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## Understanding Race in Doctoral Student Socialization

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### Abstract

Qualitative data from 11 African American doctoral degree completers in the field of education are analyzed to identify how race intersects with faculty advising and mentoring, faculty behavior, and faculty diversity and the ways in which they support or hinder doctoral student socialization. Race is considered as an influence on the academic processes associated with socialization during doctoral study. Previous research highlights that racial experiences are a significant aspect of academic success and persistence for specific racial and ethnic groups. However, very little is known about race as it relates to doctoral student socialization, specifically. A racial socialization framework serves as a guide for examining the confluence of race and doctoral student socialization. This study is guided by the following questions: In what ways are racial experience engaged during the doctoral process? How does the racial experience support or hinder doctoral student socialization? In what ways does the racial experience influence doctoral student degree completion and success? The faculty-student relationship is highlighted as a key feature of understanding racial experience as it relates to the doctoral student socialization. Findings present several situations where race is considered as intellectual and identity priorities as students experience doctoral student socialization. Several strategies are presented to support students who consider race during the doctoral process in an effort to promote their academic success and degree completion.

**Keywords:** African American doctoral students, race and doctoral process, doctoral faculty and race, doctoral student socialization

### Understanding Race in Doctoral Student Socialization

Understanding that race within the doctoral process has wide-reaching implications for building knowledge about how to facilitate and doctoral support student success for students of color. A

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growing body of scholarship demonstrates the impact of racial experiences on graduate students of color (specifically African Americans) and their academic achievement and preparation for the faculty and leadership roles (Antony & Taylor, 2000; Cleveland, 2004; Morehouse & Dawkins, 2006; Nettles, 1990). Research about the doctoral student experience considers socialization as a critical aspect of academic success

(Austin & McDaniels, 2006; Baird, 1990; Gardner, 2010; Gardner & Barnes 2007; Golde, 1998; Lovitts, 2001; Nettles & Millett, 2006; Taylor & Antony, 2000; Walker, Golde, Jones, Bueschel, & Hutchings, 2008; Weidman & Stein, 2003; Weidman, Twale & Stein, 2001). Yet, very little is known about the impact of the race on doctoral student socialization, specifically. Consideration of the racial experience within doctoral student socialization can serve to enhance our understanding of student success more completely.

Statistical trends highlight profound racial disparities for doctoral students of color over the last several decades (see Table 1). For example, a review of Ph.D. demographic characteristics for all disciplinary fields between the years of 1975 and 1999 demonstrate that doctoral recipients of color represent less than ten percent of all doctoral degrees awarded (National Science Foundation, 2012). This disparity continues into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century demonstrating minimal change in doctoral degree completion for students of color. According to the National Science Foundation report (2012) in 1991 minorities represent 3,697 doctoral degrees compared to their White counterparts who represent 27,440 of the doctoral degrees. While the same report highlights an overall increase for minorities from 1991 to 2011 of 3,697 to 6,962 respectively, grave disparities continue to exist for specific racial groups (see Table 2). For instance, African Americans represent only 5.4% of overall doctoral degree production for all disciplines between 1991-2001(National Science Foundation, 2012).

**Table 1. Degree Completion Trends by Race for All Disciplines between 1975-1999. (National Science Foundation, 2012)**

Citizenship status, race/ethnicity, of Ph.D.s, by field of doctorate: 1975–99 total and 5-year cohorts from 1975						
Characteristic	1975–99	1975–79	1980–84	1985–89	1990–94	1995–99
All fields	883,090	159,728	156,105	163,396	193,326	210,535
U.S. citizen	640,434	131,319	123,163	116,137	130,085	139,730
American Indian/Alaskan Native	2,722	282	392	498	640	910
Asian/Pacific Islander	17,156	1,777	2,381	2,840	4,119	6,039
Black	26,574	5,301	4,978	4,153	5,094	7,048
Hispanic	16,651	2,061	2,496	2,927	3,949	5,218
White	559,930	115,575	108,807	103,570	114,586	117,392

**Table 2. Degree Completion Trends by Race for All Disciplines between 1991-2011. (National Science Foundation, 2012)**

U.S. citizen and permanent resident doctorate recipients, by race/ethnicity and broad field of study: Selected years, 1991–2011					
Field of study and race/ethnicity	1991	1996	2001	2006	2011
All fields	27,440	31,553	28,905	29,045	31,789
American Indian or Alaska Native	132	185	152	118	136
Asian <sup>a</sup>	1,529	3,674	2,191	2,420	2,870
Black	1,166	1,446	1,733	1,818	1,953
Hispanic <sup>b</sup>	870	1,115	1,270	1,535	2,006
White	23,183	24,673	22,690	22,159	23,541

To understand these disparities this work attempts to make sense of some the complexities involved with perceptions of race related to interactions with the academic environment during the doctoral process. This work attempts to inform audiences interested in building institutional awareness regarding diversity; particularly regarding a focus on demonstrating responsiveness to racial issues associated with racially marginalized experiences. The objectives of this work are to present knowledge and analysis involved with perceptions of race and how these perceptions translate into a racial experience for our participants. This is to say that while perceptions of race may relate to a single incident, there is potential for it to be magnified to influence multiple academic processes; subsequently becoming a consequential element of academic success. We provide several examples of one incident with the potential to influence multiple aspects of the doctoral process and ways students consider this potential. The case study provides context to understand these incidents and student perceptions of them. While the case itself is limited to institutional boundaries, the data contribute to a greater understanding of race as it relates to doctoral student socialization within an elite environment, specifically.

We assert that more research be conducted to consider race as an aspect of the doctoral student socialization process with the underlying goal of developing strategies that facilitate success and degree completion for underrepresented groups; particularly African Americans. While we understand racial dynamics influence the doctoral experience for students from many racial and ethnic backgrounds, this research considers the experiences of African American students as a lens to gaining insight about race and the doctoral experience.

Preliminary observations of the literature suggest that the racial experience serves to shape perceptions about the academic environment and notions of success at the doctoral level. For example, African American doctoral students tend to thrive in their intellectual development when their racial experiences are considered by supportive faculty members (Barker, 2011; Gasman, Hirschfield & Vultaggio, 2008; Hopp, Mumford, & Williams, 2003; Minor, 2003; Rentz, 2003; Taylor & Antony, 2000). To understand this relationship further, this work is developed through the following guiding questions: In what ways is race engaged during the doctoral process? How does the racial experience support or hinder doctoral student socialization? In what ways does race influence socialization, degree completion, and success?

## **Doctoral Student Socialization**

This section presents socialization within the guiding research in the field to situate the contribution of this work in addressing a gap in literature regarding the racial experience. The socialization of doctoral experiences have been explored from multiple perspectives; however, two areas appear to be dominant in the higher education literature. These include an organizational perspective of socialization and the role of socialization on the student experience. Scholarship in these areas acknowledges race as an important issue, yet, calls for further research on the ways race plays a role in socialization. In the following paragraphs perspectives on doctoral student socialization are addressed and followed by a discussion of emerging literature on the race and the doctoral experience.

Weidman (2006) emphasizes the organizational perspective of college impact and relies on the Brim's (1966) classic definition of socialization: "The process by which persons acquire the knowledge, skills and dispositions that make them more or less effective members of their society" (p. 3). He asserts the organizational aspects tend to be more policy relevant since their design and modification are under the control of colleges and universities as opposed to student characteristics, which are not. Some scholarship emphasizes that these priorities are not consistent with student satisfaction and success for marginalized groups (Gardner, 2008; Taylor & Antony, 2000; Turner & Thompson, 1993). Furthermore, Weidman and Stein (2003) and Weidman, Twale, and Stein (2001) explore academic norms and institutional priorities related to socialization in greater

detail by focusing on the influence of day-to-day dynamics that contribute to organizational culture.

Scholarship focused on the organizational perspective of the doctoral experience tends to contextualize socialization to highlight the role of academic environments (i.e., departments) as an important way to make distinctions among the ways in which students are socialized in a variety of contexts (Weidman, 2006; Weidman & Stein 2003; Weidman et al., 2001). While this work emphasizes the value of organizations it aptly considers that socialization processes are complex and vary according to individual characteristics. Though it acknowledges race by addressing questions raised about this issue, the notion of complexity and individual experience highlights the need for more extensive study on this topic with race being a central dynamic.

Doctoral student socialization literature about students has focused on the following areas: student response to institutional cultural dynamics, levels of student involvement, preparation for the profession, student adjustment and assimilation, the faculty perspective, and the part-time experience (Antony, 2002; Austin, 2002; Gardner, 2008, 2010; Gardner & Barnes; 2007; Taylor & Antony, 2000). This work considers the doctoral students' ultimate goal of continued research orientation during the doctoral process and beyond but rarely is race examined as a salient feature of a socialization framework or considered within the research methodology.

Regardless of research orientation, students who consider race as an aspect of their scholarly contribution (as an act of social justice) may encounter conflicts in responding to institutional dynamics, becoming involved as a student, preparing for career in the academy, adjusting and assimilating to organizational culture, and developing positive supportive relationships with faculty. Therefore, if the racial experience is considered an essential feature of the doctoral process it may become a complication of degree completion and success especially within environments where students of color are (or have historically been) marginalized.

### ***Race and the Doctoral Experience***

Research on the implication of race and the doctoral process has addressed several areas specific to the African American experience including academic preparation, parental educational background, interactions with faculty, and advisement (Antony & Taylor, 2004; Barker, 2011; Cleveland, 2004; Ellis, 2001; Gay, 2004; Green & Scott, 2003; Willie, Grady, & Hope, 1991). This work considers the ways the racial experience complicates the doctoral process when students must address discrimination and racism. While there are many critical issues to consider when examining the racial experience, our work focuses on the psycho-social aspects of the racial experience and how perception is guiding feature in multiple processes associated with doctoral student socialization.

In examining the differences in doctoral student success among Black, Hispanic and White students, Nettles (1990) discusses the severe (and systemic) underrepresentation of Black doctoral students and asserts that Black and Hispanic students perceive more feelings of racial discrimination and receive less research and teaching assistantships than their White counterparts. He notes that out of three groups, Black doctoral students require the most intervention for support due to challenges with undergraduate preparation, availability of research opportunities, and the reliance on personal resources to finance doctoral study. Nettles' quantitative study does not identify specific psycho-social issues regarding the racial discrimination experienced by Black students. However, his work underscores that perception of experience is essential to understanding the role race plays in the doctoral process.

Morehouse and Dawkins (2006) also discuss the severe underrepresentation of Black doctoral degree recipients as a long-standing pattern and suggest that more research must be developed to understand how students could be supported once they are enrolled in doctoral programs. Their

work with the McKnight Doctoral Fellowship program demonstrates the importance of seamlessness as an effective approach to supporting African American degree completion and success beyond the doctorate. They assert that opportunities should facilitate a connection between research activities and student interests and suggests that these research interests may be related to the African American experience. A seamless approach also considers the environmental constraints associated with the African American student experience in predominately White spaces where accounts of indirect discrimination and racism may occur about their participation as students as well as the ways in which their research interests are supported. Consideration of these experiences can inform program organizers of practices that have typically served to complicate intellectual development that emerges from student research interests. A seamless approach involves a series of activities that serve to counteract racist norms through supportive activities designed to embrace students' research interests and empower their intellectual development. In addition to these important motivational elements, Morehouse and Dawkins also discuss program essentials such as providing funding for doctoral study and mentors who are willing to provide guidance on research activities.

Taylor and Antony (2000) find that motivation about research was directly linked to the racial experience for doctoral students. They assert that African American doctoral students feel pressure to respond to stereotype threats of not being able to meet standards of academic achievement and feel the need to prove themselves. Furthermore, the need to prove themselves often puts them at risk of responding to false standards that do not encourage their intellectual development. Taylor and Antony note that African American students carry the weight of wanting to improve education for their communities and this obligation is deeply intertwined with their research agendas.

Moreover, African American doctoral students' obligation to social justice is often correlated with an objective to strengthen historically underserved marginalized communities (Gasman et al, 2008; Hopp et al., 2003). In fact, for some doctoral students their racial experience may extend beyond the goal of degree completion towards a commitment to a broad agenda of social justice where racial politics are central to life-long obligation of service, research, and teaching -- serving to uplift the very communities they represent.

To understand doctoral student socialization holistically, we argue that race must be considered an aspect of students' research orientation in an effort to facilitate meaning-making of the learning experience, strides towards greater intellectual development, degree completion, and success. Furthermore, considering the racial experience will serve to inform faculty and administrators who are interested in strengthening their capacity to support marginalized doctoral students. As scholars supportive of students of color, we assert that an impetus of this work is to share strategies to improve educational environments where members have been marginalized; thus enacting our commitment to uplifting our community.

Therefore, we present the racial experience of doctoral student socialization with a focus on degree completion and success; sharing aspects of student experience from a degree-completion perspective focused on perceptions of environment and the student-faculty relationship with an emphasis on the race. We draw on a racial socialization framework to understand the doctoral student socialization experience more completely.

## Conceptual Framework

Racial socialization research comes out of the child and adolescent development field with a focus on the emotional and psychological benefits for youth when they receive feedback from family or society regarding how to cope as racially different in a world that may be ambivalent, in-

competent, or hostile about that racial difference (Hughes et al., 2006; Stevenson 2014; Stevenson & Arrington, 2009).

Stevenson (2014) proposes that racial socialization is best understood as the "*transmission and acquisition of intellectual, emotional and behavioral skills to protect and affirm racial self-efficacy by recasting and reducing the stress that occurs during racial conflicts with the goal of successfully resolving those conflicts*" (p. 25). This definition conflates intellectual development and behavior with processes associated with race and aligns with the intellectual experiences of doctoral students who encounter dilemmas involving race. Such racial dynamics are considered in perspectives of reducing stereotype threat during the doctoral process for African American students addressed in Taylor and Antony's (2000) approach to clarifying attempts to protect, nurture, and sustain the intellectual lives of minority students. Racial socialization emphasizes resolution to dilemmas posed by racism and discrimination, especially within environments where historic legacies of racial exclusion are ingrained characteristics of institutional culture. These resolution skills are essential to managing internal conflicts about perceptions of academic environments and to managing conflict with constituents within the academic environment. For underrepresented students who are marginalized during the doctoral process managing conflict is critical to building relationships with members of an academic community who can support the acquisition of research skills required for success and degree completion.

Racial dynamics are considered in applied research focused on the role of perceived negative stereotypes on African American educational achievement (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Moreover, Hughes et al. (2006) found that the racial socialization practices are associated with cognitive abilities, academic orientations, and success in school (k-12). While Hughes et al. (2006) primarily focus on the impact of a parents' racial socialization on a child's identity development, they discuss the link between racial socialization and educational achievement and situate racial socialization as a protective factor toward academic success. Thus, while the racial experience is not prevalent in doctoral student socialization literature, we contend that features of the racial socialization framework align with processes associated with doctoral student socialization and provide important guidance for understanding racial dynamics associated doctoral student experience for students of color. Racial socialization serves to elucidate systems of meaning related to race and their relationship to doctoral student success and degree completion. For example, if an African American doctoral student is conducting research on African American issues and has intellectual and moral obligations to the research understanding the intellectual, emotional and behavioral perceptions of this work is essential for acquiring the knowledge and skills necessary to perform research skills. This might be critical for a student who needs to garner support from faculty whose research interests may not align with the student's intellectual, emotional, or behavioral perceptions of research.

### ***Acknowledgement of Racial Identity Scales and Measurement***

Since this work examines race from a psycho-social perspective, we acknowledge scholarship and its significant contribution to the discussion on the psycho-social experiences of African Americans, including Cross' (1991) *Shades of Black: Diversity in African American identity* and Helms' (1990) perspectives on racial identity theory in her work, *Black and White Racial Identity, Theory and Practice*. Cross and Helms' present measurement scales and interventions regarding the ways African Americans perceive their identities in relation to their personality development, interpersonal interactions, and environment. Within the context of doctoral student socialization Cross and Helm's perspective on personality development may be aligned with scholarly intellectual development (scholarly personality or scholarly voice); interpersonal interactions may be aligned with the student-faculty relations (or relationships with other academic community members); and doctoral students' academic setting might be considered for environment.

The relevance of Cross’s (1991) and Helms’ (1990) work brings to bear on the significance of psychology on the racial experience being a critical aspect of socialization for African American doctoral students. As such, participants in this study specifically responded to the interview protocol question, “tell me what it means to be an African American within your graduate school and/or academic department.”

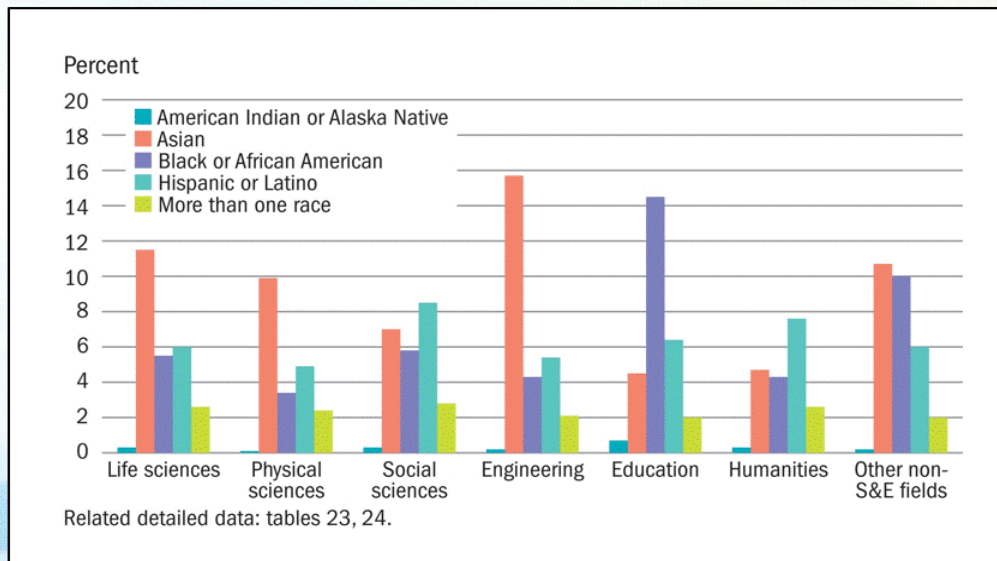
## Method

We used the case study method to collect and explore reflections about the faculty-student relationship. A case study method serves to capture doctoral student socialization on a localized level and is useful as it facilitates “in-depth” exploration of the situational pressures students experience in fulfilling their academic commitments (Creswell, 1988; Taylor & Antony, 2000). The case study method allows us to examine multiple specific contextual influences involved with student experience that may shape the racial experience by way of environment as indicated by Cross (1991) and Helms (1990). These influences include institutional type, culture, policies, faculty-student interactions, and potential support for success during the doctoral process and beyond. For instance, the sample participants are part of a “bounded system,” as they attained doctoral degrees from the same large private graduate school of education (Creswell, 1998, p. 37).

Moreover, the bounded system explored is a predominately White institution where historically there have been instances of student marginalization that serve to complicate degree completion and a low representation of minority faculty leadership (Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001; Gasman et al; 2004; Gasman et al., 2008; Willie et al., 1991).

**Table 3. Degree attainment by discipline, race, ethnicity.**  
(National Science Foundation, 2012)

### Doctorates awarded to minority U.S. citizens and permanent residents, by race, ethnicity, and field of study: 2012



The focal institution for this study is a large, urban, private, research university located in the northeastern corridor of the United States (this institution will be referred to as Ivy University). The institution has a progressive research agenda and is home to more than 25 research centers and institutes. There are approximately 10,000 undergraduate students, 10,000 graduate students, and 1,000 faculty members. Interview participants were selected from the graduate school of education. The institutional selection is substantial since most African Americans tend to pursue doctoral degrees in the discipline of education. Table 3 represents doctorates awarded to minority U.S. citizens and permanent race/ethnicity and field of study in 2011. African Americans represent the largest group of doctoral degree holders in education, 13%.

The perceptions African Americans have about the discipline of education are significant to understanding the intellectual, emotional and behavioral values espoused during the doctoral process. The discipline of education has long-standing historical roots in African American culture as a process for overcoming barriers to freedom; and continues to be viewed as a remedy for addressing socio-economic oppression. Thus, exploring this discipline specifically may have far-reaching implications for this population; though, other disciplines should be considered for future study.

The data pool consists of African American doctoral degree completers who received doctoral degrees between 1994 and 2005. These years were selected based on the availability of data from the institutional alumni office and the potential for following up with interviewees to verify data through member checking. African American participants identified themselves as native-born Americans and self-selected this racial group on institutional application materials. Biracial and multiracial students were not identified in the final sample and all participants identified as African American.

The education school is particularly significant to the African American experience since this field is most widely represented by the African American doctorate (National Science Foundation, 2012). Between 1994 and 2011 there were 92 African American doctoral students who enrolled across the four degree-granting programs. There were 52 Ed.D. program enrollees and 40 Ph.D. program enrollees (20 students were matriculated into accelerated mid-career or executive programs and were not included in this study). We use this time period and program data to demonstrate a shift in enrollment based on some programmatic and demographic information and its impact on supporting intellectual development of African American doctoral students at this site. It is important to establish that all interview responses include a general identification (non-measured) of African American identity and a commitment to self-acknowledge race within the context under study. As such, we determined that a focus on the racial experience of African American was established among participants. Therefore, we turn to racial socialization as a guide to examine the racial experience within doctoral student socialization.

### **Sample Selection**

We collected interview responses via a one-phase semi-structured interview (Creswell, 2002). Research practices associated with this study were in compliance with the ethical standards and guidelines set forth by the institution. A letter from the institutional alumni office invited alumni who met criteria for the study to participate in the study. Criteria requirements included the following: 1) an identification as an African American born in the United States; 2) Alumnus status having not held a doctoral degree from the selection site for more than five years; 3) Not a graduate from an accelerated doctoral program. We limited the snowball sampling recommendations to the sample criteria and the selected period as well. Furthermore, the letter directed the degree completers to contact the researchers for more information about the study. Additionally, we asked interview participants if they could recommend other individuals to interview who might want to share their experiences (Creswell, 2002). Miles and Huberman (1994) recommend



snowball sampling because it “identifies cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases are information rich” (p. 28). We interviewed 11 alumni out of 92 potential participants. While all of the participants completed their programs many of them acknowledged that they wanted to be cautious in their discussions about their program involvement and were concerned about potential of repercussions associated with information shared in the interviews.

### ***Data Collection Procedures***

Individual interviews were scheduled at a mutually agreeable location and were typically an hour in length. Interviews were conducted by the researcher who is an African American doctoral degree completer from an elite institution whose racial identity aligns with the participants’ experience and whose field notes and observations were addressed during the interview to encourage the development of discussion in these interviews by affirming aspects of experience and reassuring a safe space to share vulnerabilities involved with racial identity and/or conflict. Field notes included information about program structure, program activities, the hiring of new faculty, and the accessibility of facilities and the ways racial identity intersected with these aspects of the academic experience. Rubin and Rubin (1995) found that interviewees are more willing to talk in-depth if they find that the researcher is familiar or sympathetic to their experiences. We transcribed the interviews verbatim.

### ***Data Analysis***

We used Miles and Huberman’s (1994) Traditional Data Analysis Sequence to analyze the interview data. We affixed codes to the field notes that addressed the participants’ belief systems about student-faculty interactions. Our reflections about these codes were written in the margins to aid in further categorization of these interactions. Miles & Huberman suggest that the researcher sort and sift through the notes to identify similar phrases and relationships between patterns, theme, distinct differences between subgroups, and common sequences. This was helpful in isolating common racial identity realizations about student-faculty interactions. As a result, we uncovered themes that could be formalized (p. 36) with racial socialization constructs; including how racial identity is viewed when affirming self-efficacy relating to research interests and self-awareness of voice regarding one’s scholarly contribution at various stages of the doctoral process. Data saturation occurred when themes were identified repeatedly during this process.

The analytic process took an additional three months to complete. We consistently evaluated codes relevant to the student-faculty relationship to determine if racial identity was relevant to a student’s progress towards degree completion by identifying if responses about race were associated with aspects of the doctoral process. Again, these codes are part of the “encoded system of behavior specific to their area of expertise and the system of meanings and values attached to these behaviors” (Taylor & Antony, 2000, p. 186). For example, we made thematic correlations between codes relevant to interviewees’ reflections about a faculty member’s behavior, perception ascribed to that behavior and self-awareness of racial identity.

Triangulation was achieved through member checking that included follow-up phone calls and meetings with each participant. The scheduling of in-person meetings and phone calls were determined based on availability and convenience for the interviewees and researcher. Member checking involved clarifying names of faculty and perspectives of racial identity associated with aspects of student experience.

## **Case Study**

This contextual aspect of the study addresses the unique quality of African American doctoral degree production being represented in the field of education through the perceptions of eleven

study participants. We examined student perceptions to identify racial dynamics in an effort to understand how they might evolve into encoded systems of behavior during doctoral study. Race is contextualized within this process to highlight how racial dynamics are involved in the acquisition of scholarly skill sets. Perceptions demonstrate the ways African American students affirm racial self-efficacy by recasting or reducing stress that occurs during racial conflict, and they are analyzed to demonstrate how the racial experience becomes an aspect of socialization.

All of the interviewees responded to interview protocol questions about their experience as an African American doctoral student of the site selection. They were asked to describe their perceptions of the academic community and their relationships with members of this academic community including peers, faculty, and administrators. All interviewees mentioned that faculty mentoring and support were critical to promoting their socialization, scholarship, and research, and career development post degree-completion, which is consistent with previous research (Gardner, 2010; Gardner & Barnes, 2007; Gasman et al., 2008; Gasman et al., 2004; Taylor & Antony, 2000; Thompson, 2006; Willie et al., 1991).

However, their responses also support assertions that African Americans are faced with challenges in maintaining relationships with faculty in predominately White institutions (Gasman et al., 2008; Taylor & Antony, 2000). Six participants reported that faculty advising and support were crucial to their academic progress. Three participants described their perceptions of faculty behavior as having a significant impact on their experience. And, five participants discussed how their involvement with faculty directly shaped their academic progress. Their responses highlight racial dynamics associated with interacting with faculty and are included below in the following categories: faculty advising and support, perceptions of faculty behavior, and faculty diversity.

### ***Faculty Advising and Support***

The following responses characterize interviewee relationships with faculty members who advised or supported their intellectual development. These responses suggest that making frequent connections with faculty is meaningful and valuable in building student-faculty consensus about how one's intellect translates into a research agenda. Intellectual development during the transition and adjustment phase of the doctoral process serves as the foundation for knowledge acquisition of a specialization. It also serves as an integral step in establishing a connection within an institutional community. There is no guarantee that intellectual development will enhance the socialization process. However, since intellectual development is a core feature of the doctoral experience, our analysis suggests there is a correlation between perceptions of academic support and perceptions of academic success.

During this transitional period, student perceptions about the racial identity within a context may be formulated and involve learning varying degrees of racial sensitivity within the community. This may involve self-awareness where one sees identity within a double vision whereby the racial experience is viewed as relating to context (environment) and self (epistemology). That is to say, these perceptions may develop based on how a person is received, or welcomed into a community. Within an academic community, one's intellect can be valued as a type of academic capital. Should a student perceive that this capital is hindered by the racial perceptions held by community members, he/she may begin to question his/her investment within the community.

During this stage, students evaluate the investment of joining an academic community. They establish membership in the social and academic community where they are studying and begin to affiliate with other students and faculty. The following quotes suggest that faculty support is significant to intellectual development and illustrate belief systems regarding the value of talking about one's research interest when discussed with a faculty member. A common theme here is

the accessibility of faculty members. Two respondents provide different views about student-faculty interaction and its impact on intellectual development:

*First Quote: For the most part all of the Black faculty [members] I encountered have been very supportive ... So I felt at home or that I could talk to someone about my research. Even if it was a quick talk and all of them were real busy and sometimes were inaccessible. In terms of the white faculty ... I think there were maybe one or two that I made a strong connection with.*

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

In the first quote the degree completer mentions the support of the Black faculty as being important to intellectual development. Talking about one's research is vital to its development and the facilitation of scholarly voice within the institutional community and within the larger discipline itself. This supports King's (1995) notion about African American faculty members and students sharing insights about their research. This appears to be a priority in this degree completer's reflection about intellectual development. This reflection also addresses the influence of faculty members as being supportive by way of building a network of scholars; regardless of race.

The second quote addresses the variability associated with accessibility and support of faculty. The swamp metaphor suggests the process of academic survival and how faculty members are vital to this experience. In other words, the lack of supportive faculty members could retard academic progress (and a student may sink academically). The interviewee noted the one or two faculty members who were supportive were African American. This suggests that racial identity of faculty members can be important in translating institutional priorities about supporting transition and adjustment.

Perceptions of the faculty-student relationship also identified tensions regarding the influence of faculty advising and perceptions of students' degree selection (prior to admission into the program). The following response characterizes what Taylor and Antony (2000) describe as "the social and psychological sense of peril that negative social stereotypes induce which results in a climate of intimidation that can hamper academic achievement" (p. 187). While it is not explicit in this data, decisions about degree selection could be relevant to assertions made in previous research about the Ph.D.; sometimes considered the preferred degree for faculty roles in the academy<sup>1</sup> (Courtenay, 1988). If this is the case, belief systems about the type of doctoral degree sought could potentially escalate into concerns about the development of research agendas and student-faculty relationships that would shape career viability post-degree completion.

According to one respondent, she perceived that the advising about the type of doctoral degree one attains is unclear and directly affected the experiences of African Americans within her department. Also, she perceived that a tension existed in the department regarding the degree options available to students. This reflection illustrates a sensitivity regarding the political dynamics in the department and the agendas of faculty members. Given the political nature of doctoral programs one should consider whether students who are engaged in doctoral study would feel

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<sup>1</sup> There has been a long running debate in higher education about the distinction between the Ph.D. in education (Doctor of Philosophy) and the ED.D. (Doctor of Education) degrees. The Ph.D. is awarded by the arts and sciences and is often considered the preeminent degree.

comfortable in sharing these types of reflections without concerns about repercussions. Consider her reflections:

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

According to this degree completer, being Black appears to be a racialized feature of the advising process. This interviewee suggests that some faculty members may associate any distinctions between the Ed.D. and Ph.D. with an ideal of meritocracy, holding the Ph.D. in higher academic esteem and therefore seeing it as the more worthy degree. In this case study, there were more African Americans pursuing the Ed.D. degree. As such, it is important to note that the cultural relevance of the Ed.D. and Ph.D. distinctions were noticeable to interviewees as a racial issue that caused some racial tension around perceptions of faculty support, funding, and time to degree completion. Specifically, fewer students of color received funding and direct contact with faculty for support. Ph.D. students were fully funded with opportunities to participate in research projects. Ed.D. students did not receive this level of support.

### **Perceptions of Faculty Behavior**

The next series of comments describe the degree completers' perceptions of faculty behavior while they were engaged in doctoral study. These responses illustrate belief systems regarding the faculty's acknowledgement of students inside and outside of the classroom. The quotes below address how the degree completers perceived faculty support of their research agenda, and their level of consistency in providing that support. The racial experience relates to observations about student relevance in student-faculty one-on-one and group interactions. Furthermore, the second reflection suggests that one's intellectual ability may be questioned during these interactions if research interests are racially/culturally relevant:

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

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

These responses above highlight perceptions of faculty behavior and how racial identity intersects with academic environment and notions about scholarship and research. The first quote represents self-awareness about being a member of the academic community. This interviewee was

describing experience during Stage One of the doctoral process when developing relationships with faculty is vitally important to academic progress and degree completion. The tone of the response indicates frustration and an attempt to connect with faculty with a perception that the attempt to connect with students (particularly Black students) is not the same.

The second quote involves perceptions of a faculty member's reaction to a research agenda involving racial or cultural topics. One may conclude that the faculty member is not familiar with the student's research interest at all. And, furthermore, the faculty member believes the research interest to be unworthy of intellectual inquiry. This interviewee notes the potential influence of socializing feedback about an intellectual topic that demeans the student's stimulation of intellectual interest. While the interviewee notes her advisor's lack of knowledge of the topic, this quote also suggests scholarly identity may go unsupported when student research agendas include racially or culturally relevant research topics.

### ***Perceptions of Faculty Diversity***

The comments below speak to the perception of faculty diversity. In these responses, we see perceptions about the need for more diversity among the faculty and the sense that students learn about the role and responsibility of being a faculty member of color. This need suggests that faculty diversity can support and/or affirm racial identity.

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

*Second Quote: All of them were supportive. But the reality is that black professors, and I see this more up close with ... they are just stretched too thin so I think for me I'm very self-directed. I do my research ... touch base occasionally. I probably could benefit more from someone who's more hands on at the same time it's my style to be like let me just do this. But saying that, it worked well for me because I can do that. But if I was someone who needed more direction and needed someone to lay out the pathway for me, I don't know that they would be the best people to work with. Because it's a certain reality to being a black professor, you mentor, you have to do your research, you have to do it well because of other people watching you and you do so many different things and your time is stretched. There was not a lot of hand holding or you know... it's not like I want it but sometimes you want a little more time a little more in depth.*

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

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

*First Quote: As far as the classes and the reading, I think that the discussions in the class and the reading in most of my classes did address issues of diversity.*

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

*Second Quote: Maintaining your sanity as far as when you are asked to be the poster child for the minority perspective. Some people take offense to this. But taking that as a teachable moment for other people and having a balance of let's say of challenging the mainstream ideology.*

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

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

Previous research on African American doctoral student socialization discusses school success in the context of students responding to stereotype threat by way of their domain identity (Taylor & Antony, 2000). The responses here suggest that these interviewees maintained strong commitments to their field of interests and were confident in their skills and abilities to achieve (Taylor & Antony, 2000). Their perspectives about their student-faculty interactions indicated that if the mentoring they received was unconstructive they were able to navigate towards degree completion despite the consequences of this negative interaction.

In fact, some responses suggest that this situational pressure experienced by the interviewees facilitated thinking about the belief systems held by unsupportive faculty. Respondents were mindful of the divisive nature of these interactions and continued to look for mechanisms that would support their degree completion; demonstrating self-efficacy and behavioral skills supportive of their success. Positive student-faculty interactions were found in responses that spoke to the development of research collaborations and informal connections with faculty where students were able to informally discuss their academic and social experiences

## Discussion

Student perceptions represented here indicate the racial experience influences socialization by way of student-faculty relationships, perception of faculty behavior, and the presence of faculty diversity. These perceptions considered aspects that both supported and hindered doctoral student socialization. For example, when students found a faculty member who was willing to have

discussion with them about their research interests they were likely to acquire knowledge about their research areas and become more effective students and contributors to their academic communities. However, when students weren't able to discuss their research they were at risk of sinking (as indicated by the swamp metaphor used earlier); and, therefore, socialization was hindered.

In this case an interesting concept emerged regarding advisement students received towards a particular type of doctoral degree: Ed.D. (Doctor of Education), or Ph.D. (Doctor of Philosophy). The racial experience appeared to be related to perceptions regarding practices that hindered success during the advising process. There is no evidence that this occurred during pre-advisement but students identified in their experience as a bias towards advising African American students into the Ed.D. academic track. At this site the Ed.D. degree is considered a practical credential designed for practitioners of educational management or leadership. One participant perceived that policies about a student's research agenda and type of degree (Ed.D. vs. Ph.D., Doctor of Education vs. Doctor of Philosophy, respectively) sought after were unclear to many African American students. In fact, this participant perceived one underlying assumption held by many African Americans in the school was that they were persuaded towards the Ed.D. academic course of study. Specifically, there was a perception the Ph.D. was never presented as an option for study. At this site Ph.D. students were awarded financial aid packages that were substantially larger; and faculty members often worked closely with students on large-scale grant funded research projects.

During the advisement process perceived notions of bias towards one degree over another may send messages about the students' intellectual capacity and their effectiveness as contributors to the intellectual community and field, especially if one degree is deemed preferential by way of financial reward. The participant observations about academic degree track suggest a sense of awareness (or appraisal) regarding advisement about the type of degree track students are being directed towards and that this advisement could potentially hinder their success in some way. Subsequently, the unique implications of education discipline raise important questions about the way advisement strategies might influence decision-making about course of study and students' intellectual and moral obligations to the field. There is no evidence in this study that suggests an advisement structure is in place that considers these obligations; however, when considering the organizational perspective of socialization (Weidman, 2006; Weidman et al., 2001) and the process of acquiring dispositions that make students more effective members of society, the student observations presented in this case might be considered by faculty and administrative leaders of doctoral programs who wish to strengthen advisement strategies and/or policies affecting marginalized students. To the extent that some students are concerned about their effectiveness as scholars regarding their intellectual and moral obligations to their research, being advised into one degree track versus another may facilitate unintended consequences for a student.

Previous research on the African American doctoral students aggregate both the Ed.D. and Ph.D. degree attainment (Gasman et al., 2008) to assess the student experience. However, given the historical relevance of the Ph.D. and the financial reward associated with this degree track and course of study in this case, future studies should explore the nuances of experiences to explore the racial implications surrounding selection of degree tracks and their influence on success and career development post degree attainment.

In discussing faculty behavior, most of the responses spoke to the students' perception of actions that served to marginalize their racial identity, for example, faculty members not acknowledging students outside of the classroom (these are faculty who might have the same students in class), and faculty members who may be "wildly supportive" and/or "disrespectful." These behaviors may be perceived as encoded systems of behavior that serve to marginalize African American students. This kind of behavior speaks to the larger issue of faculty being generally lacking an

awareness of the perceptions students may develop about faculty. If this disconnection involves aspects of a student's research agenda that is connected to the racial experience then this could be considered a racial dilemma. Therefore, a student would need to find a way to address the faculty member's disconnection from the research agenda in a way that does not disrupt academic progress. Finding solutions to make connections would be a demonstration of resolving a racial dilemma. The finding process in itself could be considered a behavioral skill that serves to protect the student's work, research agenda, and objective to successfully complete the program. This reinforces Taylor and Antony's (2000) findings about socialization and the student perceptions about their experiences:

Some faculty were described as 'having no background for understanding my work,' being patronizing, or being patently surprised at the academic success of African American students. Others reported endemic departmental insensitivity and racial stereotyping, such as faculty members assessing new admits who were members of minority groups and asking if the department was lowering its standards. It was also discouraging when faculty showed no interest in students' research ideas if they related to African American concerns (Taylor and Antony, 2000, p. 192).

Faculty diversity appeared to be an important issue for interviewees who were concerned about their racial experience and socialization. While faculty members of color were in small number at this institution, their presence and limited accessibility appeared to be comforting to students on some level. Some interviewees found the presence of supportive faculty (regardless of the faculty member's background) to be stimulating for continued intellectual and research endeavors. However, the participant perceptions suggest that faculty support from African American faculty carries with it an affective responsibility, one that acknowledges behavior associated with the self-efficacy needed to be successful and the potential for understanding dilemmas associated with the intellectual and moral obligations African American students may bring with them to the academic environment. Unlike what Taylor and Antony (2000) assert to be faculty members' lack of background to understand the research agendas of African American students, African American faculty often have the background, knowledge, behavior, and affective skills to support students' transmission and acquisition of the same skills.

Additionally, the findings of this study are consistent with research that indicates that successful mentoring practices often serve to "demystify" or "deconstruct" the myths associated with the academy (Gasman et al., 2004). Faculty members who employed practices that supported racial identity for African American doctoral students were accessible and willing to discuss the role of race in the student's experience. It appears that faculty members who shared brief, sincere encounters with students were viewed as considerate and helpful. This was especially important when students wanted to discuss ideas about research. This supports Gasman et al's (2004) notion that faculty members should take advantage of informal and impromptu opportunities to talk about their motivations for research when mentoring students of color. Second, faculty members who were willing to share ideas about their research often fostered collaboration with the student or identified other collaborative opportunities. Where previous research has indicated that African American students often feel isolated and marginalized at predominately white institutions (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998), faculty members who work to combat these issues can serve to transcend barriers to success. Third, the racial experience is a consistent theme throughout the socialization experience. African American doctoral students in this case acknowledged the racial experience when interpreting coded systems of behavior as they relate to following aspects of socialization: building relationships with faculty (of the same or different race), establishing a research agenda, learning one's role in the advising process, representation of one's racial community in the classroom, and the development of one's intellectual voice.

Understanding the racial experience and the ways students interact with various processes during the doctoral experience can inform faculty, administrators, and doctoral students how to develop



strategies and programs of support. We identify several racial experiences and recommend a set of strategies faculty members, administrators and students might employ to support doctoral student socialization, academic success and degree completion. We assert that understanding these strategies will also serve to encourage the development of scholarly voice. We argue a doctoral student's voice is most vulnerable when racial identity is compromised. Voice is used in presenting one's scholarship, building relationships with colleagues, and generally shaping one's scholarly presence during and beyond the program. Scholars speak about their work to build identity. We emphasize that supporting the development of intellectual voice may have life-long implications for in developing relationships with faculty; especially when discussing research interests. Table 4 includes three general features of the African American racial experience: intellectual characteristics associated with race and socialization, potential barriers to academic success/degree completion, and recommended support strategies.

**Table 4. Strategies to Support the Understanding of Race in Doctoral Student Socialization.**

	Racial Experience in Doctoral Student Socialization	Potential Barriers to Degree Completion/Academic Success	Support Strategies
<b>Faculty Advising and Support</b>	Racial experience is valued as an aspect of scholarly experience	Lack of faculty diversity with a focus on racial awareness; not feeling valued in the community if race is not valued	Find additional support outside of the institution. Family, friends, organizations may be viewed as key coping support systems.
<b>Perceptions of Faculty Behavior</b>	Racial Experience aligns with behavior that support student interests and policies supporting the racial experiences within the school	Challenges exist connecting the racial experience with research interests due to a lack of faculty support	Find additional support. Identify levels of racial awareness and its relevance to research agenda.  Find opportunities to acknowledge the role of the racial experience within student-faculty relationship.
<b>Perceptions of Faculty Diversity</b>	Racial Experience is valued within the academic community by a demonstration of practice	Challenges exist in the form of racial tension when identifying faculty available to support the racial experience associated with socialization	Find additional support. Racial tension may cause frustration. Identify emotional coping mechanisms to distress.

Implicit in the statements about establishing one's scholarly voice is the fact that collaboration is essential to developing a professional and scholarly network, thus shaping one's disciplinary identity. As a new scholar emerges, connections with other scholars with similar interests are integral to the development of a professional and disciplinary identity (Romero & Margolis, 1998). The racial experience must be considered a key element in this developmental process.

## Limitations

This study is institutionally and culturally specific. While the reflections provide perspectives of the doctoral student socialization and the racial experience of African American doctoral degree completers, they should not be generalized to other institutions or populations, though, we encourage they be considered as a guide for understanding intersections of racial identity with the doctoral process, generally. This assessment of the African American doctoral experience may

offer insights helpful in developing strategies and practices that support doctoral students. Since participants were part of a single-site case, their degree representation spans several different specializations within the field of education. The field of education is multi-faceted and multi-disciplinary and further research should consider the variations of the field and how they intersect with racial identity. While this study does not take into account any measurement variations of the interviewees' identification with the African American identity specifically, the interviewee responses may reveal this identification but it is not an intended goal of data collection. An examination of the African American racial experience that aligns with measurements such as those found in Cross and Helms work is under consideration for future study.

### **Conclusion**

While this study focuses on degree completer perceptions of the role of the faculty member in supporting the doctoral experience, faculty members were often entrenched in their own research agendas so students who could relate to these agendas were often more self-directed and proactive about their student success and degree completion. The findings of this study did offer some evidence of the importance of same-race mentoring. However, most students found support from faculty members of all racial and ethnic backgrounds helpful when they were supportive of their racial identity, research interests, and progress towards degree completion.

The exploration of the student-faculty relationship at the doctoral level is a process that will continue to develop and evolve. The understanding of this relationship can assist faculty, administrators, and students in highlighting the nuances of cultural and institutional specific experiences and the mentoring practices that are most effective. Moreover, institutional contexts demonstrative of enacted strategies that support race in doctoral student development lend themselves to practices aligned with institutional transformation considerate of diversity and its value (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). Further examination of this relationship can also serve to illuminate best practice strategies in the preparation of future and junior faculty members who hopefully will mentor future doctoral students. In fact, since 2005 the site has increased its enrollment of African American doctoral students (Ph.D.) by five students. While this growth demonstrates slight change it does indicate improvement. Also, the site has enhanced its effort to implement some strategies to make mentoring resources more readily available to faculty members within the academic community.

The concept of mentoring is a consistently mentioned in research regarding the racial aspects of doctoral persistence. For example, Nettles (1990) asserts, "Mentoring may be such a vital and essential part of doctoral education that all persisting students, regardless of their demographic and educational backgrounds, have similar experiences" (p. 10). Similarly, Willie et al. (1991) state, "Their [mentors] presence is essential in helping African Americans and other minority scholars through periods of doubt and indecision" (p. 67). Based on the findings of this study, doubt and indecision may indicate complications with the establishment of scholarly voice. More research is needed to learn more about the role of student-faculty relationship, the inclusion of racial socialization strategies in that relationship, and its impact on the racial experience and doctoral student socialization.

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## Biographies



**Pamela Petrease Felder, Ph.D.**, is a Lecturer in the Higher Education Program in the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania. Dr. Felder's primary research interests are graduate student development and doctoral degree completion with an emphasis on the impact racial/cultural experiences on persistence. This work includes a focus on academic socialization and the process of disciplinary identity development. Dr. Felder's research explores the relationship between the belief systems and behaviors of doctoral students and their impact on academic socialization, success, and degree completion. Her work is comprised of an examination of the historical societal factors that have shaped barriers to degree completion and students' approach to negotiating these barriers. Prior socialization experiences

serve to shed light on the socialization aspects of students who enter doctoral study and the disciplinary identities of doctoral degree holders as they begin to engage in their professions.



**Howard C. Stevenson** is Professor of Education and Africana Studies and former Chair of the Applied Psychology and Human Development Division in the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania. His research publications and clinical work involve developing culturally relevant in-the-moment strengths-based measures and therapeutic interventions that teach emotional and racial literacy skills for families and youth and have been funded by the W.T. Grant Foundation, Annenberg Foundation, and the National Institutes of Mental Health and Child Health and Human Development.



**Marybeth Gasman, Ph.D.**, is a Professor of Higher Education in the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania. She holds secondary appointments in history, Africana Studies, and the School of Social Policy and Practice. She also directs the [Center for Minority-Serving Institutions](#) at Penn GSE.

Dr. Gasman's areas of expertise include the history of American higher education, historically black colleges and universities, minority serving institutions, African American leadership, and fundraising and philanthropy.