

# Doctoral Degree Completion: Black Women and the Role of Faculty

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**Abstract**—The purpose of the larger research study was to examine the experiences of Black women doctoral students at a Predominately White University (PWI) in the Southeastern United States (U.S.) to understand personal and institutional characteristics that influenced persistence and degree completion after completion of comprehensive and/or qualifying examinations. This paper highlights doctoral student experiences and the role of faculty for Black women doctoral students.

**Keywords**—doctoral, Black women, faculty, and mentoring

## I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the larger research study was to examine the experiences of Black women doctoral students at a Predominately White University (PWI) in the Southeastern United States (U.S.) to understand personal and institutional characteristics that influenced persistence and degree completion after completion of comprehensive and/or qualifying examinations. There are limited numbers of Black women in doctoral degree programs, especially in the disciplines of Science, Engineering, Technology, and Math (STEM). However, according to the 2017 National Science Foundation Survey of Earned Doctorates report, trend data indicate a 31% increase in the number of earned doctorates by Blacks. Women continue to earn more doctoral degrees in all fields except for physical and earth sciences, mathematics, computer sciences, and engineering [1].

There has been emphasis to bring in more women to diversify careers in STEM, but the homologous effort has not generated an inclusive effort for Black women. This study focused primarily on the facilitators and barriers of persistence and degree completion of Black women in doctoral programs, access was critical to their eventual attainment. In addition, this paper highlights doctoral student experiences and the role of faculty in doctoral degree completion for Black women.

In the United States, 40% to 50% of students who begin doctoral education do not complete their studies [2]. Rationales for high attrition rates included time to degree completion, lack of psychosocial support strategies to enable persistence [3], and the overall uncertainty of program degree completion timeline. Data from The Condition of Education 2012 showed that women earned 158,558 or 51.7% of doctoral degrees in 2009-10 [4]. Data within race showed that 65.2% of

all Black doctoral degree earners were Black women [4]. However, with nearly half of all doctoral degree students not earning degrees, and women continuing to be underrepresented in many science, mathematics, and engineering (STEM) related fields [5], the study of Black doctoral women is critically important.

Herzig [5] emphasized the need to not only understand why graduate students started their studies, but importantly to assess the role of persistence toward degree completion. The need for understanding doctoral degree exploration was postulated by Thompson [6], who suggested that the pursuit of a doctorate was not perceived worthwhile for Blacks due to the problems they must confront as a student. Nettles and Millett [2] argued that doctoral students were “trading off great parts of their present lives against an uncertain future.”

## II. DOCTORAL STUDENT PERSISTENCE AND COMPLETION

Previous literature defined the terms persistence and success ambiguously and without consistency. For example, success has been difficult to determine due to the varied meaning it implied and goals it constituted for each student and the lack of “proper measures.” Nettles and Millett [2] concluded that for doctoral studies the focus was on degree completion, which signified success in the program, the discipline, and to the public. Other scholars, [7] posited that doctoral success was more than class participation, grades on assignments or projects. That matriculation process was related to persistence or the continued enrollment in a program, whereas there was a defined endpoint or capsulation of the process.

The literature makes noteworthy distinctions between persistence and success that the terms were on the same continuum and inferred a similar definition. Leppel [8] linked persistence with degree completion, while other scholars made the connection between persistence and staying in a major. However, some students may have persisted, they may have emotionally or psychologically left their studies even though were physically still present. For example, Black women reported feeling like “casualties of war” in the academic environment [9]. Leppel [8] contended that students who leave college before completion of a degree did so voluntarily and, therefore, it confounded the notion that improvement in grades

would correlate in persistence. That phenomenon contrasted with the position of the Tinto [10] model that indicated if integration in the social and academic community occurred then the likelihood of persistence was greater, specifically among undergraduate students. Therefore the implication was that the model did not necessarily encompass a level of satisfaction or strategic navigation, but rather that a student persisted in academia.

### III. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Previous literature has been challenged with the intersection of Black women (race and gender) thereby it has provided multiple justifications for this current study. First, collapsed or broad terms such as women, minority women, or underrepresented women were used, and did not necessarily reflect a study sample of women who self-identified as being Black women, bi- or multi-ethnic, or of African descent. Rosales and Person [11] stated that institutions need to understand the different perspective of the “Black woman” was separated from the congealed term “Blacks” and “woman.”

Second, the homogenous use of the term women demonstrated an attempt to equalize the academic experiences for all women. In another study the term woman was used to describe the experiences of three doctoral students. However, readers did not know the race of the participants, which rejected the “structural inequalities” in academe and continued to replicate hegemonic ideals [12]. Demographic terms inferred a different cultural position or context for understanding of respective worlds, White or Black. This was significant in examining the experiences of Black women in higher education that were understood through the dominant cultural normative standard of White women or Black men [16].

Research on Black women allowed for their experiences to “stand apart” from the “androcentric world” experiences of other men and women [12]. That was true more than twenty years ago when Nettles [2] indicated that there was a scarcity of research on the experiences of doctoral students and especially on research that focused on racial differences. Further, Alexander-Snow [13], summarized previous research that found a critical rationale for the lack of success of Blacks at PWIs related to the lack of “cultural pluralism,” specifically that the mission and environment catered to White culture.

Fourth, the gendered perspectives of minority women and the important features, personal and institutional, that describe their matriculation through doctoral programs has been minimized in academic research. This lack of perspective demonstrated a loss in the academy environment and in missions directed toward increased gender and ethnic diversity. In higher education, the experiences of Black women in doctoral programs are marginalized and are positioned to the periphery of enrollment and outcome data at academic institutions [14]. Black women were understood in the literature as a collective group with minimal intergroup differences, such as with academic preparation, values, and motivators for attainment of higher education. Some scholars suggest that the increased enrollment of Black students resulted from gains in the presence of Black females. However, the

gains should be considered with caution as the data continued to compare Black women to White women and Black men to other marginalized groups [11].

The third theme, personal barriers and facilitators of success were expressed by Black women as having their positions within the academy devalued as they challenged stereotypes and worked against feelings of “tokenism” or being the only one and their marginalized positions within the academy [9]. Black women described their experiences of isolation as invisibility that affected their participation in the classroom. Personal facilitators were social support systems [14], families, and the church. Other noted personal motivators as being enablers to doctorate completion included research as a personal interest and a desire to return to formal education, but that the influence of family and friends impacted the decision.

The fourth theme, institutional barriers and facilitators of success were exemplified by Johnson-Bailey [12], who used Black feminist thought (BFT) to represent Black women as part of the institutional structure. The women reported that they needed to have someone help navigate the cultural norms, not the “student handbook” in order to be successful. This “insider’s perspective” from another Black was specific information that Black students felt could not be obtained from other sources [12]. Further, scholars [9] [11] concluded the pluralistic presence of women and Black faculty were critical to graduate student success.

The current study differed from previous studies by intentional focus of Black women in doctoral study at PWIs. There was the discontinued practice of study on the generalized graduate student population and instead definitely honed on the perceived experiences of Black women doctoral students during a defined time-lapsed period within the academy, rather than a broad generalized perspective. The study was atypical in the aim to obtain actual data from participants that have already persisted to a specified landmark in the degree pursuit and can speak to the experience of persistence, yet are living in the uncertainty of degree completion.

The guiding research questions for the present study were:

- How do Black women perceive the influence of personal and institutional characteristics on their doctoral degree persistence at a PWI?
- How did Black women in the later stages of their doctoral program perceive the personal and institutional characteristics that would facilitate their doctoral degree completion at a PWI?

### IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The present study utilized BFT as an opportunity to understand the marginalized ways of knowing and survival among Blacks [9]. BFT as a critical social theory enabled Black women to become empowered from their oppressed group position in the United States Collins [15]. The framework emerged from the lived experiences of Black women, but distinguished among the common experiences to recognize the “individual” Black woman [15]. Specifically, that Black women shared common challenges, but not necessarily the same experience or to the same degree of

significance [15]. A critical feature of BFT understood that while there existed similarities in the experiences of Black women, there were also differences. It is in the overlay of race and gender in and within the intersections of BFT that are important to understanding displaced doctoral experiences.

BFT was used to guide this study due to the intentional perspective of centered Black women's voices and experiences. Women of differing identities may articulate similar experiences, but it is salient to understand that those may not account for historical marginalization that is representative of this group. It was through the BFT lens that discourse "de-centers traditionally accepted White, male-dominated power structures" [16]. Through the use of feminist theory gender became central to data analysis. Specifically, the goal was to allow for the women to tell their experiences and be positioned in the literature from an insider's context rather than from someone on the outside [18].

## V. LITERATURE REVIEW

Four themes that were consistent throughout the literature review: 1) personal barriers and facilitators of access, 2) institutional barriers and facilitators of access, 3) personal barriers and facilitators of success, and 4) institutional barriers and facilitators of success.

The research was important to contextualize the experiences of Black women in academia that have been framed by exclusionary practices and oppression. Some of the context blurred between the designation of the themes and in some instances could have been in multiple thematic sections, which demonstrated the fluidity access and success.

Minimal research has been conducted on the experiences of Black female doctoral students. Previous work on persistence was primarily informed from undergraduate studies, which led [17] to further research specific to graduate persistence, as it would be dissimilar to that of an undergraduate.

The doctoral women who entered into the academy frequently entered as first-generation students and had to learn the expectations through a series of trials and errors. Minorities (i.e., Blacks, Native Americans, and Hispanics) have experienced a history of under education at the K-12 level that discourages college enrollment and creates a difficult passageway for advanced graduate study due to the weakness in preparation, especially in the STEM disciplines. The pre-college characteristics such as the backgrounds of Black women contributed to their commitment to their college education and to the necessary integration. The nature of effective mentoring was based in values and personal relationships. There are too few Black faculty to satisfy the needs of every Black student [16]. Even if there were adequate Black faculty, they should be allowed the academic freedom to choose if they want to engage in the mentoring process due to additional responsibilities and burden that this places on them and reshapes their perilous academic experiences [20]. An alternative in some research was to identify mentors not in academia to serve in place of the frequently hard to identify or locate Black faculty member, who could provide necessary needed educational and emotional support [16].

Minority students would be detracted from science and engineering programs due to anxiety from paying educational loans and debts from baccalaureate study [21]. The researchers postulated that minority students viewed a doctoral degree as a teaching degree after a long academic tenure, which was inaccurate due to poor mentoring and the inability to secure assistantships or fellowships [21]. The aim was to prepare a doctorate-holding faculty member, not a teacher, to develop research that was applicable to both science and society [22].

The indirect message of who belongs in the academe further marginalized and alienated Black women [23]. For some Blacks the feelings of identity were meshed with their identity of being Black. For example as noted in [24] Black students perceived their discourse in the classroom as negated; however, the same thoughts were positively supported when restated by a White peer. The response at the discomfort of the underrepresented group was acceptance of the intolerance and the causal overture that the perpetrator "meant no harm" [25]. The notion of racism has been an issue of reoccurrence in higher education. Race and racism were reasoned as social constructs that were unstable [26].

Black women were bounded by gender and race and may experience the additional pressure of being judged due to negative stereotypes, which can cause them inadvertently to underperform. The women participants in the [24] study were frustrated as science majors that they were asked questions about their hair, culture, or any of the myriad of points that differentiated them from the dominant group.

The issue of student success for degree completion for institutions must be a strategic effort, but has been approached without intentional coordination [26]. The message of racial isolation and the need for improved programs such as mentoring to alleviate the effects of alienation has been replete in the literature; however, institutions appear to persist in the development of new task forces to investigate the scope of the issue instead of intentional investment into effective mentoring programs; not addressing the problem of isolation despite the literature findings suggest lack of leadership [28].

The interaction between the student and faculty member provided an opportunity for meaningful engagement related to common research interests. Those interactions have included the mentor/mentee relationship and through socialization. The mentor relationship could function both institutionally and personally toward degree completion. The concept of mentoring was first described as the person to facilitate teaching, provide supervision, and counsel to a less experienced person [16]. More literature has been published relative to mentoring; however, "few (if any) traditional mentoring models identify specific standards and components of mentoring for African American female doctoral students at PWIs" [19, p.103]. .

Sallee [29] found that the interactions or socialization that occurred between doctoral students and faculty were opportunities to learn the mores of the discipline. Carter [30] concluded that Black women noted the importance of the relationship with faculty as the "catalyst" for publications and presentations at conferences. For doctoral women professors were able to provide key information on discounted rates for

conferences, volunteer, and job opportunities. The student-faculty interaction acted as an intermediary between the academic/scientific communities and navigated through institutional issues such as class registration, financial aid, the “red tape” of any institution [31]. There was a scarcity of research on relationships between faculty and doctoral students of color [5].

Academic advisor impacted the socialization process for doctoral students. The advisor, exemplified behaviors that were similar to a mentor. The advisor was crucial to success by providing academic support, research opportunities, and support through encouragement and praise [32]. Lovitts [33] found that in the science disciplines that selection of an advisor occurred ideally by the end of the first term or by the end of the first year and would serve as the conduit for the dissertation.

## VI. METHODS

The research is a “basic interpretative qualitative study” guided by the BFT epistemological framework [34]. Constructionism is a critical tenet of basic interpretive qualitative study where “individuals construct reality based on interaction with their social worlds” [34]. The participants provide a “truth” from their reality that is socially constructed based on multiple perceptions of reality. Twelve Black women were selected from one PWI in the Southeastern part of the United States from the colleges/schools of arts and sciences, education, health, and computer sciences. For the current study, participants were selected from previously indicated disciplines that included, education, the discipline of the majority of Black women doctoral students, and from STEM, where women were least likely to matriculate [35].

The research site was a large university located in the Southeastern part of the United States. The institution was selected based on the institutional student population diversity and doctoral programs. Olympic University--a pseudonym, represented a public co-educational institution with over 25,000 total students. It was classified as a Carnegie “Doctoral/Research University.” The graduate school enrollment has more than 5,000 students and more than twenty doctoral programs in seven academic colleges. One institution will enable a richer understanding of attrition and persistence through the diversity of program offerings and student population.

Women included in the analysis were selected as a purposeful sample from enrollment records, which were provided from the associate dean of the graduate school that were used to identify Black doctoral students, based on enrollment status, by Fall 2011, in the colleges/schools of arts and sciences, education, health, and computer sciences. The purposeful sample began with sixty-two women who were identified as being enrolled either part-time or full-time Black doctoral students. The women would have self-identified as being Black based on their initial graduate school application. Twelve Black women doctoral students were selected from the college/school of arts and sciences, education, and computer sciences.

Twelve semi-structured interviews were scheduled based on their availability. Three were conducted on the telephone and nine were scheduled face-to-face at an agreed upon location from September to October 2013.

All transcribed interviews were read multiple times to identify key themes, and to consider the perspective of participants, and the interactions within the academy. Two hundred and thirty-six pages of interview data were transcribed verbatim by the researcher, which enabled greater depth of familiarity with data content. Data were analyzed through an inductive process to analyze participant interviews. Qualitative “thematic analysis” [36] was a deductive form of content analysis that was applied to the interview data to extrapolate codes, patterns, and themes. Initially identifying emergent terms that were then coded, categorized, and then thematically labeled. The analysis included the use of computer assisted qualitative data analysis and research software ATLAS.ti. The thematic analysis of coded data provided an in-depth understanding of the perceptions of Black women doctoral students as they emerged from the semi-structured interviews of participants. Trustworthiness of collected data was achieved through feedback from participants to determine if the findings and interpretations captured the essence of their perspective.

Multiple sources of information contributed to the trustworthiness of data. Triangulation included interviews, review of institutional web pages, documentation from participants, member checks of transcribed data by participants, inviting their review of emergent findings, and observations noted in field notes by the researcher while conducting interviews.

## VII. LIMITATIONS

The results of this study were limited to self-reported data and the ability of participants to thoughtfully reflect on their doctoral experiences. Participants may have been too enmeshed with their experiences to accurately articulate the untenable situations they experienced. Further, Black women doctoral students may have preconceived ideas or reservations about disclosing personal information in a research study, due to the historical legacy of Blacks and research.

This study did not consider those participants who may have dropped out of a program or who had been admitted one year or less. The study also did not include international women. Inclusion of those students may provide varying experiences of enrollment.

## VIII. FINDINGS

Thematic analysis revealed that, across the disciplines that there were not significantly different responses from the participants when asked questions related to persistence and then degree completion. There was great synergy between the narratives when examined based on conditional relationships. Themes such as ‘time management’ and ‘faculty interactions’ were discussed across both research question constructs.

Broad institutional themes that were barriers to degree persistence were inadequate funding, access to information, and overwhelmingly faculty interactions. The primary theme that was a contributing factor of degree completion was extended advisor support and accountability.

The doctoral students who were interviewed for this study were encountering new frontiers through their doctoral progression. Faculty had the opportunity to impact the climate that these women were in, but in many instances remained silent bystanders or provided minimal direction. In describing STEM faculty, Nadia, a doctoral student in computer science, characterized the personality type of faculty as being “a little colder, greener, analytical, not really touchy-feely caring types.” This may suggest that for the STEM disciplines the belief in self and development of self-motivation were critical not only to degree completion, but were perceived as professional norms.

Another student in computer science, Annabella was very direct in her assessment of regarding the academic disconnection from faculty post comprehensive exams. She stated “once you’ve finished this exam now it is all on you, it’s not on any homework assignment. It’s on you to make it or break it.” Annabella was also worried about the high divorce rate that was evident by the women faculty in her department. She acknowledged that the only success with marriage, children, and career seemed to be when the spouse shared the same research interest.

Casey as doctoral student in computer sciences similarly discussed the role of faculty during the comprehensive exam process. . Participants were able to comment on the need to make changes in actions that could be facilitated by the advisor such as promoting the need for greater accountability. Participants did not discuss the role of advisor accountability prior to comprehensive exams, which may suggest that the greater the persistence in a program the more the need for accountability toward degree completion is necessitated. Casey was able to speak to her advisor’s support when she was “devastated” after not passing her comprehensive exams for the second time.

...he was really pushing them [other faculty] like okay she may not be so strong in [this but] she is a good candidate to keep for our program, so I believe that [advisor] really push[ed] . . . he told me that he was going to push, he was going to push my research and do all that he can to get me to stay and I know that they [the other faculty] had meetings to talk about whether I would stay or not but I don’t know you know I have no idea what the others were saying . . . I didn’t know where I was going to go . . . I was worried . . . people have been kicked out of the program for not failing this [comps] . . . he just was like just keep working on your research he said because I am going to push your research . .

It was very difficult for Casey in the college/school of computer sciences to talk about the comprehensive experience due to the emotion that it still elicited; however, the experience resulted in a change for her that while her advisor supported and advocated her research, the director of the program met with her and provided guidance on how to proceed that “gave

[her] confidence” to continue on. That was a very specific example of accountability interplay between the participant and advisor, but it also involved the director of the program. The meaningful interaction demonstrated the level of support that the participant was able to receive.

Additionally, Casey discussed a structured accountability metric that her advisor incorporated for all students post-comprehensive exams. Her advisor required a daily report. Casey explained that the report was submitted daily and though she initially thought it was inconsequential she realized that the report was the “catalyst” in “getting more research done” and it greatly reduced doubts that she had about being able to finish within her prescribed timeline.

Casey’s example was one of the more dire academic circumstances; however, thematically the participants noted varying circumstances where the advisor support was important and the need for being accountable to them as significant to offset detrimental hindrances to persistence such as procrastination or the tendency of “laziness” and fatigue.

The seeking of greater accountability in the later stages of doctoral progression suggested that the Black women in this study were seeking more meaningful engagement to be better positioned in their respective departments as budding colleagues to faculty with skill development to become independent researchers.

The challenge for doctoral students may be that the level of support that they were seeking may not materialize based on unrealistic expectations and/or constrained faculty or advisor obligations. For faculty in higher education mentoring is not the primary intention within academia. Persistence appeared to be significantly influenced by the ability of students to navigate the systemic culture of doctoral education and most notably thematically as faculty interactions.

There was a scarcity in research on relationships between faculty and doctoral students of color [5]. Black women recognized the importance of relationships with faculty as the gateway to publications and conference presentations. A key finding from the research revealed to the complicated relationship between Black women doctoral students and faculty. Participants expressed a lack of specificity in expectations from their dissertation advisor that contributed to feelings of uncertainty. Participants discussed anxiety from the assertion of unchecked “power” that they believed faculty had over them when “assessing their ability” [37].

## IX. IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study found that Black women experienced greater benefits and success in doctoral programs when opportunities for extended faculty support and accountability were provided. This was asserted by study participant Jessica who explained that faculty “accountability would help” her to complete the doctoral degree. She further articulated the she needed faculty to help her feelings of “I don’t belong” that may sabotage her degree progress.

Access to a faculty member could be based on a doctoral student’s academic identity of participation within a program [5]. Courses and activities can be restricted or limited thereby

limited membership until students demonstrate abilities and can then become gradually fully integrated [5]. Dishearteningly, the relationship between faculty and doctoral students of color have not been studied extensively [5]. An important relationship remains to be examined due to the experiences that a student can learn from faculty. The advisor or faculty member was the key agent for socialization [29]. It was through that interaction with the advisor that doctoral students understood how to advance in their programs.

Lovitts [33] noted that faculty specifically have information that can neutralize or alleviate tensions related to the graduate experience. Some students were treated as colleagues and developed closer relationship that extended to personal relationships [29]. Being treated as junior colleague enabled doctoral students to develop the “tacit knowledge” of the unspoken cultural rules within the discipline. In this study, Annabella explained how there was no concern for her as an individual, but rather on the work that she was needed to produce:

...you turn into a workhorse for somebody else . . . to turn out research. They could care less if you have bags under you eyes and you look like you are about to pass out because you have been up for four days. They just want the work to be done or to meet this deadline or to present this poster or give this talk.

An important distinction of the faculty relationship was that the student had to initiate the interaction [12]. Johnson-Bailey [12] noted that science professors are reserved and keep personal information about themselves out of discussions and focused primarily on course content. This may be interpreted from students as uncaring when it may be an institutional or program artifact. The perception would be that faculty was willing to devote time to address specific issues that a student brought to their attention, but was not necessarily open to becoming a confidante. The faculty member was through whom doctoral students attend classes, learn to conduct research, and have teaching experiences.

The ability to learn how to navigate and negotiate as a doctoral student was understood as part of the experience. Participants grappled with the independence of being a doctoral student, yet being tethered to faculty or advisors. The doctoral process was explained by some participants as an “isolated,” “life changing,” and “long process,” that they were glad was coming to an end, but overall by the majority as a “positive experience.” Part of the ability to navigate within a doctoral program was to mediate the experiences while simultaneously countering both explicit and implicit expectations. In this section participants were challenged with dilemmas related to understanding the frequently unspoken or unknown rules of a doctoral program that were significant to persistence.

Black women doctoral students must understand their precarious position and the authority that faculty and advisors have over their academic trajectory. Students must quickly understand that it is integral to have the involvement of a faculty member in research and a willingness to make inroads within the department culture. In the college of

computer/school of science it was important for academic advancement to have an advisor promote scholarly work and assist in integrating a student into the laboratory. Based on the interview findings of one participant, Nadia stated that without the intentional support of the academic advisor she was extremely limited in her laboratory work and had to seek an alternative advocate.

...I did well on my own but it still wasn't the same that you have with an advisor promoting you and helping you integrate . . . into the lab . . . but [the unofficial advisor] did help me do that . . . was a great experience for me.

Nadia had to diplomatically negotiate the change to obtain a new advisor, but prior to the new assignment she navigated a new independent resolution of identifying an unofficial advisor whom she was able to work with. Doctoral students will remain in an academic quagmire if they are unable to find a faculty member who will enable their academic progression.

There was a self-awareness of being Black in doctoral programs and how faculty may choose to leverage that to their advantage. That was a very delicate pathway for Black students to navigate as they feel reluctant to turn down a request from faculty or their advisor, especially when the student concluded that there was a racial agenda, specifically the advantage is for the sole intention to promote a stereotypical token Black, but there is no belief in the research agenda of the student. One must learn to navigate institutional power structures because whether it is an advisor or faculty member they have tremendous power through the doctoral process. Nadia's elucidated an important concern that she had that was salient throughout her narrative.

...these people [faculty] can crush you...what they are doing is controlling you . . . being overly controlling or using fear intimidation . . . no one cares, no one watches. There doesn't seem to be a check and balance . . . [faculty] are hired not because they are great people but because of their great research record.

Nadia, further described concern of too much disclosure and how it can be harmful, “I've learned that in academia, don't share anything about yourself, because the more [faculty] know the more they can use against you.”

Institutional dependence on organically occurring programs is not sufficient for the persistence of Black women doctoral students. Institutions must be willing to provide the space, funding, and faculty or staff to support ongoing resources for Black women doctoral students. Simultaneous, while not shifting the onus solely on Black women, they must be stronger proponents for articulating their needs and the struggles they are experiencing. It is hard work to not remain silent and to permit micro aggressions related to race and gender to percolate. Black women need support and direction from faculty who are invested in the success of developing new doctoral students. Black women who enroll in doctoral programs would benefit from departmental policies that are more sensitive to the salient issues within the intersectionality of gender and race that directly impacts Black women doctoral students. This is not a call from more generic co-opted diversity program, but rather a call to change the narrative

related to faculty interactions and work related to minority groups. The interactions with faculty are a rich environment for populating dynamic change. The study contributed to the scarcity of research relative to the doctoral experience of Black women and to promote greater understanding of institutional measures needed for retention of students toward degree completion.

This study allowed for Black women to retrospectively analyze how they persisted in their doctoral programs and to prospectively consider the barriers and facilitators of degree completion. The use of qualitative interpretative research allowed for the practical multiple realities of the Black woman doctoral experience to be the hallmark of the research and not on the periphery or a condensed portion of larger studies related to graduate research.

Future research should focus greater emphasis on issues within colleges or program clusters as previous research had done in the college of education. While that college will most likely continue to have a preponderance of Black women, future studies may elect to address core differences within other colleges such as those in STEM disciplines. A second recommendation is to examine the experiences of Black women doctoral students with their faculty advisor. The current study only focused on the student perspective, but future studies may elect to examine the experience of degree completion for Black women as understood from the advisor. Another option would be to examine the facilitators and barriers that faculty perceive when advising minority students such as Black women.

Doctoral persistence and degree completion for Black women is a collective endeavor with the institution partnering with women to promote a cultural shift directed at understanding their needs and reducing barriers. Institutional policies and practices must cease being rhetorical and shift to meaningful and intentional engagement by faculty and students.

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