says that her spouse played the role of mentor for her. She choose to attend the university where her spouse had earned his Ph. D. because she knew that this

university offered a program that interested her and further, this school had a progressive and liberal philosophy which was supportive of minority students. She was able to complete her coursework by attending on a full-time basis for one year and one summer. She returned to work as a university instructor at the dissertation stage. Because of job responsibilities, it required five years for her to complete the dissertation. She earned her Ph.D. in 1987.

SCHOLAR B

FEMALE (Ph.D. Education Administration)

Scholar B is the oldest of six children. Her parents were divorced when she was quite young. This scholar grew up in a large urban southern city. She describes her neighborhood as diverse in terms of employment and backgrounds. This scholar had a close relationship with her extended family who valued education and held high educational expectations for family members. She states when she was quite young she observed that education allowed for independence. Her mother, who lacked marketable skills, stressed that a good education allowed for financial independence. This scholar entered graduate school immediately after completing her undergraduate degree. After completing her masters degree she found employment at a four year university in the Midwest; while there she married a graduate student. Shortly after her marriage she was accepted into a doctoral program at another Midwestern university. She spent one year at this university, away from her spouse, and earned thirty-six hours towards her doctoral degree. Illness and a pregnancy caused her to withdraw from the program. The thirty-six hours were applied to a Certificate of Advanced Studies. Later she followed her

spouse to another university where he had been accepted into a doctoral program; during this time she earned a second masters degree. The couple came to the Tidewater area because of employment opportunities afforded to Scholar B's spouse. Scholar B found employment in a local community college. At the time of the couple's divorce they had two children. Scholar B completed a third masters degree after her divorce. She states that her pursuit of education was an attempt to increase her marketability. Despite possessing three advanced degrees this scholar felt that the incomplete doctoral degree was always in her mind as bothersome unfinished business. She was motivated to complete her doctoral studies because she is one who finishes projects, and further, the terminal degree is required for promotion in higher education. Scholar B entered a doctoral program on a part-time basis. She was able to complete the program in three years and earned her doctorate degree in 1989.

SCHOLAR C

Female (Ph.D. Rhetoric and Linguistics)

Scholar C is the fourth youngest in a blended family of twenty children. She grew up in a two parent home in the Tidewater area. She considered her community to be rural with close-knit neighborhoods. Her parents emphasized the importance of education for their children. They stressed that education leads to success. This scholar describes her teachers as being her primary influence and played a major role in her decision to pursue her education. They served as role models and their praise was motivational. This scholar obtained an undergraduate and graduate degree in education. She taught in the public school setting and later entered higher education as an instructor.

She choose to pursue the doctoral degree for the promotional opportunities it would afford. Scholar C was divorced with one college-age child at the time she entered the doctoral program. In order to facilitate her studies at a university in the Midwest, she took a one year leave of absence from her job as an instructor at a local community college. This scholar was able to complete the coursework in one year and one summer. She earned her Ph.D. in 1992.

SCHOLAR D

Male (Ph.D. Gerontology and Theology)

Scholar D is the oldest of four children and the only son. He grew up in a two parent family in a large urban city in the east. This scholar states that his parents stressed the importance of education and offered support and encouragement. Their family doctor served as a role model and continuously offered encouragement for this scholar to pursue college studies. The scholar's church also provided both moral and financial support to assist this scholar's undergraduate education. Scholar D sought out financial aid and scholarships to finance his undergraduate studies. This scholar went on to complete his graduate degree after undergraduate school. He obtained a stable position which allowed comforts for his wife and two young children. At the time that he decided to pursue his doctoral studies he knew that this would greatly alter his family's lifestyle. His wife, who also has an advanced degree, supported and encouraged his efforts to attain the doctoral degree. Scholar D moved his family from the southern town where they had been living to the Midwestern doctoral university town. While at the doctoral university this scholar's spouse also attained a second masters degree.

Scholar D was enrolled as a full-time student. He also served as a university chaplain and research assistant. This scholar was able to complete the program in four years and earned his Ph.D. in 1978.

SCHOLAR E

Male (Ph.D. Education Administration)

Scholar E is the second oldest in a family of eleven children. He grew up in a two parent family in a rural community. The community provided a positive environment for families. He describes his parents as respectful citizens who instilled in their children the belief that they must always do their best. Scholar E says his teachers were a great influence in his life. They showed confidence in their students and supported the student's self confidence and self-concept. He was offered encouragement by family and community to pursue studies beyond the secondary level. This scholar taught in the public school system and was chosen to receive a National Science Foundation Scholarship to pursue graduate studies. He completed the masters degree in education and earned a Certificate of Advanced Studies. Scholar E obtained employment in school administration and later was able to take leave from his position to pursue his doctoral studies on a full-time basis. Scholar E was married with three children at the time. His spouse, who was also an educator, was supportive of his efforts to obtain the doctoral degree. He returned to his job at the dissertation stage. Scholar E was able to complete his doctoral studies in three years and earned his Ph.D. in 1975.

SCHOLAR F

Male (Ph.D. Music and Composition)

Scholar F is an only child. He grew up with a single mother in a large eastern urban city. This scholar described a supportive urban community where he was exposed to much in the way of culture and opportunity. He credits his mother with encouraging and fostering his talent and ability. This scholar went into a masters program after completing undergraduate studies. Upon being admitted to the graduate program he learned that his undergraduate degree did not meet the requirements of the graduate program and so he spent three years earning another bachelors and masters degree. He was not married at the time he pursued his doctoral studies. Scholar F was enrolled as a full-time student in his doctoral program. His program did not require a dissertation. He completed the program in three years and earned his Ph.D. in 1971.

SUMMARY

In this chapter the findings of the research study were discussed. Six African-American scholars who hold doctoral degrees and reside in the Hampton Roads area served as the sample population for this case study research. By means of the case study approach, the researcher hoped to identify and document answers to the research questions. These well informed respondents were able to provide important insights into attaining the doctoral degree. The chapter presented participant profiles and personal

profiles. In Chapter V the data received was summarized, conclusions were drawn, and recommendations were given.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter summarizes this research study, draws conclusions based on the findings of the research, and makes recommendations.

SUMMARY

The problem of study was to determine common variables considered most important to academic achievement for African-American graduate students as identified by six African-Americans who hold their doctoral degrees. Utilizing the case study research method, this researcher investigated the academic preparation, academic and psychological support system, and motivational factors that contribute to academic success as identified by the study population.

A review of the literature revealed that since the mid-1970s there has been a decline in the number of African-Americans earning advanced degrees. This decline can be traced to the 1978 shift in federal government policy which favored loans over grants and allowed more middle class students to qualify for federal assistance without increasing available funds.

CONCLUSIONS

To answer the research problem the six scholars provided answers as indicated in the following section.

QUESTION SUMMARY AND CROSS ANALYSIS

What factors influenced your decision to attain an advanced degree?

The three female scholars identify personal satisfaction, job promotion, and job security as motivational factors. The three male scholars identify respect, recognition, and increase in earning power to be motivational factors. Two of the scholars also commented on the respect and status afforded the Ph.D. title.

What factors do you identify as positive contributors to your educational and professional development?

As was stated earlier each of the six scholars had completed undergraduate studies at an HBC. Each scholar noted the positive effect and important role played by the HBCs. Three of the scholars commented on the personal interest and support offered by professors at the undergraduate level. All six scholars identify "belief in self and a desire to achieve" as a crucial element to educational and professional development. They also identify the important role of parents, extended families, and communities as components to achievement.

What factors do you identify as supporting/impeding successful completion of studies?

Five of the scholars were able to attend the doctoral programs on a full-time basis with adequate financial assistance provided. Of the five, three of the scholars were able to take leaves of absence from their jobs to pursue their doctoral studies. All of the scholars felt supported by the doctoral institutions. For the most part there were no formal support systems provided; these scholars formed their own support networks. Only one of scholars, who was single while pursuing his doctoral degree, reported any involvement in campus life and he reported the atmosphere to be very positive. These scholars had adult responsibilities and all focus appears to have been on the required studies and program completion. Use of time was an important factor for each scholar. All of the scholars assert that the politics and game-playing by the various departments can impede completion of studies if one "allows" that to happen.

What, if any, were the minority recruitment efforts of the colleges/universities that you attended?

None of the scholars identified any recruitment efforts by the doctoral institutions. One scholar reported that after acceptance into the doctoral program, she met with the Department Head and during this meeting she shared information regarding her limited financial resources. She had not been granted leave with pay and was prepared to take out loans and use her retirement savings to finance her studies. The department reviewed her records resulting in her receiving a minority scholarship/fellowship.

How would you describe the source, level, and quality of academic, social, and financial support available to you for your doctoral study?

Five of the scholars were able to identify financial assistance as supporting their efforts. The support and encouragement of friends and family was also an important ingredient for each of these scholars. Families and friends were available to provide for the childcare needs for two of the female scholars. All of the scholars describe the doctoral institutions as being supportive and providing positive and accepting atmospheres. Two of the scholars made very similar comments related to them being positive persons and "one gets back what one gives out."

What was your marital status while pursuing the doctoral program? If married what role did your spouse play?

Three of the scholars were married while pursuing their doctoral studies. All describe the role of their spouse as extremely important. As noted earlier the spouses of the scholars held degrees and advanced degrees. One of the scholars stated that her spouse served as her mentor during her pursuit of the doctoral degree. Two of the scholars had to leave their families for a period of one year and one summer to attend the doctoral institution. The third scholar relocated with his family. The families all had to make major adjustments.

Did you have a mentor? How would you describe the importance of a mentor?

Three of the scholars report having the support of mentors while pursuing the doctoral degree. Scholar D reports that his mentor offered support for both he and his family. Scholar A states that her spouse served in the role of her mentor and Scholar C identifies her Program Director who assisted in locating financial assistance

and chaired her dissertation committee as her mentor. All of the scholars recognize the significance of mentorship.

How do you account for your persistence and success?

All of the scholars stressed the importance of staying focused, remaining persistent, having faith in self, and being determined. Each of these scholars also pointed to the importance of wanting to achieve the doctoral status for "self" and not for others; it is not an endeavor to attempt in order to please others. There was also agreement that one must really want to attain the doctoral degree, because the programs require tremendous commitment and sacrifice. One of the scholars pointed out that he felt it important that he serve as a role model for his younger siblings. His success has been inspirational to his family and community.

What advice would you give to other black students who are considering pursuing a doctoral program?

Scholar A advises that it is important to shop for the doctoral institution that offers programs related to the students interest, have a sense of how the school operates for minority students, meet with faculty and alumni, investigate the school ranking, profile, and outcomes as it relates to minority and program completion.

Scholar B advises that the student seek advice of committee and advisor and most importantly, follow the given advice.

Scholar C advises that the student remain focused and persistent. She stresses that one must really want the degree, be committed to studies, and willing to make sacrifices.

Scholar D advises that one should examine why they are pursuing the doctoral degree, stressing once again that one must really want the degree. He further advises that one know the demands that will be required, be alert to how the process works, choose a supportive committee that wants your success, know that politics exist and that the student may encounter impediments that have nothing to do with your intellect. The student should maintain emotional and intellectual maturity.

Scholar E advises that the student recognize that anything worth having is worth working for. It is important to maintain faith in yourself and God. He paraphrased a quote by President John F. Kennedy that we must pray to God to help us, but the work must be our own. This scholar points out that politics exist and there are those who will make the student think that he or she can not achieve their goals. He advises, "You must not let others impede your efforts nor should you put up your own roadblocks."

Scholar F advises that the student should learn and get what you can from the doctoral program and then return the investment in your community.

The six cases are sufficient replication to convince the reader of a general phenomenon. In discussion of the institution of the family each of these scholars was able to illustrate a family with a cluster of shared values about what families should and should not do. Each family had clear and expected roles and norms. These families provided social/psychological investment in childrearing. There were support systems available to this group of scholars in the way of family, extended family, community, neighborhood and educators. These support systems provided both nurturance, feedback and security. Each of the scholars was able to describe what Kromkowski refers to as "healthy neighborhoods" where there was pride, security for children, and respect for each other. That each scholar received undergraduate degrees for Historically Black Colleges is also quite significant. It speaks to the important role that the HBCs play in developing leadership in the black community. It is also significant that financial assistance was available to five of the six scholars.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conclusions stated previously, the following recommendations are made:

1. There is a need to preserve and enhance the HBCs.
2. There is a need to invest in our communities and develop healthy neighborhoods to nurture young scholars.
3. There is a need for teacher training and teacher sensitivity as to the important role they play as role models and motivators for our children.
4. There is a need for the federal government to revisit and restructure the financial assistance policies to make funding available as a measure to increase the number of minority scholars.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide Sheet

What factors influenced your decision to attain an advanced degree?

What factors do you identify as positive contributors to your educational and professional development?

What factors do you identify as supporting/impeding successful completion of studies?

What, if any, were the minority recruitment efforts of the colleges/universities that you attended?

How would you describe the source, level, and quality of academic, social, and financial support available to you for your doctoral study?

What was your marital status while pursuing the doctoral program? If married what role did your spouse play?

Did you have a mentor? How would you describe the importance of a mentor? How do you account for your persistence and success?

What advice would you give to other black students who are considering pursuing a doctoral program?